

Building and Maintaining LGBTQ+ Picture Book Collections

2019

*There is
danger in assuming
homogeneity in any
race, class, or
cultural grouping.
-Crawley*

*Children
feel unimportant
and invisible when they
do not see representations
of their lives and
families in books.
- Naidoo*

*As
of 2016, there
are at least 10,020
children in Canada with
same sex parents.
- Canadian 2016
Census*

*Librarians
put books into people's
hands whether other people
want them to have those
particular books or not,
because that is your job
and responsibility.
-Savage*

*Danielle Bettridge
Alissa Droog
Alyssa Martin
Ashleigh Yates-MacKay*

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Executive Summary

LGBTQ+ children and families exist everywhere: in parks and schools and shopping centres. They also go to our libraries and deserve to see their lives represented in our collections. Diversity in children's picture books is important for two reasons: it exposes us to different worldviews, which fosters empathy, and reflects our own world back at us, which validates our lived experiences. The existence of these books is pivotal for affirming not only the identities of children, but for validating their families.

This evaluation toolkit will help you make decisions about which of the books in this genre should have a home in your collection. It includes:

- Questions to ask in order to evaluate these books,
- Recommended picture books,
- A guide to facing censorship challenges for these books,
- Recommended resources.

This toolkit couldn't exist without the scholarship, support, and feedback of numerous people. In the process of drafting this toolkit, we relied on scholarship from members of the LGBTQ+ community and consulted with community members in our own lives. We recognize the work and dedication of everyone who contributed to this project.

About Us

Alissa, Alyssa, Ashleigh and Danielle have been studying LGBTQ+ children's picture books since September of 2017. They are recent graduates of the Master of Library and Information Sciences program at Western University, who happen to be a combination of queer identifying folk and allies. Together, they carried out a two-year study of LGBTQ+ children's picture books and have presented their work at the Ontario Library Super Conference and the Alberta Library Conference. This research sparked a desire to help empower librarians and library staff to feel confident in including these books in their own collections.



Ashleigh Yates-MacKay Danielle Bettridge Alissa Droog Alyssa Martin

Questions?

Contact us at pridebooks4all@gmail.com

Guide to Evaluating Materials

Before You Start

LGBTQ+ children's picture books are a valuable resource for your library as they allow children and families to see themselves represented. However, the value of LGBTQ+ children's picture books does not make them above evaluation and critique. It is precisely because of the importance of these books that librarians must critically engage with these materials in order to choose which ones fit in their collections. While evaluating these books, keep these thoughts in mind:



No book is perfect - but some of these books may fit your collection better than others.



No one book is going to represent the entire LGBTQ+ spectrum of identities and lived experiences - but each book should fill a certain gap in your collection.

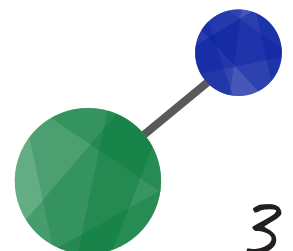


Asking tough questions of books is no small feat - it requires emotional work, an investment of time, and a love of picture books.

Current Gaps in the Genre

A library collection should have a diverse and balanced selection of identities. There is nothing wrong with the identities that are represented, but it is problematic when other identities are not equally represented. Based on our research, we have identified a number of gaps in the current canon of LGBTQ+ children's picture books. There is not enough representation of the following:

- Identities such as aromantic, asexual, bisexual, genderqueer, twospirit, and transgender, etc.
- Non-binary pronouns (they/their, zhe/zher, etc.)
- Family structures that are not nuclear (single parent, multi-generational, foster, adopted, etc.)
- Ethnic diversity
- Socioeconomic diversity
- Dis/ability diversity
- Religious diversity



Evaluation Questions

Consider the following questions when evaluating LGBTQ+ children's picture books. Use the "Prioritize" statements to guide your evaluation, and keep in mind that not every question will be relevant to each book being evaluated.

1 Publishing and Quality

Prioritize books that have high quality writing, illustrations, and stories.

- How recently was the book published?
Books that were once progressive may become outdated at a faster pace than others.
- Has the book won awards or received recognition from LGBTQ+ organizations?
Recognition is important, but a book needs a wide reach and time to garner attention. Do not discount books that have not won awards.
- Are the author(s) or illustrator(s) part of the LGBTQ+ community?
Prioritize books created by LGBTQ+ community members as they will have a better understanding of these stories.
- Do the story, writing, and illustrations have the same quality as other picture books?
The book's illustrations should engage and thrill families, as should the writing.¹

2 Language

Prioritize books that use respectful, timely and accurate language for LGBTQ+ identities.

