



Read with Pride, Bonus Episode, Children's Literature

Transcript:

00;00;03;27 - 00;00;17;26

Voiceover

[VOICEOVER] Hello and welcome to Read With Pride, a podcast focused on LGBTQIA+ literature. Brought to you by the Ocean County Library's Ocean Pride Committee.

00;00;17;28 - 00;00;24;00

Diane

[DIANE] I'm Diane, pronouns she/her. I work in the Toms River branch and I'm on the Ocean Pride Committee.

00;00;24;02 - 00;00;34;07

Mei

[MEI] And hi, I'm Mei. I work in the Children's Department at the Manchester Branch, and I'm also on the Ocean Pride Committee. I use the pronouns she/they.

00;00;34;10 - 00;00;48;16

Diane

[DIANE] Okay. Today we're going to talk about LGBTQIA+ children's books, and we're just going to have a conversation about the different books that are around and available in the Ocean County Library.

00;00;48;19 - 00;02;01;13

Mei

[MEI] So this, I told Diane, was probably one of the hardest decisions of my lifetime. I've taken out over 60 children's books, mostly picture books, talking about gender, talking about sexuality, talking about families. It was really hard. And even now I'm sitting right next to a stack of 15 books. But my plan today is to review a few different things. I wanted to be able to approach the history of queer books, and then also I wanted to recommend some middle readers picture books, and I just want to do a shout out for board books, and we'll take it from there. I'm going to read a few excerpts from some of these. Usually the pages that make me teary eyed. But let's start with the history of queer books. Up until recently, let's say last 15 years, there weren't a lot of options for picture books for queer families. The two main ones were Heather Has Two Mommies and Daddy's Roommate. Right on the nose with those two, and those two are some of the most challenged books over time. But yeah, that's all parents had.

00;02;01;14 - 00;02;34;29

Diane

[DIANE] Yeah. Yeah I know. You know, my children, their dad was gay. And when I was looking for a book for them, this was 20 years ago. I couldn't find anything. And one of my college professors suggested Daddy's Roommate, and they, I think, had it in their office. And that's how I found it. It wasn't something I could go and find easily. You had to special order it. So when Mei was talking about this, I was so excited that we have so many books in our collection for families.

00;02;35;01 - 00;04;52;07

Mei

[MEI] So I'm going to start with one of my favorite quotes from Harvey Milk, who was one of the first openly gay politicians in the United States. "You have to give them hope. Hope for a better world. Hope for better tomorrow." And with that, this is from a book called Pride: the Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag. It's written by Rob Sanders, illustrated by Steven Salerno. Rob Sanders has so many good nonfiction books about queer history. So I definitely recommend him. But what I really appreciated about this book, it came out a couple of years ago. It was one of the first historical books that I found in a picture book about queer culture. But there's another part where he says a symbol - he thought we need a symbol that shows who we are and how we feel. Something to carry during the march, something to make people feel they're part of the community. Something to give people hope. Something extraordinary. And at that point, Gilbert Baker then designs the first flag, which had a total of eight colors in it. We do have that at the library, but it is a slightly older book. So that's one historical picture book. I want to touch on family books and books about gender as well. There's this lovely book... called Love Without Bounds: An Intersection Allies Book about Families. It's written by three different doctors. And I just want to read a couple quotes. It's a beautiful book. The illustrations are really simple, super inclusive. But I think as an adult dealing with developing my chosen family, this really spoke to me. "Sometimes the family we're born into doesn't make us feel how we want to. In these moments, our closest friends step in and help our hearts to mend. A pen pal, a teammate, a snuggly pup. Those who care for you and build you up. There's so much of life we can't control. And our chosen family can make us whole." I also really appreciate this book because it offers a discussion guide in the book, which I think is so powerful for parents navigating this.

