



[The Black Flamingo](#) by Dean Atta

Balzer + Bray, HarperCollins, 2020

ISBN: 9780062990297 (Paperback)

*Age Range: 14 up (Suggested by Publisher)

Grade Range: 9 up (Recommended by *School Library Journal*)

BOOK SYNOPSIS

Stonewall Book Award Winner * A *Time Magazine* Best YA Book Of All Time

A fierce coming-of-age verse novel about identity and the power of drag, from acclaimed poet and performer Dean Atta. Perfect for fans of Elizabeth Acevedo, Jason Reynolds, and Kacen Callender.

Michael is a mixed-race gay teen growing up in London. All his life, he's navigated what it means to be Greek-Cypriot and Jamaican—but never quite feeling Greek or Black enough.

As he gets older, Michael's coming out is only the start of learning who he is and where he fits in. When he discovers the Drag Society, he finally finds where he belongs—and the Black Flamingo is born.

Told with raw honesty, insight, and lyricism, this debut explores the layers of identity that make us who we are—and allow us to shine.

"In this uplifting coming-of-age novel told in accessible verse, Atta chronicles the growth and glory of Michael Angeli, a mixed-race kid from London, as he navigates his cultural identity as Cypriot and Jamaican as well as his emerging sexuality." (*Publishers Weekly*, "An Anti-Racist Children's and YA Reading List")

REVIEWS AND PRAISE

★ "Courage and fierceness abound in this lyrical coming-of-age story...Gripping, unflinching, and unforgettable."

— [Kirkus Reviews](#) (starred review)

★ "Atta's story uplifts as it informs and entertains as it affirms."

— [Publishers Weekly](#) (starred review)

★ "A triumphant and emotional story about standing up for and embracing oneself that readers of any orientation and ethnicity will relate to."

— [School Library Journal](#) (starred review)

★ "*The Black Flamingo* presents expertly crafted, stirring poetry to portray an unforgettable teen who lives his liberation and truth in drag."

— [Shelf Awareness](#) (starred review)

"Winner of the 2020 Stonewall Book Award, this British verse novel by a poet and drag performer offers a welcome exploration of the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality... [A] memorable YA debut."

— *Horn Book Magazine*

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"Captures its audience from the very first page, with verse poetry that grows and matures alongside its protagonist.... Michael's internal dissonances are relatable on the most human level, leaving readers in a state of ultimate euphoria when he finally finds family in the Drag Society."

— [ALA Booklist](#)

"Unexpected and beautiful."

— BuzzFeed

"A novel in verse, Michael's tale explores how our identities and our discomfort mold us. Winner of the prestigious Stonewall Book Award, Atta's thick debut novel is a fast read about a young man learning to feel comfortable in his own skin."

— them.

"*The Black Flamingo* is an essential addition to the canon of queer coming-of-age stories. Dean Atta has gifted us with words that are lyrical, hilarious and intimate. I'm obsessed with this book and you will be too."

— Abdi Nazemian, author of *Like a Love Story*

"Celebratory and passionate, Atta's bold verse novel calls to its readers to find their own blazing, performative inner truth"

— [The Guardian](#)

"Inspiring"

— The Irish Times

"One of poetry's greatest modern voices"

— Gay Times

"Bold and joyous hymn to self-discover and acceptance"

— Bookseller (UK)

"An excellent book to spark discussions, break down barriers, open peoples eyes to other lives" 4*

— Independent Book Review

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

- Stonewall Award Winner, 2020
- Carnegie Medal, Short List, 2020
- LA Times Book Prize, Finalist, 2020
- Times, 100 Best Young Adult Books of All Time, 2021
- YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults, 2021
- YALSA Quick Picks for Reluctant Readers, 2021
- YALSA Amazing Audiobooks, 2021
- AudioFile's Best Audiobooks, 2020
- ALA Rainbow Book List, 2021
- Bank Street Best Children's Books of the Year, 2021
- Diverse Book Awards, Short List, 2020
- Jhalak Prize for Book of the Year by a Writer of Colour, Short List, 2020
- Florida Teen Reads, 2021-2022
- Indiana, Young Hoosier Book Awards, 2022-2023
- 3 Apples Book Award, 2021
- Charlotte Award, 2023

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- New Jersey, Garden State Teen Book Award, 2021
- Oklahoma, Sequoyah Book Award, 2022
- Warwickshire Teen Book Award, 2020
- Sheffield Children’s Book Award, Winner, 2020
- Sussex Coast Schools Amazing Book Awards, 2021
- UKLA Children’s Book Award, Long List, 2021
- Chicago Public Library Best of the Best, 2020
- Kirkus Best Books, 2020
- Shelf Awareness Best Books, 2020
- SLJ Best Books, 2020

MEDIA AND RESOURCES

- [Barnes and Noble Book Club video](#)
- Epic Reads, [Poetry from The Black Flamingo video](#)
- The Nerd Daily, [Q&A: Dean Atta, Author of ‘The Black Flamingo’](#)
- Kirkus Reviews, [A Queer Youth, Empowered by Drag](#)
- Gay Times, [Dean Atta says drag and queer identity “influences everything” he does](#)

RESPONSE TO CHALLENGES

- [Joint school committee votes to retain “The Black Flamingo” on library shelves](#)

AUTHOR STATEMENT

From my home in the UK, I extend my solidarity with those working in libraries in parts of the US where books are being banned, and free access to this life-changing technology – the book – is being denied to so many.

It was a great honour when *The Black Flamingo* won the Stonewall Book Award, sponsored by the American Library Association’s Rainbow Round Table. I wrote a lot of *The Black Flamingo* in libraries across London. I also shared early drafts at library-hosted work-in-progress readings. At some of these, people came specially to hear me, but at others, the library staff went around and gathered a spontaneous audience. It was nerve-wracking to have an audience of library users for a book I hadn’t even finished writing, but it was also thrilling to talk about my process and receive feedback on what I had so far. When we published *The Black Flamingo*, it felt surreal to return to these libraries with my hot-off-the-press hardback book in hand, to give readings or participate in panels at the libraries that contributed to the book’s development, and for it to be on shelves or, better yet, out on loan.

I grew up under Section 28, a law in the UK that prevented school libraries from carrying LGBTQ+ books from 1988 to 2003. When the UK government finally repealed this law, LGBTQ+ young people and those from LGBTQ+ families once again saw themselves represented on the shelves of their school libraries. When I visit school libraries across the UK today, I see many LGBTQ+ books on their shelves, including mine, and rainbow flags fly proudly all year round — I know this means a lot to LGBTQ+ students because they tell me so. The prominent placement of LGBTQ+ books, books by writers of colour, and books by neurodiverse writers in school libraries matter so much for representation. The fanfare and buzz libraries build around books are so important. Libraries provide free access to one of the most remarkable technologies we have for empowering and shaping young people’s futures – the book – stories, real and imagined lives, and a whole range of experiences and perspectives.

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I hope the US book bans are temporary, just as Section 28 was temporary here in the UK. However, I worry most of all for families who cannot afford books for their homes and depend solely on libraries to access them. It is imperative for them that we get diverse books back on the shelves.

***A NOTE ON AGE RANGES**

A publisher-suggested age range covers the gamut of readers that publishers envision using the book, whether for independent reading, family sharing, group study, or in other ways. Educators have the best sense of the appropriate age range for the diverse learners they work with and understand these ranges vary depending on a book's intended use.