- Is respectful language used to refer to the LGBTQ+ community and/or characters?
All language used should be respectful, timely and accurate. For a guide on respectful language please refer to the glossary.
- Are the names of LGBTQ+ identities used in the books?
Naming identities provides young readers with the language to discuss these identities and their relationships to them.² However, some individuals find labels restricting. Your collection should have both.
- What gender pronouns are used?
There are a multitude of gender identities, and many pronouns to match (i.e. he/him, she/her, they/them, zhe/zher). Prioritize books in which characters aim to use accurate pronouns.

3 *Who is Represented?*

Prioritize the inclusion of as many diverse identities as possible in your library collection.

- Which LGBTQ+ identities are represented in the book?
Certain identities, particularly lesbian and gay identities, are represented in the LGBTQ+ canon more than others.³ Examples of identities that are represented less frequently include: aromantic, asexual, bisexual, genderqueer, twospirit, and transgender, among others.
- Do the characters represent a diverse range of ethnicities, religions, classes and/or abilities?
Children's picture books mostly depict LGBTQ+ people that are "[...] white, middle-class, able-bodied, and cisgender", which is a problem.⁴ Prioritize books that include as many forms of diversity as possible.
- What types of families are represented?
Most books represent nuclear families who are genetically related, which can overshadow the legitimacy of single parent, adoptive, foster, multi-generational and other family structures.⁵

4 *How are they Represented?*

Prioritize books that respectfully and accurately represent LGBTQ+ people.

- Where are the LGBTQ+ characters in the story (e.g. protagonist, secondary, antagonist)?
LGBTQ+ characters should occupy a variety of roles within stories. It is essential to have them as protagonists because it validates lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people, while having them as secondary characters can foster understanding and allyship for other readers.⁶
- Is the person's LGBTQ+ identity the driving point of the plot?
Many stories focus solely on queerness as the main quality of the story.⁷ Include books that can stand on their own, regardless of their LGBTQ+ content, and those aimed at starting conversations.
- Are the LGBTQ+ characters portrayed as multidimensional people?
Prioritize books where the LGBTQ+ characters' queer identity is not the only facet of their personality.⁸
- Does a major plot point of the story focus on character(s) facing backlash for their, or their family's, LGBTQ+ identity?
Books that portray characters facing backlash for their LGBTQ+ identities, or families, only depict one lived experience. It is important to balance these storylines with positive ones that validate their identities.

- Are the characters of the story portrayed as humans, animals, or something else?
Books depicting characters as animals or objects hold an important place in the genre as they can pass censorship calls more readily. However, only depicting LGBTQ+ people as non-human characters is dehumanizing.
- Does the book include a wide range of gender roles?
Are gender roles ever challenged, or does the entire collection fall into boys doing “boy things” and girls doing “girl things”? The collection should include books that represent gender roles beyond the binary.
- How might the book impact the self-esteem of readers?
The book should have a positive impact on readers and foster acceptance for LGBTQ+ people.

Endnotes

- (1) Sapp, 2010
- (2) Young, 2018; Epstein, 2014
- (3) Crawley, 2017; Ryan & Herman-Wilmarth, 2018
- (4) Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018, p. 88
- (5) Lester, 2014
- (6) Lester, 2014; Bishop, 1990
- (7) Sapp, 2010
- (8) Day, 2000



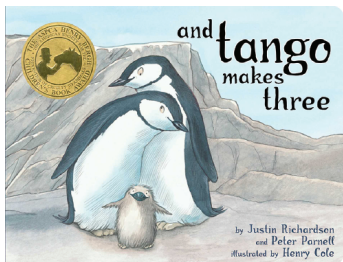
Need some new books fast?

We highly recommend you check out the ALA GLBT Round Table Rainbow Book Lists. Published annually, it lists significant new LGBTQ+ literature publications for youth aged 0-18. You can find more places to help with your search for new books on page 11 in this toolkit.



Recommended Books

Thinking of expanding your collection, but are unsure where to start? Check out these popular titles in the genre right now that feature a spectrum of LGBTQ+ identities and themes. This list is not exhaustive of all books in publication right now, nor are they perfect, but they can be used as a starting place for building collections. Unfortunately, at the time of this publication there are many identities that are not represented in this list, as we are unaware of any existing picture books that represent them. Some of these identities include, but are not limited to, Asexual, Bisexual, and Twospirit. To keep up with additional publications, see our resources.



