

Taking a Closer Look at the American Library Association's 2022 Rainbow Book List

Tadayuki Suzuki, Darryn Diuguid, & Barbara A. Ward

Introduction

Every year, the Rainbow Round Table Committee from the American Library Association (ALA) selects quality lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual+ (LGBTQIA+) books for the ALA's Rainbow Book List. The committee evaluated approximately 450 titles published in the United States and Canada between July 1, 2020, and December 31, 2021, and selected 122 titles for children and young adults for the 2022 Rainbow Book List, the 15th year the list has been compiled.

Educators, librarians, parents, and many others look forward to this annual list, as it exemplifies some of the best children's books connected to our diverse culture. As these books often focus on sensitive topics and generations, the list tends to contain more chapter books written for young adults. Although more titles for young readers have been published recently, the number of LGBTQIA+ picture books remains tiny compared with the overall number of young adult books.

According to the ALA website, the committee honored 16 picture book

titles in 2021 and 2022, 13 in 2019, and 12 in 2020. In 2014 and 2015, however, no picture book titles were on the annual lists. It is safe to surmise that there is a great need for more picture books to inform children about LGBTQIA+ topics.

When we began to explore the 16 picture books on the 2022 Rainbow Book List, we initially focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion as part of their content. As Banks and Banks (2016) reiterated in their five dimensions of multiculturalism, these concepts are the core of educational and social justice, and thus it is worthwhile to scrutinize each book with this lens.

One of the prominent features we discovered through reviewing these titles is that several picture books on this year's Rainbow Book List included intersectional identities. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) remarked that race, class, gender, physical traits, ability and disability, and other inner characteristics existing in humans shape and formulate our self-identities. Books on the list also focus on family and family dynamics, significant figures and role models, language and literacy including nursery rhymes and the use of pronouns, special events, and simple daily lives. Thus it is possible to sort these books into multiple categories.

As we continued with our research, we noticed several themes that stood out. First, this year's annual list contains several picture books about transgender and gender-nonconforming characters, more than in the past. Second, books like *The Bare Naked Book* by Stinson and *Bodies Are Cool* by Tyler focus on body features and different types of bodies in a celebratory fashion. Another essential feature worth noting concerning pic-

ture books about gender identity is the differences in the perspectives between authors who are cultural insiders and those who are cultural outsiders.

The following annotations of the 16 picture books have been organized according to five different categories: (a) significant figures and role models, (b) family and family dynamics, (c) body positivity and gender identity, (d) language, and (e) special events and simple daily lives.

Significant Figures and Role Models

Sharice's Big Voice:

A Native Kid

Becomes a Congresswoman

by Sharice Davids & Nancy K. Mays

Illustrated by Joshua Mangeshig Pawis-Steckley
HarperCollins, 2021

Ages 4–8 years

Native American congresswoman Sharice Davids has a big voice! Readers quickly realize this while reading this nonfiction book about her life, which includes the fact that when she was young, Sharice talked "a lot." One time, though, she decided to listen, a pivotal point in her life as she transitioned from an elementary school student into a fast-food worker, a mixed martial arts fighter, an attorney, and, finally, a congresswoman.

While working as a White House Fellow in 2016, Davids saw no Native Americans as part of the staff, prompting her to run for a congressional seat to ensure that everyone's voice would be heard. As one of the first Native American women in Congress and the first lesbian representative from Kansas, Davids knows that "you deserve to be seen—and heard." Pawis-Steckley illustrates the

*Tadayuki Suzuki is an associate professor
in the Literacy Department
at the State University of New York at Cortland.*

*Darryn Diuguid is a professor
in the Piper Academic Center
at McKendree University
in Lebanon, Illinois.*

*Barbara A. Ward is an instructor
in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction
at the University of New Orleans.*

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text with digital illustrations in a style that honors his Anishinaabe family and Indigenous people on Turtle Island.

