



Print it out

- [PDF of this issue](#)
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Volume 1 Number 11

In this issue

- [GLBTQ-Positive Books for Children](#)
- Being Gay
- Gay and Lesbian Parents / Alternative Families
Non-Fiction
Picture Books
- Sex Education and Gender Identity
- [More Gift Ideas for Children and Teens](#)
- For Younger Children
- For Older Children and Teens

The Gay Men's Edition

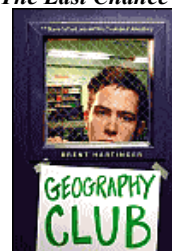
Welcome to the Kids' Books Issue

Though **Books To Watch Out For: The Gay Men's Edition** and **Books to Watch Out For: The Lesbian Edition** are distinct editions (with some of you subscribing to both) plenty of queer and queer-friendly books overlap; while this survey of books for kids and young adults was written for our lesbian subscribers, it includes plenty of books of interest to gay men - and, of course, gay dads who read do have daughters and sons they want to read to. So, topped up by a few YA faves of my own, here is a lesbian edition for our gay subscribers...

Carol Seajay ably introduces the mini-reviews that follow; I second her sentiment that, as always, books with positive portrayals of lesbians and gay men are a profoundly important element in the dialogue between gays and straights - and an enormously important component of the inner dialogue that all young queers have with themselves as they come out.

To K.T. Horning's generous survey, I'd like to add a few more particularly gay books:

I've mentioned Brent Hartinger's titles before - *Geography Club*, *The Last Chance Texaco*, and the forthcoming *The Order of the Poison Oak*, a sequel to *Geography* (all HarperTempest, all \$15.99, grade 7 and up). *The Last Chance Texaco*, about skullduggery at a youth group home, blends a range of teens, gays included; *Geography Club* and its March, 2005 sequel follow the lives of gay high school students and their supportive friends. Hartinger is a relatively new voice in YA fiction, skilled enough for adult satisfaction yet keenly in tune with younger minds.

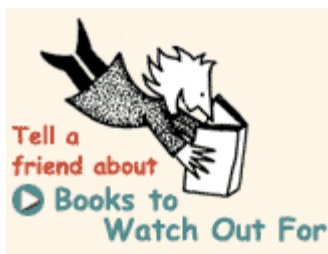
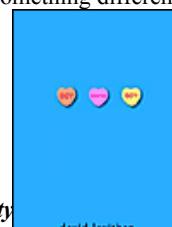


Alex Sanchez's first two YA books, *Rainbow Boys* (Simon & Schuster Pulse, \$7.99, age 12 and up) and *Rainbow High* (Simon & Schuster, \$16.95), are in the same vein as Hartinger's titles - boys at school harbor crushes, experience angst, figure it out with the support of straight friends; one of his high school seniors deals, as well, with an AIDS diagnosis. His third novel, *So Hard to Say* (Simon & Schuster,



\$14.95, age 12 and up) switches focus to the interaction between Frederick, a handsome blond teen transplanted from the white-bread world of Wisconsin to a Latino-majority high school in California, and 13-year-old *chica* Xio, an effervescent take-charge teen who quickly develops a crush on the new kid. By book's end, Frederick has dealt with his sexual confusion, gotten past his crush on a friendly but straight Latino soccer player, befriended Xio - the "best friend straight girl" syndrome so common to YA fiction - and found a boyfriend in Iggy, the steely school sissy.

David Levithan's *Boy Meets Boy* (Knopf, \$15.95, grade 6 up) is something different - it doesn't use the familiar terrain and tropes of high school flux to convey its message of tolerance. Instead, it inverts the norm - its gay characters live in a gaytopia, where gay is really, really good (the star quarterback is a drag - and Homecoming - queen) and it's the straight kids who bear the burden of much of the trauma; the writing is sharp, the humor is warm, and the book is, dare I say it, more hip than most YA novels. Levithan's second book, meanwhile, is even more different: *The Realm of Possibility*



About BTWOF

Books to Watch Out For publishes monthly e-letters celebrating books on various topics. Each issue includes new book announcements, brief reviews, commentary, news and, yes, good book gossip.

The Lesbian Edition

covers both lesbian books and the whole range of books lesbians like to read. It covers news of both the women in print movement and mainstream publishing. Written and compiled by Carol Seajay.

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news. Written and compiled by Richard Labonte.

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age 12 and up) is a novel in poetry form, expressing the varied voices of gay kids, straight kids, questioning kids, defiant kids, suicidal kids, abused kids, bullied kids, smart kids, and kids in love with each other. *Levithan* has a way of speaking in many YA tongues, with astonishing insight and tenderness.