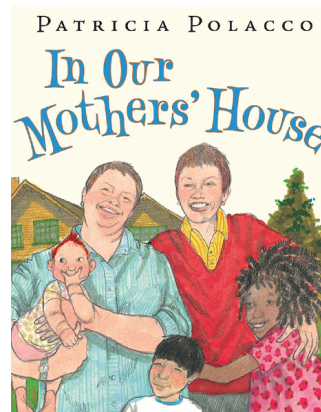
And Tango Makes Three
Justin Richardson &
Peter Parnell
illustrated by Henry Cole

Two male penguins living in a zoo adopt an egg together to expand their family to three.

Little Simon (Simon & Schuster) | 2008

CCBC Choices (Cooperative Children's Book Council) | CBC/NCSS Notable Social Studies Trade Book | Nick Jr. Family Magazine Best Books of the Year | Lambda Literary Award Finalist | Bank Street Best Books of the Year | ALA Notable Children's Book Nominee | ASPCA Henry Bergh Book Award Winner | S.E.A. Write Award Finalist

Two fathers | Animal Characters | Board Book

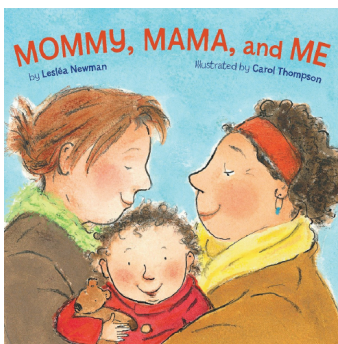


In Our Mother's House
Patricia Polacco
illustrated by Patricia Polacco

The story of Marmee, Meema and their three children as they grow up.

Philomel Books | 2009

Two mothers | Adoption | Ethnically Diverse Characters



Mommy, Mama and Me
Lesléa Newman
illustrated by Carol Thompson

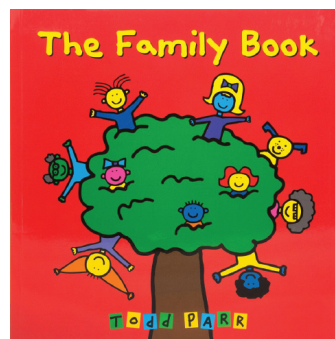
A toddler spends the day with their two mothers.

Tricycle Press | 2009

Stonewall Award 2010 | Notable Children's Books 2010

Also look for *Daddy, Papa and Me* by Lesléa Newman

Two mothers | Board Book

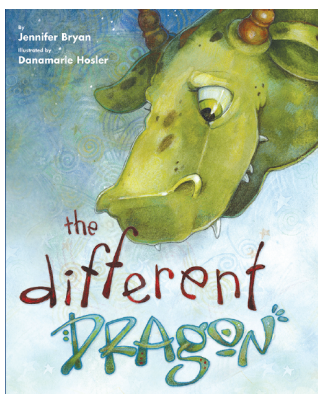


The Family Book
Todd Parr
illustrated by Todd Parr

Using colourful images, this book celebrates different types of families.

Little, Brown Books for Young Readers | 2010

Family diversity | Board book

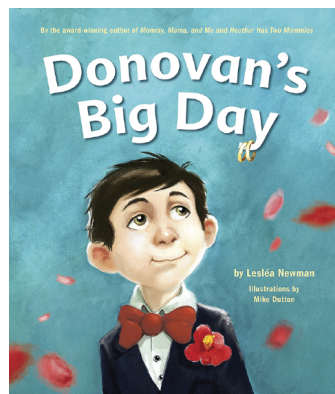


The Different Dragon
Jennifer Bryan
illustrated by Danamarle Hosler

In this bedtime story, Noah helps his two moms weave a tale about a dragon who doesn't want to be fierce all the time.

Two Lives Publishing | 2011

Two mothers

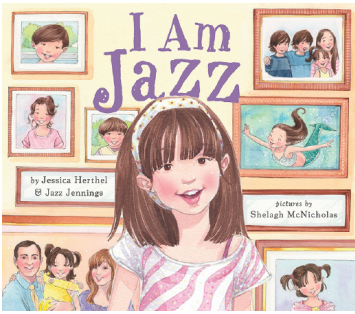


Donovan's Big Day
Leslea Newman
illustrated by Mike Dutton

Donovan gets ready for the day his two moms get married.

