



**Melissa by Alex Gino**

Scholastic Press, an imprint of Scholastic Inc., 2015

ISBN: 9781338843408 (Hardcover)

\*Age Range: 8 to 12 (Suggested by Publisher)

Grade Range: 4-6 (Recommended by *School Library Journal*)

## BOOK SYNOPSIS

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### BE WHO YOU ARE.

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.

## REVIEWS AND PRAISE

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★ "A required purchase for any collection that serves a middle grade population." —*School Library Journal*, **starred review**

★ "Profound, moving, and -- as Charlotte would say -- radiant, this book will stay with anyone lucky enough to find it." —*Publishers Weekly*, **starred review**

★ "Warm, funny, and inspiring." —*Kirkus Reviews*, **starred review**

★ "[A] sensitive, insightful portrayal of a transgender child coming to terms with gender identity." —*Booklist*, **starred review**

★ "For children who have felt like outsiders, Gino has given them a brave companion to share their path. And for children who identify with George, they may be recognizing themselves for the first time in children's literature." —*Shelf Awareness*, **starred review**

"Timely, touching... [*Melissa*] may be the most right-now book imaginable." —*New York Times Book Review*

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"Insightful... it'll resonate with anyone who has ever felt different." —*People Magazine*

"[*Melissa*] is a timely book for parents to share and discuss with their children, whether dealing with similar issues or simply to foster understanding." —*Entertainment Weekly*

"Readers going through a similar experience will feel that they are no longer alone, and cisgender (non-transgender) readers may gain understanding and empathy." —*BookPage*

"Reading this breathtaking debut should be a requirement for living." —Marisa DiNovis, Flyleaf Books, Chapel Hill, NC

"[T]he heart of this novel...is [*Melissa's*] achingly poignant struggle to be herself, and that heart beats strong and true." —*The Horn Book*

"[T]his is one of the more approachable books about transgender kids and one of the few aimed at younger readers, and its emotional depiction of [*Melissa's*] quandary will likely elicit reader sympathy." —*Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*

## AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

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- Action Book Club Selections
- ALA Notable Children's Books List
- ALA Rainbow Reading List
- ALA Stonewall Book Award (Middle Grade)
- Annual Lambda Literary Award WINNER (Children's / YA category)
- Book Links Lasting Connections
- California Book Awards (Juvenile Finalist)
- CBC Children's Choice Book Award Winner (Debut Author of the Year)
- Commonwealth Club California Book Award Winner (JUVENILE)
- Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) Choices List
- E.B. White Read Aloud Award Honor Book (Middle Grade)
- Garden State Teen Book Award Master List
- ILA Notable Books for a Global Society
- Kansas William Allen White Children's Book Award
- *Kirkus* Best Middle Grade Books
- National Parenting Publications Awards (NAPPA) Silver Award Winner
- NCTE Charlotte Huck Award (Recommended Book)
- New Atlantic Independent Booksellers Association (NAIBA) Carla Cohen Free Speech Award
- New York Public Library 100 Notable Books for Reading and Sharing
- Oregon Reader's Choice (ORCA) Award
- *Publishers Weekly* Best Middle Grade Books
- Top Ten Indie Next List Pick
- Vermont Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award (Grades 4-8)

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## MEDIA AND RESOURCES

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- [Discussion Guide](#)
- [Read with Pride Resource Guide](#)
- [NPR / Morning Edition](#), author interview with editor
- [PEN America](#), author interview
- [Kirkus](#), author interview
- [The Guardian](#), author interview
- [Vermont Public Radio](#), author interview
- [Medium](#), author interview

## RESPONSE TO CHALLENGES

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[Eanes Westlake Innovative School District](#): The committee felt strongly that making brave spaces, mirrors, and windows available, per our district-wide professional development emphasis, would be supported by having this text available for students whose perspectives might align with the main character's and her experiences and journey. In addition, the committee agreed that having resources that offer comfort or connection to characters for students within our elementary school environments is important when looking at students' feelings of connection, value, and identity.

[Anchorage School District](#): Upon consideration and evaluation of the challenged material in its entirety, the Committee finds that:

The book is not pervasively vulgar such as to justify removal.

The book is educationally suitable. If used in classroom lessons, the Committee recommends that the publisher's suggested age range be considered by teachers, and that the purpose of using the book in support of ASD's stated SEL goals be communicated to families and guardians.

The book covers many important themes in elementary and middle grade titles such as bullying, empathy, and interpersonal relationships from a perspective not often seen in materials for middle grade readers, making it a unique resource.

Considering the diversity of the Anchorage School District community along with the library/media center guidelines provided in AR 6163.1(a) which states that "A single item or several selected items may benefit one group of users and not others, or even be objectionable to others; but the totality of the collection will represent as far as possible the needs of all of its users", the Committee finds that the book is an appropriate addition to school library collections.

Removal of the book from elementary schools would mean restricting access for the intended audience of the title. The main character is 10 years old, and the publisher and professional reviews recommend the title beginning at age 8 or grade 3.

The title is well reviewed, receiving four 4-star reviews in well-regarded journals.

The book aligns with District collection development policies as detailed in ASD BP 6163.1 and AR 6163.1(a).

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It is important to note that the actions and statements of fictional characters in books can be unkind or generous, helpful or hurtful, inspiring or demoralizing. It is the reader, including the parent or guardian who reads along, and the teacher and class discussion if the book is part of a lesson, who forms the judgment and determines any lessons to be taken from the text.

[National Coalition Against Censorship Statement of Support](#): As advocates for free expression and intellectual freedom rights, we write to support the Andover Public Library Director's recommendation to keep *I Am Jazz* by Jessica Herthel, *Lily and Dunkin* by Donna Gephart, and *[Melissa]* by Alex Gino in the children's book section . . . As a public institution, the library's primary responsibility is to uphold the First Amendment, which guarantees the right of all young people in Andover to read and learn, absent from bias or viewpoint restriction. It is crucial that libraries offer access to a broad diversity of ideas and foster open exchange of perspectives. Libraries should strongly resist efforts by any individual or group to impose their own subjective ideas of morality on the general public.

The challenged books are critically acclaimed and readers of all ages can benefit from their uplifting messages of unconditional love and acceptance . . . Far too many young LGBTQ people do feel different and marginalized, placing them at heightened risk of mental illness. It is especially important that young people who feel stigmatized and silenced do not face additional obstacles in finding books that reflect their experiences and lead them towards hope and self-acceptance.

The suppression of LGBTQ books further marginalizes a vulnerable minority group. It creates a toxic culture in public spaces, especially the library where everyone should be equally welcome and guaranteed freedom to read, think and explore new ideas.

#### **\*A NOTE ON AGE RANGES**

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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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