

Exposing children to trans and nonbinary characters in literature is a great way to help them develop an early understanding of gender variance. Below is a guide on how to pick out books for children that discuss trans characters and/or include themes of non-normative gender expression.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR

- Representation that reflects the breadth and depth of trans communities. Trans people are not all white, abled, straight, thin, hearing, or middle-class. All trans people engage with a multitude of identities and backgrounds. And being marginalized in one way does not prevent trans people from marginalizing others.
- Other LGBT characters. It's common to show a trans character as isolated from community, or other trans or queer people, but we often work hard to find each other, online or in person.
- Stories that show a trans person as a whole character beyond fixating on coming out, disclosure, or transition (giving the trans character one weird hobby or trait and using that as shorthand for depth is cheating).

THINGS TO AVOID (OR AT LEAST THINK CRITICALLY ABOUT)

- Books that use a character's old name/deadname as a shortcut for explaining their trans history/identity, or that use it in a way that is unnecessary or gratuitous. Trans people feel lots of different ways about our old names (if we've changed our names), and that information should be used with care and intention.
- Books that subject a trans child or adolescent's body (especially genitals) to undue scrutiny. Trans characters are often reduced to bodies, portrayed in disrespectful, gratuitous, or titillating ways, and references to a trans character's body should be done with care.
- Books that center a cis character (sibling, child, friend) learning to "accept" a trans person in their life, especially if in doing so the trans character is subjected to abuse, violence, and trauma. Many communities have protested against the practice of using a marginalized character to "teach" a privileged person something, or to move an antagonistic character towards acceptance, and exploiting transgender characters for cis growth is no different.
- A character's trans history used as a twist or surprise ending.

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THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Authorship, and the need for trans writers to tell trans stories. Cis people can occasionally write excellent trans characters, but so far they are the exception. Cis writers often include a trans character in a novel but then subtly (or unsubtly) demonstrate their own ignorance.
- Coming out stories and transition stories are important, of course, but it's worth looking at what else a trans story has to offer, and whether there are other titles that provide a more holistic look at a trans character's experience.
- Whether the title has artistic and/or literary merit, in addition to simply being "visibility," "representation," or "education." It's important to engage with trans literature as literature, not just as a didactic or pedagogical tool, and to treat trans writers with respect as writers.

To learn more about qualities to look for in picture books for young children, check out [this document](#) by [Gender Justice in Early Childhood](#).

BOOKS WE RECOMMEND

Young Adult

Daniels, April: *DREADNOUGHT*

Deaver, Mason: *I WISH YOU ALL THE BEST*

Russo, Meredith: *IF I WAS YOUR GIRL* and *BIRTHDAY*

Schrieve, Hal: *OUT OF SALEM*

Middle Grade

Bunker, Lisa: *FELIZ YZ* and *ZENOBIA JULY*

Gino, Alex: *GEORGE*

Riordan, Rick: *MAGNUS CHASE AND THE GODS OF ASGARD*

Picture books

Gonzalez, Maya & SG, Matthew: *THEY, SHE, HE, EASY AS ABC*

Lukoff, Kyle: *WHEN AIDAN BECAME A BROTHER*

Shraya, Vivek: *THE BOY & THE BINDI*

thom, kai cheng: *FROM THE STARS IN THE SKY TO THE FISH IN THE SEA*

Thorne, Teresa: *IT FEELS GOOD TO BE YOURSELF*

To find more recommended picture books, check out [this document](#) by [Gender Justice in Early Childhood](#).