Tricycle Press | 2011

Wedding | Two mothers | Two brides



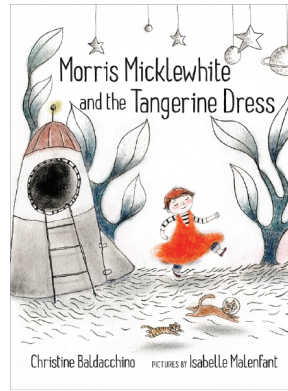
I am Jazz
 Jessica Herthel & Jazz Jennings
 illustrated by Shelagh McNicholas

I am Jazz is based on the real life experiences of Jazz Jennings, a transgender child.

Dial Books | 2014

ALA Rainbow List title 2015

Transgender | Autobiography



Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress
 Christina Baldacchino
 illustrated by Isabelle Malefant

Morris Micklewhite loves the tangerine dress at his school and continues to wear it despite bullying from his peers.

Groundwood Books | 2014

Stonewall Honor Books in Children's and Young Adult Literature 2015

Canadian | Gender Creative | Bullying | Lone Mother



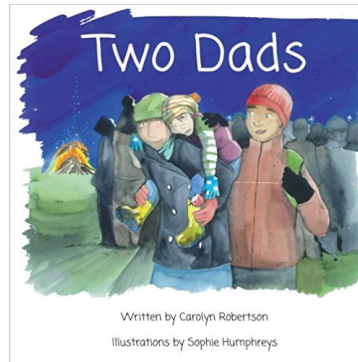
This Day in June
 Gayle E. Pitman
 illustrated by Kristyna Litten

A fun introduction to a celebratory Pride Parade, featuring numerous identities across the LGBTQ+ community. The book concludes with a caregiver readers' guide.

Magination Press | 2014

The Stonewall Book Awards 2015 - Mike Morgan & Larry Romans Children's and Young Adult Literature Award | ALA Rainbow List top 10 title 2015 | Notable Books for a Global Society Award 2015

Pride | LGBTQ+ diversity | Ethnically diverse characters

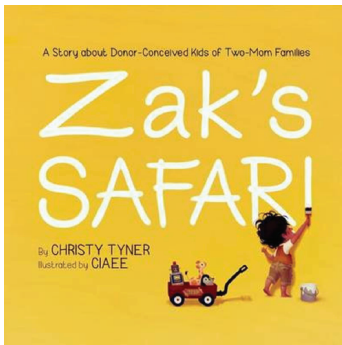


Two Dads: A Book about Adoption
 Carolyn Robertson
 illustrated by Sophie Humphreys

A poetic story about how fun it is to have two dads.

Sparkypoo Publications | 2014

Two fathers | Adoption | Ethnically diverse characters



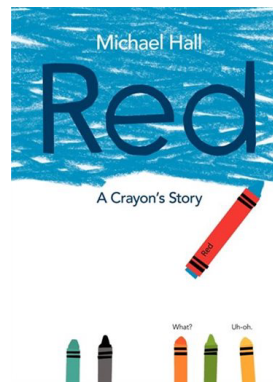
Zak's Safari
 Christy Tyner
 illustrated by Ciaee

Zak takes you on a tour of his family, explaining genes and the many ways that babies can be made.

Self-Published | 2014

2016 Rainbow List American Library Association

Assisted reproduction technology | Two mothers | Ethnically diverse characters | Family diversity



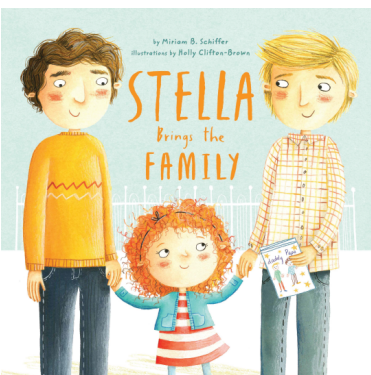
Red: A Crayon's Story
 Michael Hall
 illustrated by Michael Hall

A crayon labelled "red" discovers that he is actually blue.

Greenwillow Books | 2015

Rainbow Project Book List (2016)

Identity conflict | Non-human characters | Open for interpretation

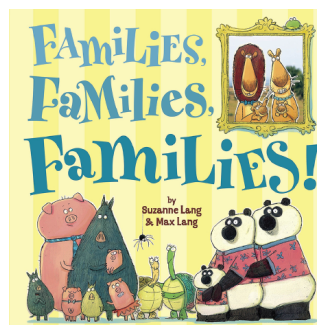


Stella Brings the Family
 Miriam B. Schiffer
 illustrated by Holly Clifton-Brown

Stella brings her two daddies to a Mother's Day celebration.