00;04;52;09 - 00;06;49;21

Mei

[MEI] So on to the next book. I'm really loving this one. It's called My Maddie and it's a new one. It's written by Gayle E. Pitman, who has written so many lovely queer books, and it's illustrated by Violet Tobacco, and it's from the perspective of a child. And I'm just going to read randomly from a few pages here. "Most mommies are girls. Most daddies are boys. But lots of parents are neither a boy nor a girl. Like my Maddy, Maddy wakes up at the crack of dawn way before I get up. I like watching the sunrise. Maddy tells me it's not day and it's not night. It's something in between and kind of both and something all its own. The sky changes from red to pink to yellow." My favorite example now. "Every morning, Maddy drinks coffee while eating breakfast with a spork. 'I love sporks,' says Maddy. It's not a spoon or a fork, but kind of both. That way you only need one utensil. When Maddy picks me up from school. I get a big bear hug. Now I know how baby bears feel. One day on our way home, it started to drizzle. The sun shone through the raindrops. Look. I pointed towards the sky. A rainbow. 'The most beautiful things

happened between the rain and the sun. Don't they?' said Maddy." I love how nuanced this book is. Just the overall messaging. It's just a very subtle, gentle story about a relationship between a child and a parent and just talking about that spectrum of gender and sexuality in such a delightful way really pleased me. Moving on to our next book. This one's so great. I'm very excited.

00;06;49;23 - 00;09;14;04

Mei

[MEI] Molly's Tuxedo. The cover alone is just so adorable that you have to pick it up. Words by Vicki Johnson, pictures by Gillian Reid. So this is a lovely story about Molly, who is prepping for picture day, which usually is a pretty exciting time for a kid unless her mom decides that she wants you to wear a dress, an itchy dress with no pockets, but you can't do anything. So just a quick page from this is, "Molly knew from experience that dresses were trouble. Dresses have tight places and zippers you can't reach, dresses in troublesome tights and fancy shoes with no purpose. Dresses with no pockets means nowhere to put interesting rocks and nowhere to keep dog treats in case you find a stray. Dresses were not right on a regular day, and they were definitely not right for something as important as picture day. Molly wanted to look like she was going on an adventure, not like she was going to a tea party, but she had an idea to save picture day." And not to give anything away, but she does gain the confidence through a friend to change in the bathroom, into her brother's tuxedo, and to see the delight and the joy and the pride that Molly feels towards the end. And I think what I appreciate about this book is that the mom, it is that typical conversation, like, I don't know, going to a Christmas party and your kid doesn't want to wear those uncomfortable patent leather shoes, but it's beyond that. And the fact that the mom does sort of give up a stink, I think is pretty realistic. But by the end of the book, the mom recognizes how proud Molly is of how she carries herself. And to add a slightly personal note, this happened to me this year, with my niece. We unfortunately had to go to a funeral, and she really wanted to wear a suit - 15 years old - really wanted to wear a suit, but was so nervous, so nervous. But the moment she was standing next to me and my suit and her dad and her uncle and her brother, I could just see in her body and her eyes how comfortable, how welcome she felt in that atmosphere.

00;09;14;07 - 00;09;21;22

Diane

[DIANE] Can I say I love that about the dress and like how horrible. But I like to think that dresses are getting better just like books are getting better.

00;09;21;22 - 00;09;23;00

Mei

[MEI] Exactly. Pockets.

00;09;23;01 - 00;09;33;15

Diane

[DIANE] That's right. Because we all need to carry around some like rocks or treasures, or at least our phone.

00;09;33;17 - 00;11;37;10

Mei

[MEI] Okay, so our next book, which is about gender and pronouns, *What Are Your Pronouns Today? Hooray for She, He, Ze, and They!* is written by Lindz Amer and illustrated by Kip Alizadeh. My main note on this book actually came from the back. Came from Lindz, the author talking about something I hadn't really even thought about, but gender euphoria. Instead of having a focus on feeling judged, you're ostracized or misunderstood or left out, this book really illustrates how a child feels when someone actually sees them and uses the pronouns that they want. It was very beautiful in that sense. It's a super positive book. With that, let's quickly do a workbook. I am very grateful because last week I got to attend an event at the Brick Branch, with the author, Katie Tanis, who wrote *Love in the Wild*, which is a board book with just the most beautiful illustrations. I just want to give a little backstory on her. Her whole field is biology. She studies animals. She mentioned that she hates misinformation. As she was collecting all this information of, like, same sex relations within the animal community, she was looking at other books, for instance, books with a baby bear and a papa bear. And she pointed out, that's not real. Grizzly bears immediately abandon their families. So I really appreciate how true to the facts she is. And I wanted to highlight the fact that she has another book coming out called *Love Under the Stars*. I'm very excited to read that when it comes out. And now let's go to middle readers.

00;11;37;13 - 00;11;43;21

Diane

[DIANE] What would we say middle readers are? Let's give a little description for middle reader.

00;11;43;22 - 00;11;50;21

Mei

[MEI] Middle reader, I mean, I would qualify that as like 8 to 12 year olds. Of course every child's reading level is different.

