



[The Real Riley Mayes](#) by Rachel Elliott

Balzer + Bray, HarperCollins, 2022

ISBN: 9780062995742 (Paperback)

*Age Range: 8-12 (Suggested by Publisher)

Grade Range: 4-8 (Recommended by *School Library Journal*)

BOOK SYNOPSIS

A Stonewall Book Award Honor * A Sid Fleishman Humor Award Honor

Funny and full of heart, this debut graphic novel is a story about friendship, identity, and embracing all the parts of yourself that make you special.

Fifth grade is just not Riley's vibe. Everyone else is squared up—except Riley. Her best friend moved away. All she wants to do is draw, and her grades show it.

One thing that makes her happy is her favorite comedian, Joy Powers. Riley loves to watch her old shows and has memorized her best jokes. So when the class is assigned to write letters to people they admire, of course Riley's picking Joy Powers!

Things start to look up when a classmate, Cate, offers to help Riley with the letter, and a new kid, Aaron, actually seems to get her weird sense of humor. But when mean girl Whitney spreads a rumor about her, things begin to click into place for Riley. Her curiosity about Aaron's two dads and her celebrity crush on Joy Powers suddenly make more sense.

Readers will respond to Riley's journey of self-discovery and will recognize themselves in this character who is less than perfect but trying her best. And creative kids will recognize themselves in her love of art and drawing.

While often funny and light, Riley's exploration of what it feels to be an outsider and how hard it can be to make a friend break your heart in the best way. And with all of Riley's hijinks and missteps, this story is laugh-out-loud funny from start to finish.

REVIEWS AND PRAISE

★ "An exploration of self-identity that is both LOL funny and touching.... Elliott brings readers crisp linework, a bright palette, expressive body language, rich narrative details, and (bonus!) kitty comics. Best of all is inimitable Riley, who endears herself to readers with her budding self-awareness and undeniable moxie."

— [Horn Book](#) (starred review)

★ "An aspiring artist grapples with gender-related expectations and burgeoning sexuality in Elliott's warm debut.... In fine lines and citrus hues, Elliott renders a sunny external world that juxtaposes Riley's internal worries and confusion in a story of self-discovery that's messy and full of heart."

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

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"Readers—especially fans of Jeff Kinney and Amy Ignatow—will love the mixture of realism and imagination that fuels Riley's world. This story is real—and really great!"

— [Kirkus Reviews](#)

"There is a lot going on in this story—finding real friends, first crushes, discovering gender identity—and all of it is handled tenderly and with respect for each of the main characters.... A fun, funny story that rings true."

— [Booklist](#)

"This realistic and heartwarming story, filled with humor and angst, has a little something for everyone to enjoy... [A] hit for readers who enjoy Raina Telgemeier's books and Jennifer Holm's "Sunny" series."

— [School Library Journal](#)

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

- Stonewall Honor Book, 2023
- ALA Rainbow Book List, 2023
- Texas, Little Maverick Graphic Novel Reading List, 2023
- Sid Fleischman Humor Award, Honor, 2023
- Cybils Award, Nominee, 2022

MEDIA AND RESOURCES

- [Educator Guide](#)
- [The Making of "The Real Riley Mayes"](#)
- [Six Questions about Book Banning, Censorship, and the Real Riley Mayes](#)

AUTHOR STATEMENT

I honestly I don't know why people want to ban [The Real Riley Mayes](#). The book is not about sex or anything "racy"- though I am against banning those books as well! Do book banners really want to keep a young person from learning about love? To keep them from knowing about that huge emotion that drives humans toward each other? Why? What future would we be making where we don't know how to love?

- From "Six Questions about Book Banning, Censorship, and The Real Riley Mayes" from rachelelliott.me

*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.

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