Chronicle Books | 2015

Two fathers

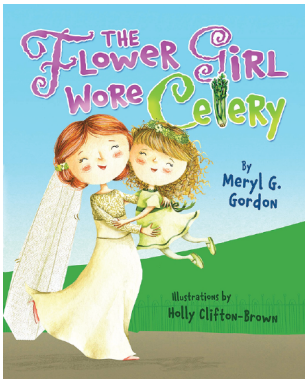


Families, Families, Families
 Suzanne Lang
 illustrated by Max Lang

Families are different, but they always love each other.

Random House Books for Young Readers | 2016

Family diversity | Animal characters



The Flower Girl Wore Celery
Meryl G. Gordon
illustrated by Holly Clifton-Brown

Nothing about Emma's cousin's wedding is what Emma expects—the ring bear isn't a real bear, her dress isn't made of celery, and the wedding has two brides!

Kar-Ben | 2016

Wedding | Two Brides

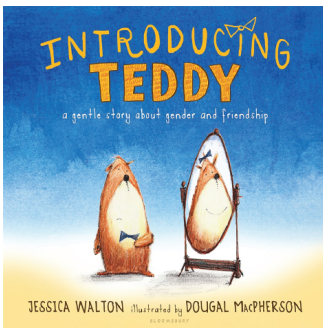


Home at Last
Vera B. Williams
illustrated by Chris Raschka

Lester and his two adoptive dads navigate the growing pains of their new family.

Greenwillow | 2016

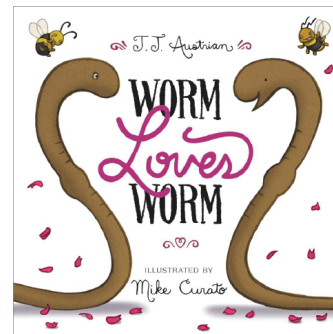
Adoption | Two fathers



Introducing Teddy:
A gentle story about gender and friendship
Jessica Walton
illustrated by Dougal MacPherson

A heartwarming portrait of a child and his teddy bear's relationship as Teddy transitions to Tilly.

Bloomsbury USA Childrens | 2016



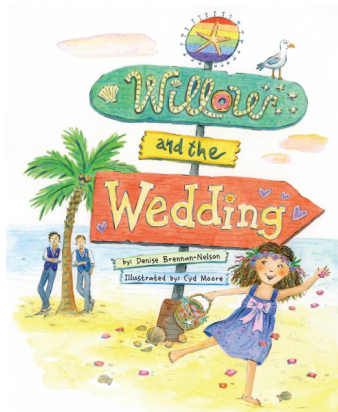
Worm Loves Worm
J.J. Austrian
illustrated by Mike Curato

Celebrate the marriage of two gender neutral worms as they and their friends disassemble a traditional wedding to make it work for them!

Balzar + Bray | 2016

Animal characters | Non-binary pronouns | Wedding

Transgender | Non-human character

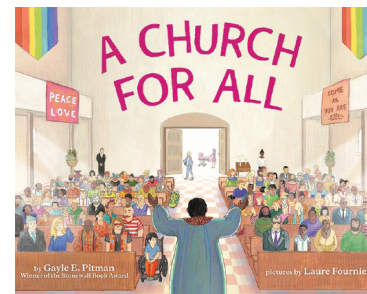


Willow and the Wedding
Denise Brennan-Nelson
illustrated by Cyd Moore

Willow travels with her family to celebrate the wedding of her Uncle Ash and his partner David.

Sleeping Bear Press | 2017

Wedding | Two Grooms

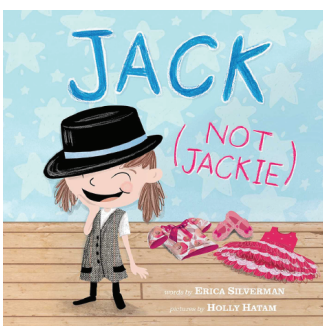


A Church for All
Gayle E. Pitman
illustrated by Laure Fournier

A poetic story about a church for everyone.

