

Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors

Exploring the 2020 Rainbow Book List

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Being familiar with the Rainbow Book List is one easy way for librarians to support the LGBTQ+ community and address the American Library Association's (ALA) Response to Service for LGBTQ+ People.

As stated on their website: "Libraries can serve lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ) people by ensuring that this population is reflected in library collections and provided with services at the library.¹ It further states, "As a population which is often the subject of discrimination and harassment, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people can benefit from the access to information which libraries provide and the sense of community which library programs can help foster. It is important to note that the LGBTQ population is diverse, spanning age groups, ethnic and racial groups, socio-economic groups, and personal identities."²

The Rainbow Book List is an annual list created by ALA's Gay, Lesbian Bisexual, and Transgender Round Table (GLBTRT)

and Social responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) to provide high-quality literature connected to the lives of the LGBTQ+ population. Specifically, the list is a curated bibliography highlighting books with significant gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer/questioning content, aimed at children and youth from birth to age eighteen. It is divided respectively into picture books, middle-grade fiction, young adult nonfiction, young adult fiction, and graphic novels. To support the growing need to introduce these books and topics to younger students, we chose to highlight the twelve picture books from 2020 selected by the Rainbow Book List Committee.

The availability of LGBTQ+ titles for the committee's consideration has changed over the years as the numbers of books being considered have increased. Specifically, in 2008 when the first list was generated from books published between 2005 and 2007, the committee reported exploring two hundred books with results that were "eye-opening, revealing a lack of accessibility through missing subject headings



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and the promotion of inappropriate titles insulting to the LGBTQ+ population including such books as *A Parent's Guide to Preventing Homosexuality*.³

The committee chose 45 books for that first list. Fast forward to the 2020 list when the committee reviewed 550 books and selected 92 titles for the list.

Importance of Book Lists and Awards

Children's book awards such as the Caldecott, Newbery, and Stonewall Book Awards, along with the Rainbow Book and ALA Notable lists, are significant since the books on those lists have already been vetted by literacy professionals. Since the number of books published each year continues to grow, award lists provide professionals with a time-saving tool and become "educational, social, and cultural" due to the impact of receiving such accolades.⁴

These book awards and "best of" compilations such as the Rainbow Book List surprisingly may be new to some as Rickman found in her survey to the Arkansas Association of Instructional Media;⁵ in fact, most of her respondents reported never ordering books from the Rainbow Book List, and 91 percent had never attended professional development opportunities focused on the LGBTQ+ community.

While some teachers and librarians have used the list as a resource for several years, others have not taken advantage of this important tool to share with others "who may not understand the experiences of children and adults in rainbow families."⁶ To aid in familiarizing those who wish to add books to their collection, this article summarizes the twelve picture books (six nonfiction and six fiction) found on the most current Rainbow List, presenting them as possible mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors for young readers.⁷

The 2020 Rainbow Book List

Nonfiction

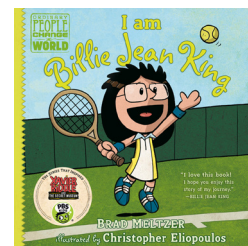
***Our Rainbow*. Illustrated. Little Bee, 2019. 20p.**

Although many individuals acknowledge the rainbow flag as a symbol of LGBTQ+ identity, most have no idea that the colors in the flag have significance. This simple book explains the meanings of each of the colors in the rainbow flag. At the top of the flag, black symbolizes diversity, and brown indicates inclusivity, celebrating the strengths and beauty of uniqueness and differences that exist among human beings. Red represents human lives, orange is a color of compassion and healing from emotional wounds. Yellow is the color of sunlight, which provides hope and warm feelings. Green celebrates the beauty of nature in the world. Blue represents peace and harmony; purple indicates the spirit that each human being embraces. With bright and beautiful illustrations, the authors attempt to teach young readers how simple acts of

kindness and understanding of the differences in others help brighten our world. *Grade Level: Preschool–Kindergarten, Age Range: 2–5 years.*

Meltzer, Brad. *I Am Billie Jean King*. Illus. by Christopher Eliopoulos. Dial, 2019. 40p.

This graphic-novel style biography focuses on the lesbian former professional tennis player, who testified before Congress that girls' sports should be funded equally to boys' sports. Growing up, she always wondered why playing sports seemed mostly reserved for boys. King loved tennis and amassed many championship titles as well as spearheading protests for equal pay. King is known for her triumph in an exhibition game over former tennis champion Bobby Riggs in the so-called Battle of the Sexes in 1973. This victory brought attention to the athletic prowess of women. King continues to be an outspoken supporter of equal pay for women. *Grade Level: Kindergarten–3, Age Range: 5–8 years.*

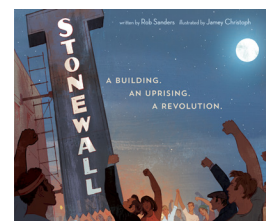


Pierete, Fleur. *Love Around the World*. Illus. by Fatinha Ramos. *Love Around the World*. Six Foot Press, 2019. 40p.

