



Rick

Alex Gino
Scholastic Inc.

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Review of Story

As he explores his identity and finds his footing in middle school, a sixth grader stands up to his bully best friend.

White, cisgender boys Rick and Jeff have been best friends since the third grade. When they're alone, Jeff shares his video games, but at school Jeff picks on other kids and talks about girls with ostentatious lasciviousness. Despite their connection, Rick knows he can't tell Jeff that he wants to join their school's Rainbow Spectrum, a safe space for LGBTQIAP+ students, or that he's questioning his own sexuality. The more Rick learns about himself, the more he realizes he needs to hold Jeff accountable for his behavior. An honest relationship develops between Rick and his cosplay-loving grandfather. Grandpa Ray reassures and supports Rick when he comes out as asexual. Adults in the story model moments of vulnerability and admit mistakes. Gino seamlessly introduces language to describe a variety of sexualities and gender identities through the perspective of Rick, who is learning many of the words for the first time. Although the book shares characters with Gino's Stonewall Award-winning George (2015), it stands alone. The cast (including students of color) represents a spectrum of genders and sexualities with an emphasis on self-identification and encouragement of exploration.

Review of Some Text in This Book

CHAPTER I: RICK RAMSEY, RIGHT HAND MAN "This game is awesome. You can actually crack a bottle on a guy's head and the shards embed in his skull." "Lemme see!" Rick dropped into the empty chair. Jeff pressed a series of buttons, and a hulking character on the screen picked up a bottle that read XXX and cracked it over the skull of a skinny little guy drinking at the bar. September 3, 2022

CHAPTER II: SHE DOESN'T USE THAT NAME ANYMORE Or lately, to stare at, if there was a girl he deemed pretty. This morning, it was a girl. "Check out the hottie!" Jeff said in greeting. He tossed his head vaguely across the schoolyard. September 3, 2022
"Which one?" Rick hated when Jeff called girls hotties. He made it sound like they were sexy pancakes.

“You know,” said Jeff, “I saw a lady walking around on the beach without her clothes this summer.” “You told me. You sure she wasn’t just wearing a bathing suit the color of her skin?” “No, dude, I told you! She was super naked. And hot too. Everyone was staring. Men, women, kids. Even the fish.” July 13, 2021

“You look good.” Rick meant it. Not the way Jeff would, but more like she looked happy. Last year, her hair had been in her face and her eyes were almost always focused on the ground. Now her reddish-brown hair was brushed back and her eyes were looking right at Rick. “Thanks.” Rick’s brain felt like a vacuum, and the next words that came to his mind popped right out of his mouth. “So you’re ...” “I’m a girl. A transgender girl. I wanted to come to school as myself last year, but my mom said I should wait for a fresh start in middle school.” “That makes sense, I guess.” Melissa shrugged. “It would have been nice to stop hiding sooner.” “That makes sense too.” Rick gave a small, awkward smile. He would have thought it would be weird to meet a transgender girl, but it wasn’t, really. At least, not if the girl was Melissa. He continued, “So I guess I know what you’re excited about this year. September 3, 2022

When the bell rang, the room devolved into a whirl of chaos. Rick found himself right behind Melissa in the rush to the door, where the kid who had been next to Melissa in the yard waited, bouncing in place. From the front, her T-shirt read, WARNING: RUNS WITH SCISSORS.