**Two Grooms on a Cake:
The Story of America's
First Gay Wedding**

by Rob Sanders
Illustrated by Robbie Cathro
Little Bee Books, 2021
Ages 6–9 years

Sanders, a frequent author on the Rainbow Book List, highlights the two grooms who, in 1971, became the first same-sex couple in America to marry legally. This is an untold story of LGBTQIA+ history, and as the front flap explains, “it’s a love story of two pioneers of marriage equality for all.”

Sanders details how the couple dated and spent time together, and a proposal came after that. Jack Baker and Michael McConnell were not allowed to get married because they were two men, but Jack changed his name to the gender-neutral Pat. Michael then went to the courthouse to apply for a marriage license, which was granted. They sealed their marriage with a kiss on February, September 3, 1971.

The couple is still together fifty years later. The back matter includes an author’s note, a marriage equality timeline, photographs, and a copy of the couple’s marriage license, along with Sanders’s research. This book, containing colorful and lively illustrations, was published in partnership with the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), as the book celebrates marriage equality.

**Prince & Knight:
Tale of the Shadow King**

by Daniel Haack
Illustrated by Stevie Lewis
Little Bee Books, 2021
Ages 4–8 years

This story is a sequel to Haack’s *Prince and Knight* (2018). After marriage, the shadow slowly veils their kingdom. Before destroying people’s lives, the prince and the knight are determined to confront the Shadow King. However, the knight discovers that the Shadow King is highly vulnerable and has difficulties ending this darkness in the world.

Additionally, both find that the world has turned against the King because of how he dresses and speaks. As differences make people unique and something to celebrate, they agree that how the world has treated the King

is unfair. The prince humbly suggests that the King join their kingdom. After being welcomed to their house, the King happily begins to build his own family.

People often judge others based on their appearances and how they speak. This story encourages readers to see the uniqueness and existing diversity through a more critical lens.

The Little Library

by M. McNamara
Illustrated by G. Brian Karas
Schwartz and Wade Books, 2021
Ages 4–8 years

Jake likes to read, but his slow pace makes him feel different from his classmates. Librarian Beck hands him a book titled *Woodworking for Young Hands* and encourages him to read it, although it is a challenging book. With Beck’s encouragement and his grandfather’s assistance, Jake finally builds a little library for his classmates and takes it to school before the summer begins.

One hot day in July, Jake receives a package from Beck, a copy of that treasured volume he has often perused. *The Little Library* is a touching story about the bond between Beck and Jake. The author uses the pronoun *them* when referring to Beck, allowing educators and students to dive into more critical discussions of using pronouns through reading the book.

Family and Family Dynamics

Calvin

by J. R. Ford & Vanessa Ford
Illustrated by Kayla Haren
G. P. Putnam’s Sons Books for Young Readers, 2021
Ages 4–8 years

Luminous Adobe Photoshop and Procreate illustrations accompany the story of Calvin, who has always known that he is a boy, not a girl. Summoning his courage, Calvin tells his parents his secret right before a family vacation and the start of school. He even embraces a new name—Calvin—the name of a stuffed toy that has brought comfort to him all along.

Calvin’s loving, accepting family even understands that he needs a new haircut as part of his new identity. He also has a supportive principal and classmate, Violet, who uses his correct name and reassures Calvin that she always knew he was a boy.

All of Calvin’s fears about acceptance and what others will say disappear because of the support he receives, and

when it is time for his classmates to share their summer experiences, he is ready to talk about the crucial changes in his life.

His classroom is filled with much diversity, love, and support, and the text and images reassure others just like Calvin that it is essential to embrace the person you were meant to be, gender identity and all, while finding a place in your family and community.

My Sister, Daisy

by Adria Karlsson
Illustrated by Linus Curci
Capstone Editions, 2021
Ages 5–7 years

Karlsson wrote this picture book based on her experiences raising two children. Both children were labeled as boys. However, when kindergarten ended, the younger child began to insist on gender identifying as a girl, which often confused her older son. The author later realized that very few children’s books depict the misunderstandings and conflicts that transgender youngsters and their family members face.

