



[Beyond Magenta: Transgender and Nonbinary Teens Speak Out](#) by Susan Kuklin

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Candlewick Press, 2014

*Age Range: 14 and up (Suggested by Publisher)

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

BOOK SYNOPSIS

A groundbreaking work of LGBT literature takes an honest look at the life, love, and struggles of transgender teens.

Author and photographer Susan Kuklin met and interviewed six transgender or gender-neutral young adults and used her considerable skills to represent them thoughtfully and respectfully before, during, and after their personal acknowledgment of gender preference. Portraits, family photographs, and candid images grace the pages, augmenting the emotional and physical journey each youth has taken. Each honest discussion and disclosure, whether joyful or heartbreaking, is completely different from the other because of family dynamics, living situations, gender, and the transition these teens make in recognition of their true selves.

REVIEWS AND PRAISE

★ “A sorely needed resource for teens and, frankly, many adults. . . . Downright revelatory. . . . Kuklin captures these teenagers not as idealized exemplars of what it ‘means’ to be transgender but as full, complex, and imperfect human beings. As Kuklin writes, ‘My subjects’ willingness to brave bullying and condemnation in order to reveal their individual selves makes it impossible to be nothing less than awestruck.’ She isn’t wrong.” — [Publishers Weekly](#), **starred review**

★ “Kuklin brings her intimate, compassionate and respectful lens to the stories of six transgender young people. . . . The collective portrait that emerges from these narratives and pictures is diverse, complex and occasionally self-contradictory—as any true story should be. Informative, revealing, powerful and necessary.” — [Kirkus Reviews](#), **starred review**

★ “A strikingly in-depth examination of the sometimes clinical complexities of being transgender, even as Kuklin’s empathy-inducing pictures put a human face on the experience. . . . Kuklin’s important new book brings welcome clarity to a subject that has often been obscure and gives faces—literally and metaphorically—to a segment of the teen population that has too long been invisible. Speaking with equal impact to both the reader’s heart and mind, *Beyond Magenta* is highly recommended.” — [Booklist](#), **starred review**

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“Readers become immersed in these young adults’ voices and experiences. The youth interviewed here do not uniformly share It Gets Better–style happy endings, but their strength is nonetheless inspirational as they face ongoing challenges with families, sexual and romantic relationships, bullies, schools, transitions, mental health, and more. The level of detail about their lives, and the diversity of their identities—including gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, and geography—provide a powerful antidote to the isolation and stigma that some transgender youth experience. . . . There is much here that will resonate with and hearten the kids who need it and will foster understanding and support among those who live and work with transgender teens.” —[School Library Journal](#)

“Pain and possibility are juxtaposed in this groundbreaking book that by its very existence portends a better future.” —[San Francisco Chronicle](#)

“It is a testament to Susan Kuklin’s gifts as a listener and interviewer that her subjects describe their lives with such candor. Kuklin introduces each teen with a bit of background, and often (but not always) the teen’s gender at birth. . . . Kuklin treats her subjects with tenderness and respect. Her book provides both reassurance and answers to questions that teens may not even realize they have.” —*Shelf Awareness Pro*

“The presentation of the spectrum of experiences is remarkably nuanced and sensitive. . . . Kuklin also brings her skills as a photographer to the book’s design, using some pictures documentary-style interspersed throughout an individual’s interview, others grouped as breathtaking galleries that explore expression or isolation.” —[Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books](#)

“Kuklin’s book is not just a lifeline for teens who are going through something similar and need to see themselves and their lives so openly portrayed—this book is an important read for the parents, friends, and loved ones who want to understand what a transgender teen might be going through. This book is worth having on any shelf in any library and will not linger there long. . . . A highly informative resource that is powerful, respectful, honest, and most importantly, long overdue.” —VOYA

“In her edited transcriptions of the interviews, Kuklin lets her subjects speak wholly for themselves. . . . Photographs (of most of the subjects) are candid and winning; and appended material, including Kuklin’s explanation of her interview process, a Q&A with the director of a clinic for transgendered teens, and a great resource list, is valuable.” —[The Horn Book](#)

“While several books have illuminated the lives of LGBT youth, this is the first book to focus solely on trans subjects, in an attractive collection that’s perfect for a coffee table or your favorite pre-teen’s bookshelf.” —[The Advocate](#) (“The Year’s 10 Best Transgender Non-Fiction Books”)