Albert Whitman & Company | 2018

Pride | Family diversity | Ethnically diverse characters



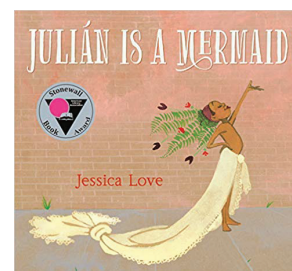
Jack (NOT JACKIE)
Erica Silverman
illustrated by Holly Hatam

Susan loves her little sister Jackie, but how does their relationship change when Jackie would rather be called Jack, and declares that he is her brother.

Little Bee Books (an imprint of Bonnier Publishing) | 2018

Partnership between GLAAD & Bonnier Publishing

Transgender



Julián is a Mermaid
Jessica Love
illustrated by Jessica Love

While on the subway with his Abuela, Julian sees women dressed as mermaids and decides to dress up as one too.

Candlewick | 2018

2019 Stonewall Book Award Winner | 2019 Children's & Teen Choice Book Awards finalist | 2019 Ezra Jack Keats Award Honor, Illustrator | CCBC Choices 2019 Choice: Picture Books for Young Children

Ethnically diverse characters | Gender creative | Family diversity

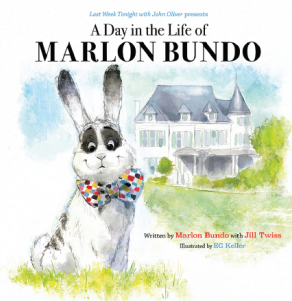


Love, Z
 Jessie Sima
 illustrated by Jessie Sima

After finding a message in a bottle that says "Love, Beatrice", a young robot names Z goes on an adventure to discover what love is.

Simon & Schuster | 2018

Non-human characters | Non-binary pronouns



A Day in the Life of Marlon Bundo
 Marlon Bundo with Jill Twiss
 illustrated by E.G. Keller

When Marlon Bundo finds true love in the paws of another boy bunny, lots of change has to happen at the Naval Observatory where he lives so that he can be with the bunny he loves.

Partially Important Productions | 2018

Same-gender relationship | Animal characters | Bullying



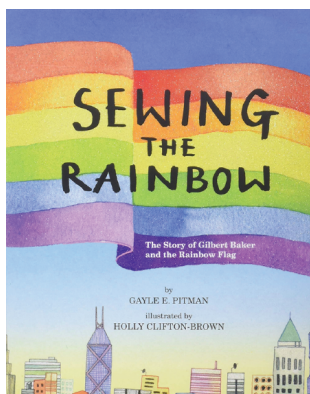
Prince & Knight
 Daniel Haack
 illustrated by Stevie Lewis

A young prince's parents try to find him a bride. When he realizes that none of these princesses will do, he finds true love with a handsome knight.

Little Bee Books (an imprint of Bonnier Publishing) | 2018

Partnership between GLAAD & Bonnier Publishing

Same-gender relationship



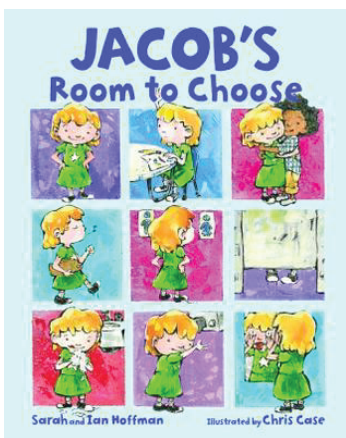
Sewing the Rainbow: A Story about Gilbert Baker
 Gayle E. Pitman
 illustrated by Holly Clifton-Brown

The story of Gilbert Baker and the history of the pride flag.

Magination Press | 2018

2019 ALA GLBT Round Table Rainbow Book List | National Parenting Product Award Winner (NAPPA)

Pride | Biography

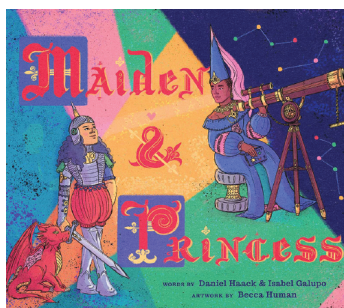


Jacob's Room to Choose
 Sarah Hoffman & Ian Hoffman
 illustrated by Chris Case

Jacob wants to wear a dress to school, but has to convince his parents to help him.