Thus she wanted to support more children in similar circumstances. The author uses first-person narration for the older son to emphasize inclusiveness. In one scene, the older son tells Daisy, “I have a friend who is a boy and a girl, but this friend wants me to call them ‘they’ and ‘them.’” Daisy responds, “I know who I am. I know I’m a girl” (unpaged).

Although a simple interaction, more critical conversation is needed to understand the power of these pronouns. The author narrates the sensitive topic with love and compassion.

**Born Ready:
The True Story
of a Boy Named Penelope**

by Jodie Patterson
Illustrated by Charnelle Pinkney Barlow
Crown Books for Young Readers, 2021
Ages 4–8 years

Based on the experiences of the author’s son, this picture book adds to the growing collection of children’s books featuring transgender characters. The protagonist, Penelope, an active child who enjoys karate and skateboarding, becomes frustrated that his family does not understand him and begins to act out. He finally shares a secret with his mother right before his fifth birthday, telling her he is a boy.

She acknowledges his feelings, but he quickly corrects her and tells

her that he does not “feel like a boy. I AM a boy” (unpaged). Mama becomes his biggest ally and informs the other family members at his birthday party. Although some family members struggle with Penelope’s revelation, most accept the news with little trouble, as does his best friend at school and the principal.

His Ghanaian grandfather even comments that the Twi language does not use gender pronouns. Penelope insists on keeping his original name and claims that he was “born ready” (unpaged) for whatever comes his way, even a fierce competitor at a karate tournament. The book contains important references to getting up and trying again after being knocked down—a lesson for everyone.

With handmade watercolor textures, the digital illustrations pay tribute to a willingness to love, accept, and embrace those around us no matter how they might change. This is evident in Penelope’s stance and posture as he feels increasingly comfortable embracing his true identity. Often, transgender individuals are described as disliking their dead names, but that isn’t the case here.

Sam Is My Sister

by Ashley Rhodes-Courter
Illustrated by MacKenzie Haley
Albert Whitman, 2021
Ages 4–7 years

Rhodes-Courter wrote this story based on her experiences with Sam, her gender-nonconforming daughter, whom she and her husband adopted. Sam likes to dress as a girl, which often confuses Evan and Finn, her two brothers.

Initially, the author and her husband did not know how to support Sam’s gender fluidity, but they began educating themselves, gradually teaching their two boys different hairstyles, behaviors, and preferences for clothes that do not offend or hurt anyone.

One day, Sam asks Evan how he knows which hand to use when he colors. Evan responds that drawing with his other hand does not feel right, and Sam teaches him that being a boy does not feel right to her either. The story questions how heteronormativity becomes invasive in children’s thoughts, further allowing children to ponder and discuss inclusiveness and acceptance of others.

Body Positivity and Gender Identity

Fred Gets Dressed

by Peter Brown
Little Brown Books for Young Readers, 2021
Ages 4–8 years

The colorful, pink-tinged digital artwork of this picture book captures Fred’s exuberance and curiosity as he races naked through the house and checks out his parents’ bedroom closet. There he considers his father’s clothing and recalls how he dresses. But tying a necktie and shoelaces stymies the young boy, and he reaches into his mother’s closet, quickly donning her clothes and then adding jewelry and makeup.

Before he can do more than test a color against the skin on his face, his parents arrive. They are not bothered in the least by Fred’s curiosity and exploration. His mother even puts on makeup and styles her hair while Fred watches and copies her. His parents are supportive, with all three family members bedecking themselves and putting on makeup.

The next-to-last page shows a beaming family—Fred, his parents, and their dog—proudly showing off their fashion choices. The last page will prompt giggles, because Fred is still missing one crucial item of clothing. Trying on different clothes is entirely normal and acceptable for youngsters as they play dress-up and explore their identities. In this case, it is easier for Fred to put on his mother’s clothing than his father’s.