Alyson Books has published three of New Zealand author William Taylor's books for teens - *Jerome*, *The Blue Lawn*, and *Pebble in a Pool*, all of them darker than the YA norm. In *Jerome* (\$9.95, 12 and up), a series of emails and letters between Kate, a young lesbian studying in America, and Marco, a macho teen still in New Zealand, dwell on the suicide of Jerome - Marco's best friend and, he thought, Kate's boyfriend, though the two were covering for one another while they sorted out their sexuality. At 95 pages, it's more a novelette than a novel - but it packs a thoughtful punch. In *The Blue Lawn* (\$10.95, 13 and up), 15-year-old David, a self-aware, clean-living kid in rural New Zealand, is attracted to



rougher, tougher, and slightly older Theo, whose anger at coming out in the process. For a number of other YA-interest titles from Alyson (including a relatively new edition of *Two Teenagers in 20* and a 2004 new edition of *Not the Only One: Lesbian and Gay Fiction for Teens*), go to:

<http://store.yahoo.com/alysonbooks/yoadfi.html>
And for a review of *Not the Only One*:
<http://www.pridesource.com/article.shtml?article=9876>



James Howe's *The Misfits* (Aladdin Books, \$5.99, ages 10-14) is one title I've mentioned in an earlier newsletter that deserves to be mentioned here - not only because it's a marvelous story about how a gang of school misfits, gay included, cope with the "sticks and stones" of being called names, but also because - it contains words like faggot, after all - it's being challenged at an Iowa high school by parents distressed that it "sends the wrong message" to their kids. Sure...tolerance is so un-Christian:

http://www.qctimes.com/internal.php?story_id=1040304&l=1&t=Local+News&c=2,1040304

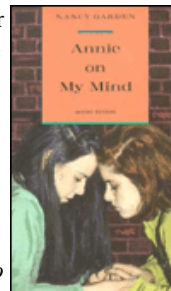
For an interview with Howe, a gay man with a daughter, about the why of *The Misfits* (and for reviews of a dozen of his picture books for kids, including the Bunnacula series, the Sebastian Barth mysteries, and the Pinky and Rex series):

http://www.childrenslit.com/f_howe.html

The Misfits is also available from Full Cast Audio, five hours in CD or cassette, \$21.95, read by Spencer Murphy and a full cast of voices (28 in all); I've read the print and savored it, and next I'll listen to the audio; includes an interview with the author: www.fullcastaudio.com

And, to round out this special edition about a special kind of queer book, here's an interview with *Annie on My Mind* and *Good Moon Rising* (and many more) author Nancy Garden on why children's books matter, her experiences with censorship, and the letters she receives from children and adults alike:

<http://www.cynthialeitichsmith.com/auth-illNancyGarden.htm>



And now, from Carol Seajay:

I'm always looking for excuses to give books to kids and with so many gift-giving holidays coming up, it seemed like a good time to devote an issue to books for the kids in your life.

I've also been thinking about the blatant homophobia kids were subjected to during the elections - and how that affects them. The kids in the eleven constitutional-amendment states got the worst of it, but kids everywhere were hit, again and again, with anti-gay messages and sentiment. So this is a particularly important time to affirm to the kids that it's OK to have gay aunts, uncles, moms, dads, teachers, neighbors, and friends, and yes, it's fine if they're gay, too. And, books, in part because they last longer than TV ads, are a great way to provide that support, to initiate conversations, and to tell the kids you're a safe person to talk to about things gay.

So I asked Kathleen (KT) Horning, the Director of the Cooperative Children's Book Center, and a former Children's Books columnist for Feminist Bookstore News, what she'd recommend for holiday gift giving and for some of the GLBTQ-positive books she thinks are the best.

So the first article in this issue focuses on GLBTQ-positive books for kids. The second article covers more general gift suggestions for children and teens. We'll be covering GLBTQ-positive books for teens in an upcoming issue.

KT has also served on numerous children's book award juries and maintains [Purple Socks](#), a website celebrating the life and work of much-loved – and lesbian – children's book author Louise Fitzhugh. (Think Harriet the Spy, Nobody's Family is Going to Change, Suzuki Beane and Bang Bang You're Dead.) If you read any of those books growing up, check it out.

***Shopper's Advisory:** Feminist and GLBTQ bookstores are particularly good places to shop for these books. The big chains and online mega-store – Surprise! – don't seem to stock some of the important GLBTQ-positive kids' books. You can find a good list of community stores on our [links page](#). Order online or call first to confirm that the books you want are in stock.*

Enjoy – and don't forget to pick up a book or two for your own inner child.

Carol



[back to top](#)

GLBTQ-Positive Books for Children

Compiled by K. T. Horning

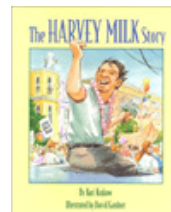
While in the past few years we've seen a notable increase in the quantity and quality of gay/lesbian books for teens, the same hasn't been true in books for younger children. This list represents the best books I've identified over the years as being of particular interest to the gay and lesbian families with whom I've worked. Some of the themes are blatantly gay; others are more subtle but represent common values in GLBTQ families – respect for individual and family differences, cultural diversity, and the importance of community.