Magination Press | 2019

Gender creative | Washroom access

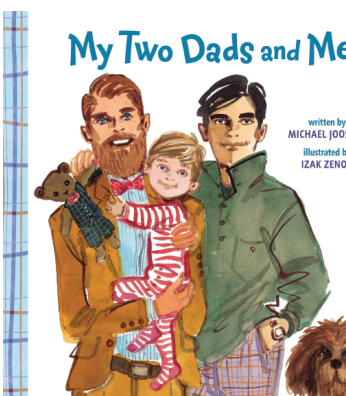


Maiden & Princess
 Daniel Haack and Isabel Galupo
 illustrated by Becca Human

From the publisher: "In this modern fairy tale, a strong, brave maiden is invited to attend the prince's royal ball, but at the dance, she ends up finding true love in a most surprising place."

Little Bee Books | 2019

Same-gender relationship



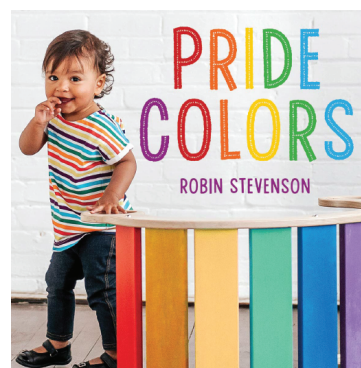
My Two Dads and Me
 Michael Joosten
 illustrated by Ikzak Zenou

Families with same sex parents spend the day with their kids.

Penguin Random House | 2019

Also look for *My Two Moms and Me* by Michael Joosten

Two fathers | Board Book



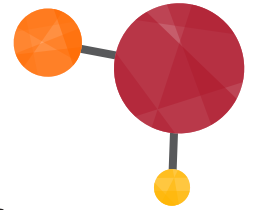
Pride Colors
 Robin Stevenson

Coloured photographs accompany rhymes about the colors and meaning of the pride flag.

Orca Books Publishers | 2019

Pride | LGBTQ+ diversity | Ethnically diverse characters | Board book

Finding New Books



Awards:

- ALA GLBT Round Table Rainbow Book List
- Lambda Literary Award
- Notable Books for a Global Society Award
- Stonewall Book Awards

Publishing Houses:

- Flamingo Rampant
- Little Bee Books
- Magination Press
- Simon and Schuster

Resources

Helpful Organizations:



GLBT Round Table of the ALA

The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Round Table is a division of the ALA that provides both book recommendations and toolkits on how libraries can be LGBTQ+ inclusive spaces.



LGBT Family Coalition

A bilingual group of parents advocating for legal and social recognition.



My Pronouns.org

An online resource that explains the importance of gender pronouns. Information includes how and why to use someone's personal pronouns appropriately.



PFLAG Canada

A charitable organization that supports families and their LGBTQ+ children. Pflag Canada hosts family friendly events and provides lists of LGBTQ+ organizations across Canada.



Trans Student Educational Resources

An organization created by trans youth to improve the American education system. While the focus is American, the organization does have great resources and informational graphics, such as the gender unicorn.

Censorship Resources:

- **How to Respond to Challenges and Concerns about Library Resources**
From the ALA
- **Responding to Concerns about LGBTQ Topics and Schools**
From Welcoming Schools: A Project of the Human Rights Campaign Foundation

Defending your Collection from Censorship

LGBTQ+ children's literature is frequently listed among the most challenged literature in public libraries. This sort of conflict might make some library staff hesitant to include these books in their collections, but this would be a disservice to the community, and betrays our libraries' commitment to intellectual freedom. Here are some tips and resources to help you feel better equipped to handle censorship challenges.

Organizations and Documents



The United Nations (UN)

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). The UN has outlined rights that they believe all children should be afforded. Article 13 enshrines a child's right to freedom of expression, including the freedom to obtain and disseminate information. Article 16 protects a child's right to privacy. Article 17 recognizes the importance of media, and guarantees a child's right to access information, particularly from a diverse range of sources.



International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)

The IFLA statement on libraries and intellectual freedom (2015) outlines that IFLA believes in intellectual freedom, and believes that all libraries must uphold it. Included is a list of ways in which a library may incorporate this belief into their activities and policies.



Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA)

The Statement on Intellectual Freedom and Libraries (2015) is a short document, which states that the CFLA aligns itself with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These documents affirm that individuals have the right to consume any media they desire, so long as it does not contravene the law.

Tips for Interacting with Patrons who Challenge a Book

- Listen respectfully to the patron's complaint.
- Know the policies at your library that relate to censorship and cite them. Knowing your libraries' policies empowers you! Know where to find this information so that you can share it with a patron.
- There should be an established set of guidelines to follow for complaints.
- Avoid personal opinions.
- Explain that every family must decide for themselves which materials their children will use and that it may be different from their own views.
- If you're uncomfortable, it is okay to direct the person to your supervisor or someone else.