00;11;50;22 - 00;11;51;14

Diane

[DIANE] Right, absolutely.

00;11;51;14 - 00;11;57;19

Mei

[MEI] Radically different. So that's a rough estimate. But I would consider that juvenile fiction.

00;11;57;21 - 00;14;08;12

Diane

[DIANE] Right. And I think that as an adult reader, I enjoy middle readers. They're a quick read for me, and I get some different information that maybe I wouldn't get in an adult reader. One book, in fact, was published in 2015 by Alex Gino. The title is *Melissa*. It was formerly titled as *George*. And Alex Gino is a non-binary author and they wrote this book. I think thinking about their own life and what it was like to grow up in the early 90s. Throughout the whole book, the main character was narrated completely in the female pronoun she, she, she, and it was about a character that was just going through a transformation, and her family knew it. And in the school, and I think it was probably sixth grade, how they were going through the school and encountering the same things that any sixth grader would encounter, bullying and schoolwork and other stressors with friends. But then at the other piece of it as

being wondering, questioning their gender at the same time, one of my children was starting to use the pronouns they/them, and they were teaching me about non-binary. So it was interesting for me to read this book around that same time and help open my eyes. Alex Gino also wrote some companion books later on. One is called Green and that's about a non-binary child. My non-binary child happens to love the color green, so again, I connected with it. And then another one they wrote is called Rick. And Rick used to be a bully. I don't want to spoil anything, but Rick was a bully in the story. Melissa and now there's a few years later, probably eighth grade, and Rick is figuring out their own life and seeing how together Melissa is and remembering things and befriending people in like there was a rainbow coalition in their school. So I love Alex Gino's books. I believe they have several that are not connected, but these three are all companions of each other. So I really like that.

00;14;08;15 - 00;14;13;04

Mei

[MEI] And those definitely go in and out, in and out of Manchester at least.

00;14;13;06 - 00;15;11;26

Diane

[DIANE] Oh, very. Yeah. Very popular. Yeah, we definitely have them on our shelves. Another book I read, middle grade, is called Answers in the Pages by David Levithan, who I actually just saw about a week and a half ago at the Hoboken Library. He is with a group, Authors Against Banning Books or Censorship, and this book talks about that which is very prevalent to today, banning books. This book is told in like three stories. Each chapter is three different stories. One is set in the 80s, one is set in the present, and one is the actual book that the students are supposed to be reading. One of the parents in the school is very upset they're reading this book, and she's only upset from reading the last page of the book. So it talks a little about book banning and why someone would do that, and how these students were even able to find the book, even though the parents didn't want them to.

00;15;11;26 - 00;15;30;04

Mei

[MEI] Call me a typical librarian, but Banned Book Week is by far my favorite week of the entire year. It is really exciting to see the different books challenged over time. It really blows my mind.

00;15;30;07 - 00;15;34;10

Diane

[DIANE] I thought you were going to say about your favorite book though. Oh no, it's just that that's your favorite week.

00;15;34;16 - 00;18;08;23

Mei

[MEI] My favorite week, I like, I love it. I get so amped up, I had caution tape all over my end cap this year. It is pretty comical. So just to give a little backstory, I want to return to some middle readers, all of which are nonfiction. I came out the year Will and Grace came out. I did plenty of oral reports and papers on all these different historical figures that honestly, I didn't care much about. I learned history at my grandmother's kitchen table. That is where she would whip out the albums, and each picture was

labeled with the name of the person where it was, what year, and that's how I did it, through oral storytelling. But none of that was queer oral storytelling. So I'm really excited about, I'm going to mention three books that are nonfiction middle readers. That, man, if I had them when I was that age, it would have shifted my life dramatically. So I'm really excited these books exist now. The first one I want to touch on is the Stonewall Riots: Making a Stand for LGBTQ Rights. The exciting part about this one, as someone who likes visuals, is that it's a graphic novel. I love learning history through graphic novels. I do want to read a little quote by Michael Bronski, who is a Harvard professor and author of A Queer History of the United States for Young People. It's in the intro of the book: "The message of Stonewall in 1969 and now is that if we want to see change in the world, we must fight. But there is another message that is equally important that this book beautifully illustrates. We must acknowledge our history, reflect on the people who came before us. Preserve their stories and pass them along. As James Baldwin, an African American author and gay man, wrote in 1965, 'The great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways. And history is literally present in all that we do.' Everything you do and say now to make the world a better place will be history, as important as anything that happened at Stonewall."