Most of the books listed here are available through your local independent bookstore. A few of them are, unfortunately, out of print, but I've kept them on the list because they're worth seeking out at your local public library.

Being Gay

***The Harvey Milk Story* by Kari Krakow, illustrated by David Gardner. \$17.95. Two Lives, 2002. (ISBN 0-9674468-3-X)**

An unequivocal picture book biography strikes a fair balance between Harvey Milk's personal life and his political activism. Krakow's succinct text portrays Milk as a caring individual who worked to ensure the rights of all people who lived in the San Francisco community he represented as supervisor. The shocking assassination of Milk and San Francisco Mayor George Moscone by fellow supervisor Dan White is neither glossed over nor overdramatized, and Krakow ends on an upbeat note by writing about Harvey Milk's legacy. Illustrated with cartoon-style drawings, the book is accompanied by excellent author notes and sources for further information. (Ages 6-10)



***King & King* by Linda DeHaan, illustrated by Stern Nijland. \$14.95. Tricycle Press, 2002. (ISBN 1-582460-61-2)**

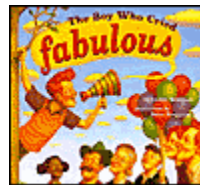


When the queen decides it's time for her son to marry, she lines up all the suitable princesses and tells him to choose a wife. The prince isn't the least bit interested in any of them until Princess Madeleine arrives at the castle. From the moment their eyes first meet, it's love at first sight - for the prince and Princess Madeleine's brother, Prince Lee. The two

marry, inherit a kingdom and, as in all good fairy tales, live happily ever after. Their story continues with an adoption in *King & King & Family* (\$14.95. Tricycle, 2004. ISBN 1-58246-113-9). (Ages 3-7)

***The Boy Who Cried Fabulous* by Lesléa Newman, illustrated by Peter Ferguson. \$15.95. Tricycle, 2004. (ISBN 1-58246-101-5)**

Roger sees everything a bit differently from his family and his peers. To him, everything looks *fabulous* – from the clothes in the window of a men’s store to the things he notices on a busy city block. Embarrassed by his exuberance, his parents try to break him of his habit of exclaiming “Fabulous!” Roger simply replaces it with the word *marvelous* and then expands his vocabulary to include adjectives such as *glorious*, *elegant*, *splendid*, and *scrumptious*. Ultimately his parents are able to see the world through his eyes and accept their son for the fabulous person he is. Newman’s witty rhyming text will make this a pleasure to read aloud. (Ages 3-7)



***An Enchanted Hair Tale* by Alexis De Veaux, illustrated by Cheryl Hanna. Out of print. HarperCollins, 1987. (ISBN 0-06-021623-9)**

It’s Sudan’s hair – a “fan daggles of lions and locks and lagoons” – that sets him apart from his peers. Grown-ups fear his hair and neighborhood kids tease him



mercilessly: “And wherever Sudan went,/ people saw his head;/ they pointed and said/ ‘He’s strange. He’s queer. He’s different.’”

Upset by their cruelty, he storms away and, far from home, stumbles upon a whole family of folks with enchanted hair who admire him and help him celebrate his differences. De Veaux’s poem deals with the necessity of leaving home to find a community of kindred spirits, an aspect of reality for most gays and lesbians that’s rarely addressed, even in gay/lesbian literature

for teens. (Ages 6-9)

***Goose* by Molly Bang. \$10.95. Blue Sky/Scholastic, 1996. (ISBN 0-590-89005-0)**

Although not specifically about gay identity, this story will certainly resonate as an allegory with anyone who has ever felt out of place at home. Three nearly wordless double-page spreads dramatically set the scene as a goose egg falls out of its nest during a violent rainstorm and rolls down a hole, into a den of woodchucks. It

hatches soon thereafter and the woodchucks immediately accept their newest family member. Never cognizant of the fact that she is not a woodchuck, the gosling grows to adulthood learning to do all the things woodchucks do: digging holes, sunning by a stream and, of course, chucking wood. But she never feels completely at home in her family, and she eventually realizes that she must set off on her own to see if she can find what she is missing. The misplaced egg story has been told many times before but rarely with such gentle understatement. And never has an egg found a more unlikely foster family! Bang’s restrained use of

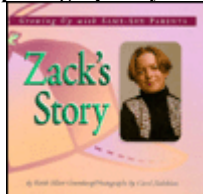


anthropomorphism adds a great deal of visual humor to the story, as she playfully depicts the absurdity of a goose living a woodchuck’s life. She puts a bit of a twist on the story’s conclusion as well. The goose’s great moment of self-discovery is not that she is a goose but that she can fly. “She flew and flew and flew all the way home,” we are told, and we see the goose reunited with a family of very happy woodchucks. (Ages 2-7)