“[A] candid, inspiring book. . . . The teens are members of a group, but also distinct individuals, each with a unique, highly personal story. It goes without saying that their decision to share these stories is courageous. But being brave and taking chances is what transitioning is all about.” —*The Chicago Tribune*

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

- A Stonewall Children’s and Young Adult Literature Honor Book
- An American Library Association Rainbow List Selection
- A Flora Stieglitz Straus Award Winner

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- A Cooperative Children’s Book Center Choices List Selection
- A National Council for the Social Studies Notable Trade Book for Young People
- A Lambda Literary Award Finalist
- An International Literacy Association Notable Book for a Global Society
- A *Publishers Weekly* Best Children’s Book of the Year
- A *Kirkus Reviews* Best Young Adult Book of the Year
- A *Booklist* Editors’ Choice
- A *Shelf Awareness* Best Book of the Year
- A *Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books* Blue Ribbon Winner
- A *Foreword Reviews* Book of the Year Gold Award Winner
- A Texas TAYSHAS Top Ten Reading List Selection
- A Junior Library Guild Selection

MEDIA AND RESOURCES

- [Discussion Guide](#)
- [NPR Interview](#)
- [Essay by Susan Kuklin at NPR](#)
- [PEN America Interview](#)
- [CBS Interview](#)

RESPONSE TO CHALLENGES

[National Coalition Against Censorship letter of support:](#)

“The challenge to *Beyond Magenta* was initially referred to a review committee. The committee evaluated *Beyond Magenta* and concluded that it should remain in the library. This is not surprising given the critical acclaim that it has received, including the 2014 Foreword INDIE for Young Adult Nonfiction, the 2015 Lambda Literary Award for LGBT Children’s/Young Adult Literature, and the 2015 Bank Street College of Education’s Flora Stieglitz Straus Award. . . . Every book in a library is not right for every child, but the library as a whole should have books which appeal to each of the district’s students. The district can certainly address the concerns of parents who dislike the book by allowing them to opt out of permitting their children to check it out. NCAC is urging the District to return *Beyond Magenta* to the library shelves.”

[A committee in Conway, Arkansas, charged with evaluating challenged books:](#)

“*Beyond Magenta* is useful as a self-teaching tool for kids who may not know who they are.”

AUTHOR STATEMENT

[A letter from Susan Kuklin to the Catawba County \(NC\) School District:](#)

Thank you for the opportunity to tell you about my book, *Beyond Magenta: Transgender and Nonbinary Teens Speak Out*. In 2009, when I began its research, the *T* in *LGBTQ* was little talked about in mainstream media. And yet, many young people who are part of the transgender umbrella were teased, beaten, thrown out of their homes, maimed, and even murdered. Why? What could be so threatening about this small population who are not harming anyone? With these two questions in mind, I began my research.

Long story short, six recently transitioned young people volunteered to share their personal experiences with our readers. They promised to be honest and candid. I promised to be nonjudgmental and allow them to talk

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about their lives in their own words. With help from psychologists, social workers, and doctors from a respected health clinic in New York City, a collaboration began.

Transitioning, as described in *Beyond Magenta*, is not done lightly. Coming out publicly is even more challenging. The participants chose to come forward for three reasons: they wanted to define themselves in their own terms, they wanted to educate others, and they wanted other transgender people to know that they are not alone.

What I learned from these youngsters—who I had come to admire and love—was that we have so much more in common than we have differences.

Bad things happened to some of the participants. (Regrettably, bad things can happen to children.) To pretend these things do not occur will not make them go away. Instead, without giving them a voice, it can make them worse. Without useful information and support, these kids are less able to cope, to survive and thrive.

By challenging or banning the stories and lessons of the six brave, thoughtful young people in *Beyond Magenta*, our autonomous society is saying that they do not—or should not—exist. Well, they do exist. And they are loved and appreciated by many. LGBTQ young people and their families need to know this.

It was my hope that *Beyond Magenta* would be read to start a conversation, a conversation where cisgendered teens would become more aware and empathetic toward their transgender classmates and that trans teens would know that they are important, included, and loved. Isn't that a central part of education? Isn't it a primary function of education to teach students to think for themselves, to prepare them for the vast and diverse world in which we live?

By barring information and discouraging freedom of expression, conversation and education stops. By restricting and discouraging freedom of expression, the bullies win and the violence and attacks continue.

Please do not let this happen. Our children deserve better.

***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.