00;18;08;25 - 00;20;05;07

Mei

[MEI] I love this book. It's pretty rad. It starts off with an older generation talking about Stonewall, and how things were so different that you could be fired for being gay also. And the kids are sort of scoffing it off, but then they go back in time and they experience it for themselves. So I think that's part of the History Comics series I truly love. I'm going to try to say the author's name: Archie Bongiovanni. Another book that I am really digging is The Rainbow Revolutionaries: 50 LGBTQ+ People Who Made History. And it's written by Sarah Prager and illustrated by Sarah Papworth. The author Sarah Prager also wrote the next book I'm going to talk about. This book is really grand if you're just looking for little biographies, it's just a page long biography of each historical figure, like Gilbert Baker, who made the rainbow flag. This would be good for a little report if you had to. I don't see a kid just sitting here and reading it necessarily, but it's a good resource. But the one that I'm really obsessed with is A Child's Introduction to Pride: the Inspirational History and Culture of the LGBTQIA+ Community. I appreciate this for so many reasons. Obviously, the historical aspect of it, the inclusion of a lot of terms to learn from, just the variation in content alone. I think that it resembles a textbook, but is way more fun than that. But it's broken up into text and pictures on every page. I think it's a really great resource for anyone, a middle reader, I think. That is my other favorite one.

00;20;05;10 - 00;20;12;21

Diane

[DIANE] What I like about all of these also like if you're in high school or adult, like I'm like, I don't know enough about the Stonewall Riots.

00;20;12;22 - 00;20;13;10

Mei

[MEI] Exactly.

00;20;13;11 - 00;20;16;18

Diane

[DIANE] You know, like you said, like it wasn't taught, it wasn't out there.

00;20;16;19 - 00;20;23;18

Mei

[MEI] I didn't learn about it until I took a gay and lesbian documentary class my senior year of college.

00;20;23;21 - 00;20;28;14

Diane

[DIANE] And maybe I don't want to read a text heavy book, but that would be great for anyone to read.

00;20;28;16 - 00;20;39;11

Mei

[MEI] Exactly. It breaks it up so that it's not overwhelming to read it. And a lot of these books just mentioned are on our reading guides that we have created.

00;20;39;14 - 00;20;54;08

Diane

[DIANE] The Ocean Pride Committee created reading guides that you can find in your branches, and it has books for children, teens, adults. It lists where the books are available in our library print, digital.

00;20;54;11 - 00;21;11;17

Mei

[MEI] And there's 50 titles on each, so there's plenty to choose from. And honestly, I will repeat. It was so hard to choose any of them. It's just so amazing to see how many books have been published in the last ten years alone.

00;21;11;19 - 00;21;12;15

Diane

[DIANE] No I agree.

00;21;12;16 - 00;22;17;03

Mei

[MEI] Sorry. So I will say, I think there is a slight absence of romantic picture books. I did read a couple of, like, crushes and things like that. And I mentioned this to my friend this week, you know, talking about the podcast. And they were like, "Yeah, I mean, when I was seven, everybody just had cooties." And I'm like, "Yeah. I mean, not all kids, but yeah, like it's true." So maybe that's the hindrance that people don't want to "over sexualize" - that was air quotes - children, but I do look forward to seeing more books like that. And as much as these books are nuanced and just lovely. I'm looking forward to the day where it's not the main focus, and that's happening more and more especially. There's a graphic novel that I haven't finished reading, but the illustrations are gorgeous, but the Tea Dragon Society.

00;22;17;05 - 00;22;18;13

Diane

[DIANE] Yep, that's the title you told me.

00;22;18;16 - 00;22;31;04

Mei

[MEI] Beautiful. And about a non-binary character. Things like that were so subtle. It's not the main point of the book that will excite me even more.

00;22;31;07 - 00;22;47;11

Diane

[DIANE] I think, though, I do, you see a little more of the, you know, starting little Romance into the middle readers, and then, of course, in the teens. So definitely, I think, yeah, the young ones, it's overall, are there a lot of romantic books for...?

00;22;47;12 - 00;22;47;25

Mei

[MEI] No.

00;22;47;25 - 00;22;56;01

Diane

[DIANE] Right. So that's the whole thing that's like, there's love. There's love and feelings and emotions, but maybe not romance.