Quick Phrases to Use

- If you would like to challenge this material, here are the steps you will need to take.
- We have a duty to represent all kinds of families and identities and these materials are an important part of our collection. The inclusion of these materials is supported by our library policies.

Glossary

Aromantic:

"A sexual orientation where a person experiences 'a lack of romantic attraction'." ¹

Asexual:

"A sexual orientation where a person experiences little or no sexual attraction." ²

Bisexual:

"A person who is emotionally, physically, spiritually and/or sexually attracted to people of more than one gender." ³

Cisgender:

When a "person's gender identity is in line with or 'matches' the sex they were assigned at birth." ⁴

Ethnicity:

"A socially defined category or membership of people who may share a nationality, heritage, language, culture and/or religion." ⁵

Gay:

"A person whose enduring physical, romantic, spiritual, emotional and/or sexual attractions are to people of the same gender. The word can refer to men or women, although some women prefer 'lesbian'." ⁶

Gender Binary:

"A social system whereby people are thought to have either one of two genders: 'man' or woman'." ⁷

Gender Expression:

"How a person publicly expresses or presents their gender. This can include behaviour and outward appearance such as dress, hair, makeup, body language and voice. A person's chosen name and pronouns are also common ways of expressing gender." ⁸

Gender Identity:

"A person's internal and individual experience of gender. It is a person's sense of being a woman, a man, both, neither, or anywhere along the gender spectrum." ⁹

Gender Roles:

"How we're expected to act, speak, dress, groom, and conduct ourselves based on our assigned sex." ¹⁰

Genderqueer:

"Individuals who do not follow gender stereotypes based on the sex they were assigned at birth. People who are gender non-conforming may or may not identify as trans."

¹¹

Lesbian:

"A woman who is emotionally, physically, spiritually, and/or sexually attracted to women." ¹²

Sex:

"The classification of people as male, female, or intersex. Sex is usually assigned at birth and is based on an assessment of a person's reproductive systems, hormones, chromosomes, and other physical characteristics." ¹³

Sexual Orientation:

"The direction of one's sexual interest or attraction." ¹⁴

Transgender/Trans:

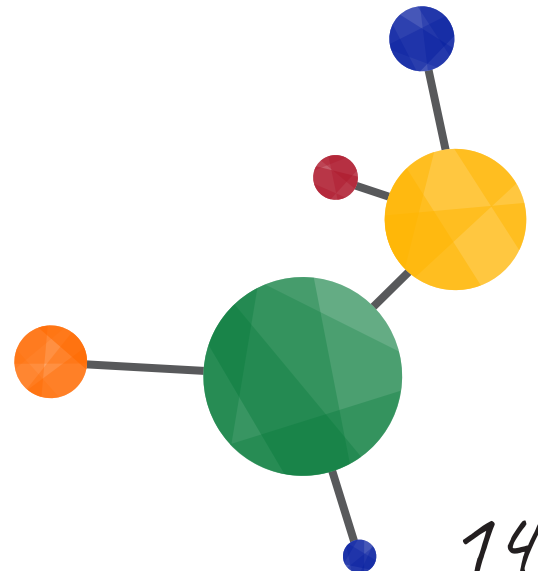
"Umbrella terms that describe people with diverse gender identities and gender expressions that do not conform to stereotypical ideas about what it means to be a girl/woman or boy/man in society. Trans identities include people whose gender identity is different from the gender associated with their birth-assigned sex. Trans people may or may not undergo medically supportive treatments, such as hormone therapy and a range of surgical procedures, to align their bodies with their internally felt gender identity." ¹⁵

Twospirit

"A term used by Indigenous People to describe from a cultural perspective people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, or intersex." ¹⁶

Endnotes

- (1) Trans Student Educational Resources (n.d.)
- (2) The 519 (n.d)
- (3) The 519 (n.d)
- (4) The 519 (n.d)
- (5) The 519 (n.d)
- (6) The 519 (n.d)
- (7) The 519 (n.d)
- (8) The 519 (n.d)
- (9) The 519 (n.d)
- (10) Planned Parenthood (n.d.)
- (11) The 519 (n.d)
- (12) The 519 (n.d)
- (13) The 519 (n.d)
- (14) The 519 (n.d)
- (15) The 519 (n.d)
- (16) The 519 (n.d)



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