“Remember that girl in the blue skirt from this morning?” “You mean the hot one?” “Yeah, well, she sits in front of me in homeroom, and I found something out ...” “How was she close up?” September 3, 2022

CHAPTER IV: PLATO WAS GAY,

EVEN DURING SCIENCE CLASS “I know just the place!” said the girl with the braid. “Has anyone heard of the Rainbow Spectrum? It’s an after-school club for LGBTQIAP+ rights. I know about it because my sister helped start it a couple of years ago, when she was in eighth grade.” July 13, 2021

Rick was still thinking about the Rainbow Spectrum that evening. Sometimes Rick wondered whether he was gay because he had never had a crush on a girl. But he had never had a crush on a boy either, so how could he be gay? July 13, 2021

CHAPTER V: THE KETCHUP KERFUFFLE

There were rainbows at the top and bottom of the poster, and big, bold letters that read All Are Welcome. Jeff hit Rick on the shoulder to get his attention. “Whoa, Rick. Check this out. A buncha gay kids are meeting up! Gross!” July 13, 2021

“And then that lesbo tried to tell me that I was harassing her!” “Whoa, dude!” said maybe-Matt. “What did you call her?” “And before you answer that,” said maybe-Mark, “you oughta know my aunt’s a lesbian.” “And she could kick your butt!” added maybe-Matt. “She does aikido. She’s scary!” “So now you guys are gonna go all gay on me too?” July 13, 2021

Maybe Jeff was a jerk, even if he wasn’t being a jerk to Rick July 13, 2021

CHAPTER VI: ON BEST FRIENDS

“Sorry. I shouldn’t make fun of your friends.” Grandpa Ray’s eyes shifted left and then right. “Not even if they’re jerks!” July 13, 2021

CHAPTER VII: THE RAINBOW SPECTRUM

He wasn’t sure whether it would be worse if it was empty, 49 with just Kelly, Leila from science class,

and the faculty adviser staring at him, or full of gay kids and lesbian kids and bisexual kids and transgender kids. July 13, 2021

I can already tell this is going to be an exciting year. Before we do anything else, let's do a go-round, where we all introduce ourselves. In addition to sharing your name, grade, and preferred pronouns, July 13, 2021

Zoe was the girl with the patched-up jean jacket. "Hi, I'm Zoe, I'm in eighth grade, and I'm bisexual. My preferred pronouns are she and her. And I'm here because I think LGBTQIAP+ rights are really important." July 13, 2021

"Yeah, so I'm Green, and I'm in sixth grade and enby." Green saw some puzzled looks from around the room and clarified, "Enby from NB, or nonbinary." July 13, 2021

"I'm in sixth grade, and my pronouns are he and his. I'm a straight guy, as far as I can tell, but my moms are queer." July 13, 2021

"I'm Leila. I'm in sixth grade and use she and her, and I don't really know yet, but I've been doing a lot of reading and thinking, and I might be bisexual." 53 July 13, 2021

My name is Melissa, and I use she and her. I'm in sixth grade, I'm Kelly's BFF, and my connection to the community is that I'm a transgender girl." July 13, 2021

Kelly went next. "Hi. I'm Kelly Arden. I'm straight, but I'm a proud ally." "Not to be harsh," said Zoe, "but ally isn't really an identity to be proud of. And you're new, but we talked about this last year, and we don't use that word as a noun here anymore. Allying is something you do, not someone you are." "Then what's the A for in LGBTQIAP+?" asked Kelly. "Asexual," said Zoe. A few kids nodded, but others looked confused. "Asexuality is when you don't have any interest in, like, ever doing the deed with anyone." July 13, 2021

Others wanted to protest local businesses that didn't support LGBTQIAP+ rights. July 13, 2021

CHAPTER IX: PRONOUNS AND PURPOSE

I want to apologize for my ignorance last week. The singular they has a rich history in English, and as I learned on one blog, it is more important to be respectful than to be right. July 13, 2021

Any ideas what the other letters stand for?" July 13, 2021

"Bisexual!" "Transgender!" "Intersex!" July 13, 2021

CHAPTER X: SECRETS SHARED

"Oh, phew." Rick sat back down. He had never seen an adult quite so nervous to say something before, especially not to a kid. He put his hand on Grandpa Ray's knee and patted it a few times. Grandpa Ray put his hand on top of Rick's and rested it there. Rick could feel Grandpa Ray's bony knee through his pants. July 13, 2021

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