Gay and Lesbian Parents / Alternative Families

Nonfiction

***Zack’s Story: Growing Up with Same-Sex Parents* by Keith Elliott Greenberg, photographs by Carol Halebian. \$21.27. Lerner, 1996. (ISBN 0-8225-2581-X)**



Zack is twelve years old, but this easy photo-essay about his life with two moms will be accessible to early elementary school-aged children. Color photographs and a first-person narrative show us that day-to-day life in Zack’s household is pretty much like life in any middle-class American step-family, except for the occasional trips to Provincetown and regular participation in Gay Pride parades. (Ages 6-9)

***Celebrating Families* by Rosmarie Hausherr. Out of print. Scholastic, 1997. (ISBN 0-590-48937-2)**

No two family structures are alike in this engaging portrait of fourteen American families. Christina lives with her older brother Sherron and their grandmother. Lindsay and her sister Masha live part of the time with their mother and part of the time with their father. Joseph lives on a farm with his parents, aunt and uncle, grandparents and great-grandparents. Justin lives with his dad. Chris lives with his mom and every Sunday they go visit Chris's dad who is in prison. Alexandra and Sarah live with their lesbian moms. Each double-page spread is devoted to an individual child and his or her family, depicted in a creatively composed family portrait that uses color photographs. On the facing page a brief text describes the distinguishing characteristics of the living situation and tells one or two things that the family members enjoy doing together, using a black-and-white photograph as an illustration. No single family is presented as the norm here and all are celebrated for their strength and diversity. (Ages 4-9)



***Families: A Celebration of Diversity, Commitment, and Love* by Aylette Jenness. \$7.95. Houghton Mifflin, 1990. (ISBN 0-395-66952-9 paperback)**

Seventeen young people each briefly comment upon the composition of their families in a photo-essay which originated as an interactive exhibition at the Children's Museum in Boston. One strength of this unique book rests in its organizational pattern, in that no one type of family unit is presented as standard, or correct, or "other." Blended, adoptive, mixed-racial, biracial, two parent, one parent, gay and lesbian, collective and extended families from diverse racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds are pictured. Child-expressed definitions of "family" and a list of books for further reading are additional features of this important book. (Ages 5-13)



Picture Books

Some of the books in this section reflect gay and lesbian family life specifically; others involve family differences in general and may resonate more deeply with children who live in alternative families.

***Heather Has Two Mommies* by Lesléa Newman, illustrated by Diana Souza. \$10.95. Revised edition, Alyson Wonderland, 2000. (ISBN 1-55583-543-0 paperback)**



Three-year-old Heather was conceived through alternative insemination so having two mothers does not seem at all out of the ordinary to her until she begins attending a children's play group and meets children with fathers. The original edition was a bit wordy for its intended audience, but *Heather* certainly paved the way for subsequent books about gay and lesbian families. The tenth anniversary edition, published in 2000, has a much shorter text. It was revised by the author in response to criticism that the original was too complex for preschoolers. (Ages 3-6)

***Daddy's Roommate* by Michael Willhoite. \$8.95. Alyson Wonderland, 1990. (ISBN 1-55583-118-4 paperback)**

Full-color cartoon illustrations accompany a brief text in which a boy describes what weekend life is like with his dad and his dad's lover, Frank. An upbeat, positive portrayal of a situation familiar to many kids with gay fathers. The same characters are featured a few years later in *Daddy's Wedding* (Out of print. Alyson Wonderland, 1996). (Ages 3-6)



***Asha's Mums* by Rosamund Elwin and Michele Paule, illustrated by Dawn Lee. \$7.95. Toronto: Women's Press, 1990. (ISBN 0-88961-143-2 paperback)**



Asha faces a challenge when both her mothers sign a permission slip so that she can take a class trip to the Science Centre, and her teacher asks her which one is her *real* mother. "Both," Asha answers honestly. Asha and her mums together find ways to explain their family situation to curious classmates and a grudgingly accepting teacher. (Ages 4-7)

***Saturday Is Pattyday* by Lesléa Newman, illustrated by Annette Hegel. Out of print. New Victoria, 1993. (ISBN 0-93468-52-9)**

Young Frankie has trouble adjusting when his two moms, Allie and Patty, separate. He misses Patty terribly, even though they talk on the phone frequently. Things get a little better for him when Patty fixes up a room just for him in her new apartment, and he can look forward to spending every Saturday with her. A reassuring story for any child facing the separation of his or her parents. (Ages 4-6)



***123: A Family Counting Book* by Bobbie Combs, illustrated by Danamarie Hosler. \$8.95. Two Lives, 2001. (ISBN 0-9674468-0-5 paperback)**