Bodies Are Cool

Written and Illustrated by Tyler Feder
Dial Books, 2021
Ages 3–5 years

Tyler Feder does double duty as author and illustrator in this celebration of bodies. A wide array of bodies is featured on the subway, at dance class, in the park, and at the movies, among other places. Inclusivity topics such as various skin colors, hair textures, hair everywhere, and body shapes, including different abilities, are all covered.

The shining moment is when Feder says, “*You* define your body.” On the copyright page, Feder notes that “the art for this book was drawn digitally, with love, by a left hand with a crooked index finger.” In a final celebration of bodies, Feder signs off with characters adorned with heart-shaped T-shirt emblems showing “I love my body!”

The Bare Naked Book

by Kathy Stinson
Illustrated by Melissa Cho
Annick Press, 2021
Ages 3–5 years

Stinson offers readers a nonfiction picture book celebrating naked bodies. With brightly colored illustrations by Cho, the book unabashedly embraces bodies and their hair “on heads and faces and other places,” along with “eyes that see and eyes that are blind.”

Young readers will enjoy the predictable text, with each spread ending in a question, such as “Where are your hands?” “Where are your fingers?” “Where is your navel?” and “Where are your genitals?” The words and illustrations honor inclusivity by showing characters in wheelchairs, with various skin tones, and in unique cultural attire.

The text ends with “Bodies, bodies, to love and to celebrate. So many wonderful bodies!” In the author’s note, Stenson shares that the book was initially published in 1986, causing controversy due to its naked bodies and frank talk. The publisher and author agreed that it was time to update the picture book with a full range of human beings and bodies.

Language

What Are Your Words? A Book About Pronouns

by Katherine Locke
Illustrated by Ann Passchier
Little Brown, 2021
Ages 4–8 years

Learning how to use gender-neutral pronouns can be challenging. In this uniquely crafted picture book, Locke’s story demonstrates the need for familiarity with using various pronouns appropriately.

Uncle Lior, Ari’s transgender uncle, always asks him, “What are your words?” Ari considers that using pronouns is like the weather; he must think of appropriate ones or often change them as needed. For example, Robin prefers *ze*, and Avery prefers another term, such as *ey*. Although Ari typically knows his words, he is nervous when they do not come to him immediately. Uncle Lior encourages Ari to continue calling out different pronouns because acknowledging differences is a sign of acceptance of others.

Reading and discussing this story may help young readers become more sensitive to others and their pronoun preferences, as well as introducing the idea of gender fluidity.

Adventures With My Daddies

by Gareth Peter
Illustrated by Garry Parsons
Peachtree, 2021
Ages 4–8 years

Author Gareth Peter and illustrator Garry Parsons offer an easy-to-read rhyming text with colorful illustrations about two daddies, their child, and a dog. The daddies read stories about dragons, treasures, and deadly dinosaurs, but the child's favorite one of all is when the daddies read "my adoption story."

Peter writes about the dads not being the best at everything, but the most important thing is that they are always there for their child. The pencil and acrylic illustrations highlight the diverse family and all their adventures.

Special Events and Simple Daily Lives

Daddy and Dada

by Ryan Brockington & Isaac Webster
Illustrated by Lauren May
Little Brown Books for Young Readers, 2021
Ages 3–6 years

An easy-to-read story celebrating different types of families is complemented by the clean, crisp lines of digital illustrations created with Procreate and Adobe Photoshop. Narrated by four-year-old Rumi, this picture book introduces readers to her two fathers, Daddy and Dada, and two other family members—a brother named Xander and a dog called Betty—and the family's various pastimes.

The young narrator makes a point of explaining how families come in different sizes and in other compositions—one father and one mother, one parent, two fathers, two mothers, even one child and one grandparent, or large families with twins and several pets. She even points out that friends may serve as someone's family and that families enjoy spending time together in various ways.