Pierete tells a heartfelt story based on real events inspired when she and her then-partner, Julian Bloom, traveled around the world to get married in 28 of the 195 countries that allowed same-sex marriages. Each beautiful double-page spread shows the two women marrying in various countries such as the United States, Belgium, and Brazil, as they learn about the traditions that make each place special. At the end, the reader is hopeful that the couple makes it to the remaining countries, but the backmatter includes one last photograph of them. Sadly, Bloom passed away from brain cancer before the couple finished the journey. *Age Range: 6–8 years, Grade Level: 1–3.*

Sanders, Rob. *Stonewall: A Building, An Uprising, A Revolution*. Illus. by Jamey Christoph. Random House, 2019. 40p.

Rob Sanders explains the history of the Stonewall Inn building, first erected in the 1840s. Christoph provides digital spreads which show the Stonewall first, as a stable for horses, then, Bonnie's Stonewall Restaurant in the 1930s, and finally, the gay-friendly Stonewall Inn in 1967. At that time, Greenwich Village was a mecca for immigrants, a hotspot of contemporary art galleries, and the "place to be" in the 1950s. Stonewall became home for those "that didn't fit in or belong," but others did not feel the same as the Inn was raided by law enforcement officials due to intolerance. The famous raid in June 1969 caused angry bar patrons with "fists and bricks" to start the Stonewall Uprising, giving birth to the LGBTQ+ Rights movement. Despite some criticism for not making transgender activists central in the narrative and illustrations, this book is an important addition to



civil rights history. *Grade Level: Kindergarten–3, Age Range: 5–8 years.*

Stevenson, Robin. *Pride Colors*. Photos by Michael Feist and others. Orca, 2019. 28p.

Using nursery rhymes and beautiful photographs of toddlers and/or same-sex parents, Stevenson explains the meaning of the colors in the rainbow flag. The author adds a short sentence right after she introduces the meaning of each color. For instance, “CUDDLE IN ORANGE, a snuggle, a snooze. Be yourself. Love who you choose.” “Soft GREEN GRASS, cool, shady tree. I’ll love the person you grow to be.” This allows young readers and parents/educators to discuss not only the meanings of each color but also the interpretations of the colors, words, phrases, and sentences. Without using explicit words, the author introduces Pride Day family structures, and the LGBTQ+ community to young readers. *Grade Level: Preschool and up, Age Range: Baby–3 years.*

Thorn, Theresa. *It Feels Good to Be Yourself: A Book About Gender Identify*. Illus. by Noah Grigni. Holt, 2019. 40p.

This informational picture book is filled with gender identity vocabulary and would be helpful to begin discussions about the topic. Thorn places each of the new terms in uppercase letters, while Grigni uses colorful illustrations and various families to emphasize differences. We meet several characters such as Ruthie, a transgender girl, and Ruthie’s cis-gender brother. Ruthie’s friend Alex identifies as a boy and girl, while Alex’s friend, JJ, feels neither like a boy or girl; they are gender non-binary. The book emphasizes how someone may guess at a person’s gender identity based on appearance, and how it is okay to let people know when they are wrong. The backmatter includes terms, additional resources, and recommended pronoun usage. *Grade Level: 1–2, Age Range: 4–8 years.*



Fiction

Gale, Heather. *Ho’onani: Hula Warrior*. Illus. by Mika Song. Tundra, 2019. 40p.

In the frontmatter, Gale explains that Hawaiians value individuals who have both feminine and masculine traits. In this tale, the main character, Ho’onani, does not see herself (the pronoun used in the text) as a boy or girl. When Ho’onani auditions for and wins the lead role of the warrior for a traditional hula chant, her classmates are shocked since they expect the role to go to a male. Based on a true story and documentary, the text and Gale’s vivid watercolor and ink illustrations showcase the traditions and values of the Hawaiian culture. This book was cited as one of the Ontario Library Association’s 2019 Top Ten Titles. *Grade Level: Preschool–3, Age Range: 4–8 years.*

Haack, Daniel and Galupo, Isabel. *Maiden and Princess*.

Illus. by Becca Human. Little Bee, 2019. 40p.

Known for the LGBTQ+ themed *Prince and Knight*, Haack coauthors this beautifully Illus. fairy tale that begins with a queen and king hosting a ball in search of a maiden to marry their son. One maiden was not excited to attend the ball, and she confided that to her mother. As her mother encouraged her to attend, the maiden dressed accordingly and went to the ball where others were impressed with her beauty and thought she might be the perfect mate. When she leaves the crowded ballroom to get away from all the attention, she meets a princess and falls in love at first sight. In her illustrations, Human includes a diverse group of characters along with expected extravagant costumes, crowns, and furniture. This book was published in partnership with GLAAD. *Grade Level: Preschool–3, Age Range: 4–8 years.*

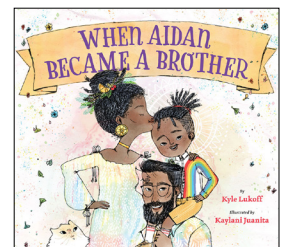
Hoffman, Sarah and Hoffman, Ian. *Jacob’s Room to Choose*.