A variety of families with two dads or two moms illustrate a simple rhyming text that counts from one to twenty. Everyday events and activities are highlighted: “One family going for a ride/ two houses with families inside/ three books waiting to be read/ four puppies waiting to be fed.” (Ages 2-4)

***ABC: A Family Alphabet Book* by Bobbie Combs, illustrated by Desiree Keane and Brian Rappa. \$8.95. Two Lives, 2001. (ISBN 0-9674468-1-3 paperback)**



The same approach that was used in *123: A Family Counting Book* is used, however, here the text makes frequent references to two moms and two dads: “B is for book. Our moms read our favorite book to us at bedtime. C is for cookies. Both of my dads know how to make great chocolate chip cookies.” (Ages 3-5)

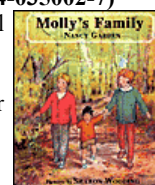
***Felicia's Favorite Story* by Lesléa Newman, illustrated by Adriana Romo. \$9.95. Two Lives, 2002. (ISBN 0-9674468-5-6 paperback)**

The story of how she came to be adopted from Guatemala by Mama Nessa and Mama Linda is a favorite bedtime story of young Felicia. The child’s playful questions and answers hint at the number of times she has heard the story before. Newman’s story is filled with gentle humor and pleasing repetition that will make the story appealing to young children and their parents. (Ages 3-6)



***Molly's Family* by Nancy Garden, illustrated by Sharon Wooding. \$16.00. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004. (ISBN 0-374-035002-7)**

That Molly has two mothers has never been an issue in her life until her kindergarten classroom is preparing for open school night, and one of her classmates tells her that her family isn't a real family. Both of Molly's mothers and her wonderfully understanding teacher help Molly and her classmates appreciate that there are many kinds of families. (Ages 4-7)



***Three Days on a River in a Red Canoe* by Vera B. Williams. \$5.95. Greenwillow, 1981. (ISBN 0-688-04072-1 paperback)**

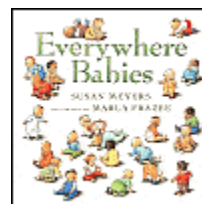


Until *Molly's Family* was published, this was the closest that mainstream publishing had ever come to presenting a lesbian family in a picture book. Here two women and their two children take a weekend canoe and camping trip. Although one of the women is referred to as “Aunt Rosie,” lesbian families will feel at home in this story in which the children take an active role in helping out with pitching the tent,

hauling the canoe, and preparing vegetarian meals. They even remember to bring a fish to their cat when they ultimately return to a home the four characters share. (Ages 4-8)

***Everywhere Babies* by Susan Meyers, illustrated by Marla Frazee. \$16.00. Harcourt, 2001. (ISBN 0-15-202226-0)**

A celebration of babies and families of all kinds features “fat babies, thin babies, small babies, tall babies, winter and spring babies, summer and fall babies.” The families those babies are part of prove to be just as diverse as the babies themselves in illustrations that show babies being loved by mom-and-dad, mom-and-mom, dad-and-dad, and individual parents. Several of the couples shown (gay, lesbian, and straight) are mixed race in this playful picture book. (Ages 1-4)



***Else-Marie and Her Seven Little Daddies* by Pija Lindenbaum. Out of print. Henry Holt, 1991. (ISBN 0-8050-1752-6)**

Else-Marie's family seems normal to her but when her mom tells her one night that she won't be able to pick her up after school the next day as usual, Else-Marie panics to think that her classmates might discover the secret of her "other parent." While Else-Marie's mother is of average size and number, not only is her father knee-high, there are seven of him! Of course, everything Else-Marie imagines her classmates saying and doing turns out to be much worse than what really happens when her seven little daddies show up at school. In fact, the other kids barely seem to notice that there's anything unusual about her dad. A delightfully amusing picture-story from Sweden uses exaggeration and absurdity to effectively express realistic fears and pressures children feel when their families don't conform to popular conventions. (Ages 4-8)



***My Mom Is So Unusual* by Iris Loewen, illustrated by Alan Pakarnyk. \$4.95. Pemmican, 1986. (ISBN 0-919143-37-7 paperback)**



A Métis girl lovingly describes all of the things that make her mom different from the other mothers she knows: the way she dresses, the way she expresses herself, and her fondness for turning up the radio really loud so she can dance to rock music. One of the few picture books featuring a contemporary American Indian family, this comes from a Native-owned small press. (Ages 3-6)

***Winter Poems* by Barbara Rogasky, illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman. \$15.95 hardback, \$5.99 paperback. Scholastic, 1994. (ISBN 0-590-42872-1; paper: 0-590-42873-X)**

Life partners Rogasky and Hyman combine their considerable talents into this rich anthology of wintery poems. Caldecott-Award-winning illustrator Trina Schart Hyman uses her own rural New Hampshire family as the models for her watercolors. Her extended family includes a white mother, African American father, two young biracial sons, and their lesbian grandmothers (Rogasky and Hyman). (Ages 5-9)