This picture book follows the example of other publications depicting nontraditional families celebrating their bonds and promoting acceptance—an encouraging trend. The back matter, with various diverse families shown in framed photos on the wall, expands young readers' concept of what constitutes a family.

Pride Puppy!

by Robin Stevenson
Illustrated by Julie McLaughlin
Orca, 2021
Ages 3–5 years

Pride Puppy! emphasizes diversity, inclusion, and social justice. The book works as an excellent introduction to Pride parades for young children, which is the story's primary focus. In this engaging A-B-C book, to procure more attention from toddlers, the author utilizes a nonhuman character so that more younger readers can relate to the story and get familiar with its concept. "D for dog, dressed up for the day." "L for leash and for loose and for leaping!" "P for puppy, proudly parading!" "W for wags and wide smiles all around."

As dogs appear on all pages, it is a book for dog lovers. The puppy is part of the family but functions as a secondary or additional character. In addition, the author includes nursery rhymes so that younger readers become familiar with LGBTQIA+-related vocabulary words naturally. The "Search and Find Word List" at the end of the book encourages children to explore vocabulary words alphabetically, stimulating vocabulary discussions through further reading.

Grandad's Camper

by Harry Woodgate
Little Bee Books, 2021
Ages 4–6 years

Addressing the lack of representation of older LGBTQIA+ characters in books for children, this picture book honors not only the love between two men but also the affection between a granddaughter and her grandfather. It is narrated by the young girl, who loves looking at photographs while hearing Grandad's stories about his travels with Gramps in their camper as well as about how the two of them met, fell in love, and decided to spend their lives together.

After Gramps's death, Grandad no longer wants to explore the world. The narrator tells herself, "I can see how much he loves these memories and how much he loved Gramps" (unpaged), a painfully poignant realization. The girl suggests that they resurrect the camper and head off on a trip of their own.

The text is pitch-perfect, capturing this intergenerational relationship as well as the strong bond between Gramps and Grandad. How could anyone resist a proposal like Gramps's, offering to see the "many wonderful things in this world" (unpaged) with Grandad? The

illustrations rely on striking colors and a variety of double-page spreads and smaller scenes of the couple's travels and adventures to depict their love.

The front matter features a scene of the young couple driving through the mountains, while the back matter shows the tail end of the van driving into the sunset. This story grips the heart, prompting contemplation of Grandad's loss and loneliness after Gramps's death.

Suggestions for How to Be a More Inclusive Educator

As educators in university teacher preparation programs and former elementary, middle, and secondary classroom teachers, we hope to provide readers with ways to make their workspace more diverse and equitable. The ALA (2022) best described the importance of diversity and, in particular, the need for diverse books:

As our nation continues to diversify, it is essential that children learn to understand the important role of their culture and the cultures of other people in creating an overall global culture respectful of differences. (p. 2)

Queer Your Space With These Books

An educator's workspace, whether an office, reading space, or classroom, must present a welcoming atmosphere to make it inclusive for the LGBTQIA+ community. It is easy to display the Rainbow Book List picture books in that space during LGBTQIA+ History Month (October) or Pride Month (June). However, it is essential to mix books like these during all months of the year and in various collections about families, culture, and diversity.

Another technique involves integrating individuals and places from the community, such as the significant figures and role models section in this article. During casual conversations about critical civil rights leaders, including community leaders from the Rainbow Book List, such as Sharon Davids, the first Native American congressperson, and Jack Baker and Michael McConnell, the first gay couple to challenge the same-sex marriage ban in the 1970s, long before the groundbreaking case in 2015.

Small Steps for Significant Gains

Educators should include many of these award-winning books in their classroom libraries, but they should have them interwoven within the other

genres too. Teachers have found that only LGBTQIA+ students search for a specific section with that title, while others miss the opportunity to see the diversity within the community (English, 2019).

