



Monthly Featured Book

Presented by ADL's Education Department

About the Monthly Featured Book: This collection of featured books is from Books Matter™: The Best Kid Lit on Bias, Diversity and Social Justice. The books teach about bias and prejudice, promote respect for diversity, encourage social action and reinforce themes addressed in education programs of [A World of Difference® Institute](#), ADL's international anti-bias education and diversity training provider. For parents, guardians and family members, reading the books listed on this site with your children and integrating the concepts into your interactions with them is an excellent way to help children grapple with and learn about these important principles.



Melissa

Alex Gino (Author)

Age Range: 8–12

Year Published: 2022

Book Themes

Transgender Identity, Gender Roles,
Being an Ally, Bullying

About the Book

When people look at Melissa, they think they see a boy named George. But she knows she's not a boy. She knows she's a girl. Melissa thinks she'll have to keep this a secret forever. Then her teacher announces that their class play is going to be *Charlotte's Web*. Melissa really, really, REALLY wants to play Charlotte. But the teacher says she can't even try out for the part... because she's a boy. With the help of her best friend, Kelly, Melissa comes up with a plan. Not just so she can be Charlotte -- but so everyone can know who she is, once and for all.

Conversation Starters

Whether you read the book aloud or children read it on their own and you discuss it later, use these open-ended questions to deepen the conversation. Remember not to judge their responses and to listen thoughtfully and engage in a give-and-take that helps them expand upon their understanding of the book and its themes.

- What is the book about?
- What is Melissa like as a person? Did she change throughout the book and if so, how?

- What do you think it was like for Melissa knowing she is a girl but not being able to tell anyone? Did you ever have something you couldn't share with anyone?
- Why do you think it was so important to Melissa that she play the role of Charlotte in *Charlotte's Web*?
- Who was an ally to Melissa in this story and how did they act as an ally?
- Before reading the book, what did you know about being transgender and what did you learn?
- How do you think Melissa felt as she played the part of Charlotte in the play?
- How did you feel when you read about the fight between Melissa and Jeff? Has anything like that ever happened at your school?
- Why do you think it was so difficult for Melissa to tell his Mom that she is a girl?
- How did you feel when the book ended? What do you think might happen next?

Talking Points

Below are some important considerations to highlight in order to make this a learning opportunity for your child and your family.

1. Transgender Identity

Ask your child if they know what the word transgender means. Define **transgender** as a term for people whose gender identity differs from how they were assigned at birth (e.g., assigned boy or girl). Also, because the book mentions the word "transition," explain that transition refers to the time period when a person begins living as the gender with which they identify rather than the gender they were assigned at birth. For some young people, this is not difficult to understand and for others, it may take some getting used to. Talk with your child about people you know who identify as transgender, either real people in your lives or celebrities and TV/movie characters. Allow them to ask questions and if you don't know the answers, tell them you will find out or discover the answers together. Model and emphasize the importance of being empathic to transgender people and their challenges and consider ways to support them, especially in school. Creating a home environment where children/teens feel comfortable asking questions and wanting to learn more is very important. You may want to read an article together or watch the video [Becoming Me](#) (In the Life Media) in which eight families with transgender and gender non-conforming children (ages 5–25) share their stories. You can also clarify and discuss vocabulary using [Terminology Related to Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Identity](#).

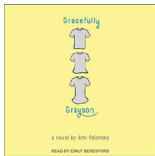
2. Identity-Based Bullying

Ask your child why some of the students in Melissa's class teased and bullied her. Elicit that they teased her because of their bias about her gender identity. Explain that there is a lot of name-calling, teasing and bullying of Melissa because of people's prejudice or bias about her gender identity. Talk about what identity is and some of the categories for one's identity including race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, ethnicity, etc. Explain that identity-based bullying is bullying based on the bias or prejudice someone has about a person's identity or perceived identity. Ask about and discuss how that happened in the book, particularly with the way Jeff and Rick treated Melissa. Ask your child if they have seen any identity-based bullying happening at school, in the neighborhood or online and whether it gets addressed and if so, how. Stress the role of the bystander in these situations and how we can be an ally (see below); talk about how several characters in the book moved from being a bystander to being an ally to Melissa.

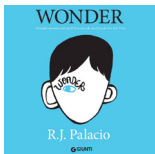
3. Being an Ally

There are many instances in the book where someone acts as an ally to Melissa. For example, Melissa's best friend Kelly works out a plan which enables Melissa to play Charlotte as a way to help her mother see Melissa as a girl. Ms. Maldonado, the school principal, says something supportive to Melissa and Melissa's Mom about who Melissa is. With your child, define **ally** as someone who helps or stands up for someone who is being bullied or the target of prejudice. Ask your child about other instances in the book where someone acted as an ally. Emphasize that a person can **be an ally** in a number of different ways including: supporting the target, telling a trusted adult, not participating in the bullying, confronting the aggressor, etc. Ask if they have seen anyone act as an ally in their school or if they have ever been an ally to someone who was the target of bias or bullying. Make sure your child knows that they should think through what their goals are in being an ally, to be safe and to ask for the help and support they may need. Model being an ally by showing your children the ways in which you engage in ally behavior and potentially do something together.

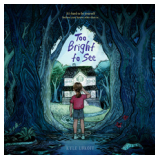
Other Books You Might Like



Gracefully Grayson by Ami Polonsky, www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/books/gracefully-grayson.html



Wonder by R.J. Palacio, www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/books/wonder.html



Too Bright to See www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/too-bright-to-see

ADL Additional Resources

The following are curriculum and resources on transgender identity, gender norms and bullying.

Curriculum Resources

- Unheard Voices: Stories of LGBT History, Curriculum Connections, www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/unheard-voices-stories-of-lgbt-history.html
- Identity-Based Bullying, Current Events Classroom, www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/identity-based-bullying.html

Websites

- Be An Ally: Six Simple Ways

www.adl.org/education-outreach/anti-bias-education

Some simple things a student can do to be an ally to targets of name-calling and bullying.

- Bullying and Cyberbullying Prevention Strategies and Resources

www.adl.org/education-outreach/anti-bias-education

Provides a collection of ADL resources on bullying and cyberbullying for educators, administrators, students and families and caregivers.

- Beyond the Binary: Discussing Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Identity in K-12 Schools

www.adl.org/resources/tools-and-strategies/beyond-binary-discussing-transgender-and-gender-non-conforming

- Let's Get it Right: Using Correct Pronouns and Names" This site includes suggestions and resources for K-12 teachers on how to bias, prejudice and bullying related to transgender and gender non-conforming issues and identity.

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/lets-get-it-right-using-correct-pronouns-and-names

- Terminology Related to Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Identity

www.adl.org/assets/pdf/education-outreach/terminology-related-to-transgender-and-gender-non-conforming-identity.pdf

- Glossary of Education Terms

www.adl.org/assets/pdf/education-outreach/glossary-of-education-terms.pdf

A glossary of anti-bias education terms often associated with and provide a common, working language for ADL's anti-bias programs and resources.

- Parent, Family and Caregiver Resources

www.adl.org/education-outreach/anti-bias-education/c/parent-family-and-caregivers.html

Strategies, tips, guiding principles and resources to help parents, family members and caregivers impart values and principles to the children in their lives.