00;22;56;03 - 00;23;45;05

Mei

[MEI] And I think it's really helpful. I did want to mention this. The reading book lists, I think, are so helpful because as someone who's prepping the queer display in the children's department, I've literally had 60 books out for the last two months just trying to read all. And it's not like I could just search LGBTQ+ and... I had to try really hard to just slowly find some of them because, it's not always clearly an LGBTQ+ I like but it was really interesting and I hope that I can be a better resource for patrons who are interested in these books, because you really have to - they're all spread out. We don't have, you know, a section.

00;23;45;08 - 00;23;54;06

Diane

[DIANE] That's right. It's just good. That's how it should be. It should be spread out and all the subjects, just like anybody we want to see inclusivity in all of the library.

00;23;54;06 - 00;23;54;17

Mei

[MEI] Yeah.

00;23;54;19 - 00;24;02;22

Diane

[DIANE] So all right, I think that's our talk. So is there anything else that you want to share?

00;24;02;24 - 00;24;08;07

Mei

[MEI] I think I covered my entire concept map. Yes.

00;24;08;09 - 00;24;18;20

Diane

[DIANE] To those of you on the podcast world we don't see, but Mei has a beautiful flow chart that I would love to share but we can't do that in the podcast world, so...

00;24;18;22 - 00;24;49;06

Mei

[MEI] Yeah. No, it's, it's exciting. I mean, as someone who has worked in publishing on and off for 20 years now, things really are shifting. It doesn't mean that we have less challenged books, but more content is going out there in a positive light, and the people that need to find those books are hopefully finding them. And if not, they're hopefully asking their friendly librarians for some suggestions.

00;24;49;06 - 00;24;51;28

Diane

[DIANE] That's right. Come into our branches and get all these books.

00;24;51;28 - 00;24;54;10

Mei

[MEI] I'm finally going to return all my books.

00;24;54;10 - 00;24;57;06

Diane

[DIANE] That's right. So once Mei returns them, you could check them out.

00;24;57;06 - 00;25;17;22

Mei

[MEI] Yeah, I did have a patron though, who asked me, as a side note, she asked me how many books she could take out, and I said "Sixty," and she's like, "Sixty?" And I was like, "Yeah, I have 60 kids books out right now." And she was like, "But why?" I'm like, "I don't know. They make me feel good." I mean, like I cry during most kids books.

00;25;17;22 - 00;25;18;16

Diane

[DIANE] Oh my gosh.

00;25;18;23 - 00;25;24;24

Mei

[MEI] But I'm like, "Yeah, I guess that doesn't make sense to most people, I swear my reading level is higher."

00;25;24;26 - 00;25;26;12

Diane

[DIANE] Oh no, it makes complete sense.

00;25;26;12 - 00;25;58;23

Mei

[MEI] But I think with a kids book, you're able to break down things into much simpler terms. No matter what end cap I do, I'm reading books about Passover so that I can understand it from a child's perspective. And the same with these books. Trying to understand it from a child's perspective, who can get very confused. I mean, when I worked at a more progressive nursery school, the kids would always come up to me and like, "What are your pronouns?" Which was so impressive. And they're like, "Are you a boy or a girl?" And I would say, "Somewhere in between." And they happily took that answer.

00;25;58;28 - 00;26;00;23

Diane

[DIANE] The kids are pretty good with that.

00;26;00;24 - 00;26;01;05

Mei

[MEI] Yeah.

00;26;01;11 - 00;26;09;23

Diane

[DIANE] So all right, I love children's literature and we have so much and even the pictures, like... we didn't even touch on like the beautiful images in these books.

00;26;09;24 - 00;26;14;26

Mei

[MEI] I know, I really, I was going to do Julian the Mermaid.

00;26;14;28 - 00;26;16;08

Diane

[DIANE] Oh, I didn't bring that one in with me.

00;26;16;08 - 00;26;24;16

Mei

[MEI] And I'm like, I can't even because the illustrations make that book, and they just came out with another one, Julian at the Wedding.

00;26;24;16 - 00;26;30;12

Diane

[DIANE] Oh yes, I saw that one as well. So thank you very much, Mei.

00;26;30;13 - 00;26;31;16

Mei

[MEI] Thanks for listening.

00;26;31;16 - 00;26;44;28

Voiceover

[VOICEOVER] Thank you for joining us today. Be sure to visit the Ocean County Library's website for more podcasts and events. All the titles mentioned in today's episode can be found throughout the Ocean County Library for free with your library card. Until next time, happy reading!