Perhaps using two approaches would be effective: including a section specifically for the students in the LGBTQIA+ community, but also having the books listed under genres, so everyone has a chance to read these diverse books. Teachers could also build a “free response and open discussion time” in the classroom by allowing students to submit anonymous questions, which gives them more time to craft a response (English, 2019). This will enable educators to know what is on students’ minds and be the guide on the side as they answer these very important questions.

Finally, teachers should resist the urge to divide students by gender as with the traditional “boys on one side, girls on the other” when lining up during class or even when creating small groups. Instead, selecting groups by random numbers, paint chip color, or game cards will avoid gender issues, because this gives students opportunities to interact with everyone.

Analyze Your Collection of Mirrors and Windows

Choosing picture books like *Prince & Knight: Tale of the Shadow King* and *The Little Library* for interactive lessons and read-aloud provides insight into diverse populations so that students can see themselves through mirrored experiences and have a chance to observe another culture as though peering through a window.

Although many of us would likely select these books, Buchanan and Fox (2019) observed that preservice teachers in their university programs rarely choose diverse books like those on the Rainbow Book List we have analyzed for this article. If they do use a diverse book for instruction or a read-aloud, preservice teachers tend to borrow books from their cooperating teachers. The authors summarized their observations:

The same concerns for classroom trends have also been observed in teacher education, where White preservice teachers select titles with predominantly White-characters for instruction with diverse students. On our campus, elementary program faculty frequently observed this trend among preservice teachers, despite

culturally relevant instruction and mirror and window pedagogy being central to several of our foundations and methods courses. Across field observations and lesson plans, preservice teachers were not consistently sourcing titles with diverse characters. (p. 190)

This issue caused the researchers to think more deeply about why their preservice teachers were not selecting diverse books, so they conducted a content analysis of their education lab materials at the Betty Holden Stike Education Laboratory. Perhaps the lack of diverse book selections was due to the dearth of materials at their university. After a thorough analysis, they found that the collection did not positively reflect the offerings of smaller publishing companies, which, for many years, have often been the companies that publish diverse materials.

It has only been in recent years that larger publishing houses have felt comfortable publishing LGBTQIA+ materials. In addition, the researchers found that the library collection featured mostly heterosexual/traditional families and “fails to provide a mirror for children whose family is comprised of single caregivers, same-sex headed households, or children whose primary caregivers are not birth mothers or fathers” (p. 198). Although a similar content analysis of a library or even a personal collection is time consuming, it is worthwhile to identify gaps in collections as these researchers did.

How can a school or teacher make a library more inclusive and culturally representative? A representative collection must start early, because studies have shown that preschool-age children have already created negative stereotypes from parents, caregivers, educators, and books with which they have interacted (Naidoo, 2014). Following are more thoughtful ways to move toward a prosperous, representative collection:

1. Have faculty and staff increase the use of diverse selections in courses and other settings.
2. Start a policy on accepting or refusing donations.
3. Prioritize diverse selections for purchases.
4. Ask for a budget increase to support purchases included in the gaps.

The most important part of this process is to establish a council for purchases

that includes faculty with expertise in diverse collections, along with community stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, and students. Of course, award lists like the Rainbow Book List offer a starting point, because experts in the field serve on awards committees, and they use a critical lens when selecting the award winners.

Use New Digital Tools to Diversify the Collection

Along with considering the recommended titles from the Rainbow Book List, including those in this article, educators will want to use the ALA’s Diverse Book Finder¹ to expand their collections. Although this new tool highlights Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), it is still an effective tool for finding books connected to the books and topics analyzed for this article.

For example, when searching for the language “gender identity,” which was a central theme in the current list, with the books *Fred Gets Dressed*, *Bodies Are Cool*, and *The Bare Naked Book*, one finds 204 books with which to diversify a book collection.