***A Child's Calendar* by John Updike, illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman. \$16.95 hardback, \$6.95 paperback. Holiday House, 1999. (ISBN 0-8234-1445-0; paper: 0-8234-1766-2)**



The same family that appears in *Winter Poems* is again featured in Hyman's watercolor paintings for John Updike's collection of twelve calendar poems, one for each season of the year. Her lovely paintings quietly relate one year in the active life of this family. They experience the Fourth of July, an August heat wave at the beach, colorful autumn leaves, and winter snow. A Caldecott Honor book in 2000. (Ages 5-9)

***When Winter Comes* by Nancy Van Laan, illustrated by Susan Gaber. \$16.00. Atheneum, 2000. (ISBN 0-689-81778-9)**

What happens to leaves and flowers, caterpillars and songbirds, field mice and fish, and other living things "when winter comes and the cold wind blows"? In a series of lyrical question-and-response verses, Nancy Van Laan conveys some of the ways the natural world changes when the cold and snow arrive. Her text is a gentle song for the season. Gaber's subdued palette captures the transformation resulting from the first heavy snow. A loving family explores this changing world. The two adults and their child could be many families: the child pictured could be a boy or a girl, and the adults are illustrated so that they can be seen as two women or a woman and a man. (Ages 3-6)



***Just Us Women* by Jeannette Caines, illustrated by Pat Cummings. \$14.89 hardback, \$5.95 paperback. Harper, 1982. (ISBN 0-06-020942-9; paper: 0-06-443056-1)**

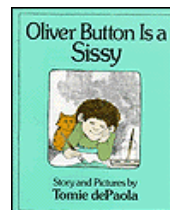


An African American girl and her aunt take a leisurely car trip, moseying down backroads, stopping at roadside markets, and eating breakfast at night. The story begins and ends with Aunt Martha's special stipulation for the trip: "No boys, no men, just us women." One of two picture books, along with *Village of Round and Square Houses*, that deals with the concept of women-only space, an important issue in many lesbian households. (Ages 4-7)

Sex Education and Gender Identity

***Oliver Button Is a Sissy* by Tomie DePaola. \$14.00 hardback, \$6.00 paperback. Harcourt, 1979. (ISBN 0-15-257852-8; paper: 0-15-668140-4)**

The boys at school tease Oliver and call him a sissy because he prefers reading, drawing and jumping rope to sports. Oliver's parents push him to participate in sports (just to get some exercise) but Oliver refuses, opting instead for a tap dancing class. A now-classic portrait of a gentle boy who refuses to bow to peer pressure. (Ages 3-5)

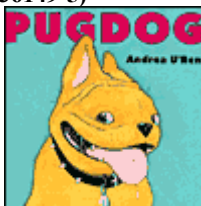


***The Sissy Duckling* by Harvey Fierstein, illustrated by Henry Cole. \$16.00. Simon & Schuster, 2002. (ISBN 0-689-83566-3)**



The sissy duckling in Fierstein's picture book faces a slightly harsher reality than Oliver Button in that his father strongly disapproves of his son's effeminate tastes and habits. All ends happily, however, when the duckling gets a chance to rescue his father and nurse him back to health after he's shot by a hunter. This surprisingly moving story is one part fantasy, one part painful reality, and one part wish fulfillment – and it stars the campiest character in children's literature. (Ages 4-8)

***Pugdog* by Andrea U'Ren. \$16.00. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001. (0-374-36149-5)**



Mike assumes his pugdog is male because of his tough exterior and rough-and-tumble personality. But when a veterinarian informs him his dog is female, Mike completely changes the way he interacts with his dog, much to Pugdog's displeasure. Hilarious illustrations of the slobbering Pugdog and the prissy poodle named Harry help drive home the point about the importance of accepting individual differences. (Ages 3-7)

***It's So Amazing! A Book about Eggs, Sperm, Birth, Babies, and Families* by Robie Harris, illustrated by Michael Emberley. \$21.99 hardback, \$10.99 paperback. Candlewick, 1999. (0-7636-0051-2; paper: 0763613215)**

An extremely gay-friendly book about sex and sexuality, this fact-filled book comes with its own bird and a bee – cartoon characters whose responses and questions throughout echo those young readers might have. The book is organized into 22 sections picturing widely diverse families of children and adults as illustrated by Emberley's artwork rendered in color pencil and watercolor. In addition to the predictable topics, other subjects covered include "twins and more," chromosomes and genes, "lots of kinds of love," adoption, "okay and not okay touches," and essential information about HIV. Harris and Emberley created the book for an age group desperately in need of such information due to the limited number of books about this subject for children of elementary school age. In an opening section they report that science can change, not all scientists agree, there are questions without answers and there can be more than one answer to some questions. (Ages 7-10)