Illus. by Chris Case. Magination Press, 2019. 32p.

Two elementary students have embarrassing experiences related to the bathroom. Jacob is chased from the bathroom by other boys because of how he dresses. Sophie, who dresses more like a typical boy, also has a similar experience in the girls’ restroom. During a class meeting, Sophie tells Ms. Reeves, her teacher, she wants to go to the bathroom again, a request which confuses her teacher. Ms. Reeves explains that there are more than two ways for us to express the uniqueness of our genders; for instance, boys may have longer hair and girls may wear pants. With support from the administration, Ms. Reeves leads her students in creating new, inclusive bathroom signs and encourages them to celebrate the uniqueness of gender diversities. With watercolor illustrations, this book is listed on the Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People award list for 2020. *Grade Level: Kindergarten–3, Age Range: 5–8 years.*

Lukoff, Kyle. *When Aiden Became a Brother*. Illus. by Kaylani Juanita. Lee & Low, 2019. 32p.

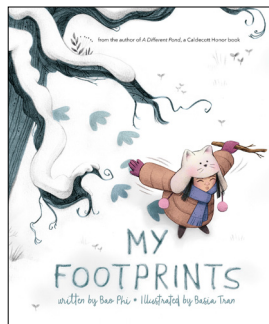
A transgender boy, Aiden is thrilled to help his parents welcome another baby to the family soon. Being a big brother is an important responsibility for him, but he also wonders if the baby will feel recognized by everyone. He helps his mother buy new clothes for the baby and also helps his father paint the bedroom. He also looks for names that can fit this new baby whomever they grow up to be. Just before the baby arrives, Aiden becomes nervous and wonders if the baby will be happy with everything that he has done as a big brother. However, his mother reassures Aiden that he taught them how important it is to love someone for exactly who they are and that this new baby is very lucky to have Aiden as the big brother. The primary theme of this well-written picture book is acceptance of others, and the story also features several intersectional characteristics, such as people of color,



gender-binary and transgender identities, ages, and family relationships. *Grade Level: Preschool–3, Age Range: 4–7 years.*

Phi, Bao. *My Footprints*. Illus. by Basia Tran. Capstone, 2019. 32p.

Thuy's classmates often tease and bully her because of her appearance, heritage, and her two mothers. On her way home from school one day, she notices her footprints in the snow. Her imagination takes over, and she pretends she is like several different animals. What if she could fly away like a bird? What if she could sprint like a deer, roar, or bear? While mimicking the footprints of each creature, she arrives home. Thuy tells her two mothers she wants to be a monster to prevent her classmates' harassment. Instead of addressing the problem directly, her parents play with Thuy, identifying their favorite animals/creatures together. Momma Ngoc's favorite creature is the phoenix, which symbolizes harmony and happiness. Momma Arti chooses the brave and beautiful Sarabha (a mythical combination of a lion and a bird) to help give Thuy more courage to cope with her problems at school. The graphite and digital color illustrations bring Thuy's imagination to life with vivid detail, in a style reminiscent of Calvin and Hobbes. *Grade Level: Kindergarten–4, Age Range: 6–8 years.*



Smith, Heather. *A Plan for Pops*. Illus. by Brooke Kerrigan. Orca, 2019. 32p.

Lou visits his grandparents every Saturday. But his grandparents are not typical; Lou builds special moments with each

grandad as they teach him various life lessons. Kerrigan illustrates the uniqueness of both Grandad and Pops in terms of their dress, interests, and personalities. One Saturday as they leave for the library, Pops falls and needs a wheelchair for the rest of his life. Grandad and Lou hatch a plan to cheer him up when he refuses to leave his room, helping him return to his old self. *Grade Level: Preschool–Kindergarten, Age Range: 3–5 years.*

Conclusions and Implications

The first LGBTQ+ picture books were written by advocates and supporters for LGBTQ+ families and have often been historically inequitably challenged by some parents, educators, and school administrators and suffered from censorship. Perhaps even worse, many of them were simply ignored.

Noticeably, none of the picture books selected for the 2020 ALA Rainbow List portrays or depicts queer lifestyles. Rather, the authors minimized or even avoided using explicit terms and often chose to use and include non-human character(s) to teach readers about LGBTQ+ topics. The illustrators purposefully used many different colors with energizing and positive images about the stories' themes and concepts.

The 2020 ALA Rainbow List proudly represents the current trend in LGBTQ+ picture books and offers unique possibilities for expanding library collections so they address the needs of all patrons. &

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