In addition, when searching with the phrase “gay family,” which is connected to the books *Calvin, Born Ready: The True Story of a Boy Named Penelope*, *Sam Is My Sister*, and *My Sister, Daisy*, more than 1,000 matching books are displayed.

The site has a disclaimer, as it lists only books that are part of a culture but not necessarily recommended, because the library or individual reader should decide which books are essential to their mission.

Book Talk These Selections

Book talks are a valuable reading tool for all grades and individuals, and the books in this article should be included in those performances. Fisher and Frey (2018) developed four characteristics of their reading volume program. A significant component involved teachers and students conducting book talks to “spur reading.”

At the end of the study, teachers found that students were more interested in books, checked out more books, and had improved writing scores, and parents and their children anecdotally reported that they read more books at home.

There is plentiful research about the value of book talks. Typically, these are 1- to 3-minute snippets with a tempting hook to engage the listener, a summary

quoting a passage or two, and ending with a teaser to encourage the listener to check out the book.

As impactful as book talks can be on the reading lives of individuals, including these books for literacy instruction does much more. For students who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community, recognizing their own experiences in a book's content shared in front of the class by a teacher or peer could be life affirming and life changing.

Findings Through Analysis

When taking a closer look at the 2022 Rainbow Book List, we thought about such criteria as content, primary and secondary characters, and authors' backgrounds. Regarding authors' backgrounds, cultural insiders are authors who have lived through experiences involving growing up as part of the LGBTQIA+ experience. They often craft these stories and share their experiences and struggles with readers. As these books often contain more personal information, the stories typically include more detailed reports and facts.

Families are an essential part of children's lives. Several stories on this year's list discuss family and its dynamics. We categorized *Pride Puppy!* for special events and simple daily lives. It depicts Pride fests for LGBTQIA+ people. However, Stevenson's additional emphasis in this book is the significance of its dynamics. LGBTQIA+ is not only a unique community but a family also consisting of many different forms and styles, allowing the author to emphasize the dynamics of the LGBTQIA+ family.

Another intriguing finding related to family dynamics is that two honored books feature two fathers rather than two mothers. *Daddy and Dada* and *Granddad's Camper* are books featuring two gay fathers. In the stories, the authors focus on the similarities or commonalities with other families, rather than on differences.

Gay marriage is an excellent example of a political issue addressed in a book on the current Rainbow List. On June 26, 2015, during the Obama presidency, the U.S. Supreme Court legalized gay marriage. However, few realize that the first gay marriage in the United States took place several decades earlier.

Sanders, a children's book author who writes primarily about nonfiction events related to LGBTQIA+ issues, utilizes easy-to-understand language and skillfully narrates the first legal

gay marriage in this country. However, many gay couples are still fighting for equitable treatment and justice. Therefore the two grooms in *Two Grooms on a Cake: The Story of America's First Gay Wedding* are symbolic heroes for many.

Many LGBTQIA+ children's books no longer use sexually explicit terms like gay and lesbian excessively in their works. However, when Haack wrote *Prince and Knight*, there was a backlash against the book, although the story's focus was to teach young readers the joy of adventure. Additionally, the monitoring and advocacy group of the GLAAD cautiously reviewed the expressions and messages before publication (Flood, 2019).

In *Prince & Knight: Tale of the Shadow King*, the sequel to *Prince and Knight*, Haack focuses on the empathy developed toward the Shadow King by both the prince and the knight. In this story, the author focuses on the relationships between authority, power, and tenderness. The true meaning of strength is not always toughness but often sympathy and empathy, as the prince and the knight express to Shadow King. Thus, although the prince and the knight are a gay couple, that is not the primary focus of the story.

Another essential finding is that LGBTQIA+ topics are universal to any race, ethnicity, birth sex, and gender. Thus more authors contextualize some intersectional characteristics, making the story context more authentic and meaningful to today's family compositions, schools, and society. For example, in *Adventures With My Daddies*, one of the fathers has darker skin and the other is Caucasian. Additionally, the child has darker skin.