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[back to top](#)

More Gift Ideas for Children and Teens

By K. T. Horning

For Younger Children

***Big Momma Makes the World* by Phyllis Root, illustrated by Helen Oxenbury. \$16.99. Candlewick Press, 2003.**



In this reworking of the traditional Genesis story, Big Momma is the Creator. Even with a small baby on her hip, she manages to summon light and dark and make the stars and the moon. She even tells the earth to "get over here." While "Baby liked it all right just the way it was," Big Momma needs some grass and some animals and people to keep her company. And when she sees what she has done, she declares, "That's good. Real good." (Ages 4-7)

***Kitten's First Full Moon* by Kevin Henkes. \$15.99. Greenwillow / HarperCollins, 2003.**

When Kitten sees her first full moon overhead, she's sure it's a bowl of milk in the sky, but her attempts to drink the milk all fail. Licking doesn't work (she only gets a firefly on her tongue), a leap from the porch yields a bumped nose and pinched tail, and although she runs and runs, the moon never seems to get any closer. Bold lines and shades of black, cream and grey are a departure from the familiar style of Henkes' wildly popular mouse books such as *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse* and *Sheila Rae the Brave* but his writing is as lyrical and humorous as always. A perfect choice for the baby or toddler on your gift list. (Birth-age 4)



***Mary Smith* by Alison U'Ren. \$16.00. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.**

This engaging picture book is based on the life of a real woman, Mary Smith, whose job it was to awaken her fellow townspeople in an era before alarm clocks were common. Rising before dawn, she went from home to home and woke people up by shooting dried peas at their windows. Pea shooter in hand, Mary strides purposefully through the morning in U'ren's entertaining and informative story that ends with an unexpectedly humorous twist involving Mary's daughter and *her* pea shooter. (Ages 3-7)



***The Neighborhood Mother Goose* by Nina Crews. \$15.99. Amistad / Greenwillow / HarperCollins, 2004.**



The familiar nursery rhymes are given a fresh, new look by Crews' clever use of photography. Here we see a racially diverse group of kids in a Brooklyn neighborhood playfully cast as Jack and Jill, nimble Jack, contrary Mary, and the little girl with the little curl right in the middle of her forehead, among many others. (Birth-age 4)

***Two Old Potatoes and Me* by John Coy, illustrated by Carolyn Fisher. \$15.95. Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.**



A father and daughter who only see each other on weekends cut two old potatoes into nine pieces and plant them in the sunniest spot in their garden in the spring. Told in the voice of the child, the understated and poetic text skillfully uses the garden as a metaphor for growth, change, and nurturing. (Ages 4-7)

***Uncle Andy's: A Faabbbulous Visit with Andy Warhol* by James Warhola. \$16.99 hardback, \$5.99 paperback. Putnam, 2003.**

Author/artist James Warhola's very famous uncle, Andy Warhol, was just plain Uncle Andy to young Jamie and his siblings. In a funny and observant narrative that never strays from a child's point of view, Warhola describes one of the many visits he and his family made to visit Uncle Andy and their grandmother, Bubba, who shared a five-story apartment in New York City with 25 cats, "all named Sam." (Ages 4-7)



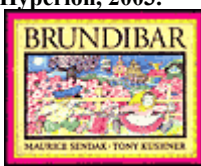
***The White Swan Express: A Story about Adoption* by Jean Davies Okimoto and Elaine M. Aoki. Illustrated by Meilo So. \$16.00. Clarion, 2002.**



Fine storytelling is at the heart of this singular book that follows the journey of the parents-to-be to China and the lives of the little girls whom they will adopt. The adoptive parents in this story include a lesbian couple, a single woman, a middle-aged man and woman, and a young Japanese Canadian man and woman. The authors have worked in myriad details about the preparations and journey of the adults that children will find fascinating. At the same time, they create a sense of each of the four little girls as unique individuals as the story moves back and forth from the adults traveling east to the children they will meet. The emotions are always genuine in this heartfelt story in which the telling never strays to sweetness. The title of the book comes from the White Swan Hotel, where many adoptive parents stay when they are in China. (Ages 4-7)

For Older Children and Teens

***Brundibar* by Tony Kushner, illustrated by Maurice Sendak. After the opera by Hans Krása and Adolf Hoffmeister. \$19.95. Michael Di Capua Books / Hyperion, 2003.**



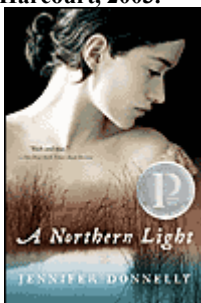
This picture book adaptation of a satirical Czech opera that was completed in 1938 makes numerous references to the Holocaust, highly appropriate given its history and intent. It was performed more than fifty times by children in the Nazi concentration camp Terezin. Tony Kushner's frantic, frenzied narrative is matched by Maurice Sendak's unsettling artwork. Sendak's illustrations are packed with symbols and images both obvious and subtle. The imagery is just part of what makes this such a highly discussible book for older children and teens. (Ages 11-16)

