

# That's So Gay! (And Lesbian, and Bi, and Trans ...)

Young adult books for Pride Month – and all year long

**M**iddle and high school aren't exactly super-welcoming places for The Gay — check out [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org) for sobering stats. So what's a queer or questioning young adult to do? Hide? Sue the school for lack of human rights protection? Go on the attack? OK, I'm a geek, so I fight homophobic idiots with, you know, *books*. In case some folks haven't figured out how red-hot-kick-ass it is to be gay, I've got an out, proud, *flaming* list of young adult (YA) books just in time for Pride Month.

There are way too many to talk about in this column because hey, we're here, we're queer ... and a lot of us are writers. From Jacqueline Woodson's gorgeous *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun* and *The House You Pass on the Way* to the hilarity of Brian Sloan's *A Really Nice Prom Mess* to the wide range of tales in *Full Spectrum* and *Am I Blue? Coming Out of the Silence*, books with LGBT characters span the entire rainbow.

One of the oldest YA books about lesbians remains one of the best (and most

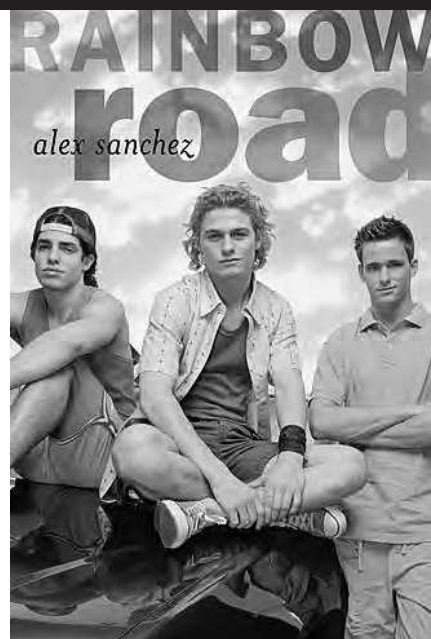
often hated): Nancy Garden's 1982 *Annie on my Mind*. Garden truly blazed the trail with her tale of Lisa and Annie meeting in the Metropolitan Museum and dealing with their own confusion, conservative classmates, bemused parents and siblings who don't quite know what to say.

Despite *Annie*, as the essential-for-school-librarians *Serving Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Teens: A How-to-do-it Manual* notes, gay books massively outnumber books about lesbians.

Julie Anne Peters is changing that. First there was *Keeping You a Secret*, about a young woman whose mom freaks and tosses her kid out of the house. Lots of kids *do* have to deal with coming out in a hostile environment, and Peters writes clearly about how to gather resources and survive. In *Luna*, Peters' tale of a trans girl told through her sister's eyes, financial security is freedom. *Far From Xanadu* rocks the world of small-town Kansas with a butch, softball-playing, working-class dyke and her semi-straight love object. And in *Between Mom and Jo*, the 12-year-old narrator has to deal with his biological mother's breakup with his other mom, whom he adores.

One of the best YA books ever is Ellen Wittlinger's *Hard Love*, in which straight boy John, whose mom won't touch him and whose dad lives strictly for himself, falls for lesbian Marisol through the brilliance of her zine writing. The emotional rawness and honesty of *Hard Love* makes it stand above most adult or YA books. Wittlinger's also about to fill a publishing void with *Parrotfish*, whose first-person narrator is an endearing transboy living through his transition in high school.

Brendan Halpin's *Donorboy*, a humorous piece of writing about dealing with grief and bonding with new people, wasn't published as YA but could have been. Furious, hilarious 14-year-old Rosalind writes an online journal about living with her biological dad, whom she had not met before a



truckload of turduckens killed both of her moms. This book is charming and moving, a smart crossover for teens and adults.

Multnomah County librarian Sara Ryan wrote one of the first YA books to feature a bi character with 2001's acclaimed *Empress of the World*, which she followed up this year with the Portland-focused *The Rules for Hearts*. Smart kids and drama fans should enjoy both books.

What about boys? Well, to start with the best, in the fall of 2003 came the world-opening, terrific near-future *Boy Meets Boy* by David Levithan, most of whose subsequent books also contain gay characters. But *Boy Meets Boy* is an essential read.

Alex Sanchez' *Rainbow Boys* trilogy addresses serious issues (coming out as an athlete, unsafe sex), but these books speed by with lots of pretty-in-lavender fun. Many of Sanchez's main characters are Latino, great to see in a white-dominated genre. Sanchez also penned the younger-skewing *So Hard to Say* about two middle schoolers (one straight, one not so straight) and their tentative friendship, and *Getting It*, a book with a straight 15-year-old pro-

tagonist who's longing to get laid and who's worried about his new gay friend.

Brent Hartinger is another writer who churns out fun, lively and realistic books about a coterie of gay characters. *The Geography Club*, *The Order of the Poison Oak* and *Split Screen* follow gay Russell and his bi friend Min as they form a GSA, deal with being queer, fall in love and work through a variety of relationship issues. And James Howe, famous in my young days for the *Bunnycula* series, now lives a second YA star life as the author of *The Misfits* and *Totally Joe*, both super books appropriate for middle school youth of all sexual orientations or gender identities.

If you're young and queer and don't have what you need, a library can be a great place to go for info and for space away from the prying eyes of family members. If you're out and proud and supported, hey, grab some of these books and pass them around to your friends. It's our world. And yes, it is just so, *so* gay. **EW**

For more books and a list of top ten must-reads, go to [www.eugeneweekly.com](http://www.eugeneweekly.com)



**BOOK NOTES:** Anne Fadiman reads from *At Large and at Small*, 7:30 pm 6/14, Powell's on Burnside, Portland. Michael Ondaatje speaks, 7:30 pm 6/18, Portland Art Museum. \$10. Tony Wheeler reads from *Bad Lands*, 7:30 pm 6/18, Powell's on Burnside, Portland. Karen Karbo talks about her Minerva Clark teen detective series, 1 pm 6/20, Downtown Library. Karbo also hosts the library's Teen Book Club meeting at 4 pm 6/20. Shirley M. Collins reads and discusses "Who and What We Are," her series of handmade books, 7 pm 6/20, Mother Kali's. Austin Grossman reads from *Soon I Will Be Invincible*, 7:30 pm 6/21, Powell's on Hawthorne, Portland.

FRIDAY 6/15 DOORS OPEN AT 9 PM:  
**JERRY JOSEPH BAND (ELECTRIC)** FEATURING  
**JR RUPPEL AND STEVE DRIZOS**, WITH SPECIAL GUEST  
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SATURDAY 6/16 DOORS OPEN AT 9 PM:  
**THE BAKERS BALL LIVE!** LINEUP TBA

FRIDAY 6/22 DOORS OPEN AT 9 PM:  
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**ELECTRIC SOUL IMPROV** FEATURING **MICHAEL KAY**  
AND **MARVIN HARLEY, AND BIG B**

SATURDAY 6/23 DOORS OPEN AT 9 PM:  
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FEATURING PERFORMANCES BY **LIMOSINE, CAP GUN SUICIDE**  
AND **THE ATHIARCHISTS**, PLUS MOVIES, RAFFLES & PRIZES

FRIDAY 6/29 DOORS OPEN AT 8 PM:  
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EVERY SUNDAY NIGHT  
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