My Sister, Daisy and *Calvin* depict transgender and gender-nonconforming characters. All characters in *My Sister, Daisy* have darker skin. In *Calvin*, however, Calvin's father has darker skin, but his mother has fair skin; Calvin is an interracial child. *Born Ready: The True Story of a Boy Named Penelope* is another transgender and gender-nonconforming title; however, Penelope is a dark-skinned boy initially misgendered as a girl.

In *Granddad's Camper*, the granddaughter seems to be an interracial child, though there is no description supporting her skin color and racial features in the story. Including story characters with different skin colors is not the only way for authors to make their stories more intersectional, but it can be one

effective strategy to demonstrate the concept of inclusion and support and reflect today's existing differences.

We also found some ordinary and established patterns typical in many picture books. For example, in many stories on this year's list, the settings and story context manage to stay within children's experiences and cognitive growths, such as friends, nursery rhymes, and pronouns, allowing younger readers to connect the stories with their lives, families, and schools.

Through investigating all titles on this year's list, we concluded that coming out about LGBTQIA+ children's sexual orientation and depicting or exaggerating the relationships of gay parents are not the focus or trend of many LGBTQIA+ picture books for young readers. However, we still find these features in LGBTQIA+ books for middle graders and young adult readers. Instead, books about body positivity are a new focus on this year's list. Books about body positivity are meaningful for children's growth and cognitive development.

Feeling good about oneself concerns self-esteem and pride, not just about physical features but also familiarity with those individuals who have led the way and worked for change. All children need to learn about significant figures and role models who positively impact the world to enrich their points of view and how they perceive others and the world.

However, racial, cultural, linguistic, and especially sexual and gender minorities often have difficulty finding one critical figure who can positively impact their lives. Some titles on this year's list contribute to filling this void. For instance, the story of Sharice Davids, the Native American congresswoman, is a meaningful picture book describing her multiple intersectional identities. The first openly lesbian congresswoman to run for federal office, Davids's example may inspire others like her to see themselves as elected officials.

Some children's book authors include LGBTQIA+ secondary characters in their stories. For example, Beck, the librarian in *The Little Library*, is a gender-binary character. Although Beck is a secondary character, he is an integral part of Jake's story.

Conclusion

For this article, we reviewed all picture book titles on the 2022 ALA

Rainbow Book List based on the five categories we initially selected: (a) significant figures and role models; (b) family and its dynamics; (c) body positivity and gender identity; (d) language; and (e) special events and simple daily lives. As many books possess overlapped features, however, it was challenging to make clear distinctions for categorization. Of 16 books on the list, 13 titles are fiction; only three are nonfiction, but we surmised that the sparse number of nonfiction books could reflect the few publishing companies producing nonfiction books with LGBTQIA+ themes.

One encouraging discovery from a review of this year's award-winning books is the inclusion of more titles about transgender and gender-nonconforming children. Out of five titles, however, four primary characters' birth sex is male; only *Calvin's* primary character's birth sex is female.

As Casper and Schultz (1999) maintained, many children are still in the process of developing and constructing their gender at a young age. As Sullivan and Urraro (2017) also noted, girls who identify as boys are often socially more accepted and assimilated than boys who identify as girls. They further delineate that statistically, more boys might identify as girls than girls who identify as boys.

It is worth celebrating that several picture books about gender identity appear on this year's list. Perhaps more publishers are willing to publish LGBTQIA+-related books, which means that more books will come to cover a broad spectrum of experiences and identities available, and maybe the quality

of the books will improve even more.

Books such as these offer educators avenues to nurture students' self-concept and empathy through reading. With increased familiarity with these books, including the suggestions for being more inclusive, educators may feel encouraged to continue to build more sophisticated and unbiased eyes and perspectives to select additional appropriate and equitable LGBTQIA+ books for their students.

Note

¹ <https://diversebookfinder.org/>

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