***Gregor the Overlander* by Suzanne Collins. \$16.95 hardback, \$5.99 paperback. Scholastic Press, 2003.**

Ever since his father's abrupt and unexplained departure two years earlier, Gregor has maintained a personal rule. He doesn't allow himself to think about his father returning. Imagining a future that includes his father makes his present reality without him too painful to bear. Abiding by this self-imposed law, Gregor moves listlessly through an uneventful life with his grandmother, mother and siblings in New York City as this novel opens. Uneventful, that is, until the day his two-year-old sister Boots disappears headfirst down an air duct in the laundry room. Without a second thought Gregor dives after her, and with this Alice-like plunge, enters the Underland, a subterranean world where communities of humans and oversize rats, bats, spiders, and cockroaches exist uneasily together. At first intent only on returning to the Overland, Gregor soon discovers that an ancient prophecy casts him as the central figure in a dangerous mission, one that may help him find his missing father. This well-conceived fantasy combines a traditional prophecy and quest structure with strikingly memorable characters, both human and otherwise. (Ages 9-14)



***A Northern Light* by Jennifer Donnelly. \$17.00 hardback, \$8.95 paperback. Harcourt, 2003.**



Mattie Gokey is a collector of words and a writer of stories. But she buried her dream of going to college and becoming a published writer beneath a promise to her dying mother that she would stay on their small farm in upstate New York to care for her siblings and father. That promise weighs like a burden as Mattie graduates from high school in 1906 and earns a scholarship to a college in New York City. She feels guilty for thinking about leaving and angry that her father forbids her to go. When Mattie gets a summer job at one of the nearby resorts that caters to rich New York clientele, she has a chance encounter that refocuses her determination to set her own future course. Jennifer Donnelly has created a compelling and thought-provoking literary work, finely plotted and exquisitely written. Strong dialogue and well-drawn characters make the details of everyday life for Mattie and others in her community come alive. Through excellent characterization, Donnelly explores the limitations of class, race, and especially gender in that earlier era. (Ages 13-18)

Orpheia Proud by Sharon Dennis Wyeth. \$15.95. Delacorte, 2004.

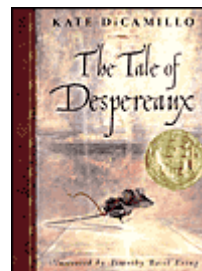
This entire novel is written as a piece of performance art, created by 17-year-old Orpheia, an African American lesbian, who performs it as a monologue in a Brooklyn club. While Orpheia speaks, 14-year old Ray paints on the backdrop behind her – art seen only by the audience. Life has not been easy for Orpheia. Both of her parents died when she was young, and her older brother, Rupert, who became her guardian, is strict, narrow-minded, and abusive. There are two things that have been a constant for her, however: her love of poetry and her love for Lissa. How she found and lost Lissa, and then found herself through her art is the story she tells the community of kindred spirits who manage and frequent the club, and who have helped her find her voice. (Ages 14-17)

**Stitches by Glen Huser. \$15.95 hardback, \$9.95 paperback. Greenwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 2003.**

Travis is a kid who has been teased since he was in first grade. First, it was words like "girlie." As he grew older, it was "Sissy. Crybaby. Fruitfly. Fagface." As he enters junior high school, his interests in sewing, puppetry and theater are encouraged, first by an English teacher and then a home economics teacher, but these same interests are part of what mark him in the eyes of some students as a target for their continued bullying. This thought-provoking, touching novel never overtly addresses Travis' sexuality, because Travis himself is barely beginning to consider that aspect of his identity. Instead, it focuses on the many facets of Travis' personality that make him the person he is. While the book doesn't shy away from the harsh reality of bullying and violence, it nonetheless remains an uplifting story full of warmth, humor, and hope. (Ages 12-15)

The Tale of Despereaux by Kate DiCamillo, illustrated by Timothy Basil Ering. \$17.99. Candlewick Press, 2003.

This funny, original story brings four different strands into a narrative whole, with well-developed fairy tale characters. There's Despereaux, the heroic young mouse, cast out by his family because he would rather read books than gnaw them; Chiaroscuro, a rat living in a dark dungeon, who aspires to a life filled with light; Miggery Sow, a serving girl who longs to be a princess; and, of course, the princess herself, who looks and acts just like the princesses in Despereaux's beloved book of fairy tales. The ways in which all these characters' lives intersect is the basis for a multilayered story that deftly draws on multiple literary traditions. The story is at once sophisticated and wholly accessible to children, particularly as a read-aloud. Beautiful book design and numerous black-and-white line drawings add to the old-fashioned feel of the satisfying story. (Ages 7-11)



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