

GREEN



Juvenile

By Alex Gino

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Book Summary:

A young middle-school-aged girl who describes herself as nonbinary, works with her classmates on a new version of "The Wizard of Oz."

Summary of Concerns:

This book contains explicit alternate gender ideologies; excessive/frequent alternate sexualities; inexplicit sexual activities; derogatory terms; and references to racism and homophobia.

2 /5

Teen Guidance
BookLooks Review Rating

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5	<p>Green’s life was pretty great, especially for a kid in middle school. They were queer and nonbinary, and had lots of queer and trans friends. Pretty much everyone used their name and pronouns, and they felt mostly comfortable with their body the way it was.</p> <p>...One of the best parts in Green’s day was lunch with kids from the Rainbow Spectrum, Jung Middle School’s group for LGBTQIAP + students and issues.</p>
6	<p>Most days, he got to the table before Green, especially if Green had to go to the bathroom. Green used the gender-neutral one in the nurse’s office, which was out of the way, but it was also a private stall that never had a line.</p>
7	<p>Melissa sat down next to Leila, her girlfriend, and kissed her on the cheek.</p>
8	<p>Mr. Sydney, who had been faculty advisor of Rainbow Spectrum last year, was back in his role as spring musical director, now that Mx. Abrams had returned from parental leave and was running Rainbow Spectrum again.</p>
9	<p>“That pretty much rules out anything with openly queer characters,” said Melissa, wrinkling her nose.</p> <p>...And even if Green did want to be an actor, most musicals didn’t have nonbinary characters. They sighed and said, “I dunno. I agree with Melissa—classic sounds like it’s gonna have lots of boy roles and girl roles and not a whole lot of nonbinary roles.”</p> <p>...It was certainly less terrible than playing a girl, but in order not to have a binary gender, they’d probably have to play a rock or something.</p>
10	<p>Ronnie had never said he was queer, so Green didn’t ever think they’d ever be more than friends.</p>
11	<p>Green wasn’t sure at first what they thought of Ronnie, a kid who seemed to talk a whole lot about his two moms, Mama B and Mama C.</p>
15	<p>But it was also everything special, because it was the moment Green knew they didn’t just like Ronnie. They like liked Ronnie.</p>
18	<p>Everyone included nonbinary people, especially when someone like Melissa said it.</p> <p>...Green winced at the word boy and looked over at Jay, a white nonbinary eighth grader who usually wore striped button-down shirts.</p>
19	<p>Some of us have been in plays in the past where girls had to play girl parts and boys had to play boy parts, but not everyone wants to do that. Plus, how are nonbinary people supposed to try out?</p>
20	<p>They wished it said something about how nonbinary people shouldn’t have to play binary roles, and that if they really wanted a show that was inclusive, there would be nonbinary characters as well as nonbinary actors.</p>
21	<p>“Not if all the characters are boys and girls. I know, acting is about being someone you’re not, but if I never have the option of playing someone with a gender like mine, I don’t think I want to do it.”</p>
22	<p>“I got that from my moms. I just mean it’s good that you feel okay sharing that kind of stuff with me. I know I’m a cis het guy, and that means I need to be extra-aware when people let me in.” A cis het guy. It wasn’t that Green thought Ronnie wasn’t cisgender. And Ronnie had said at Rainbow Spectrum that he was in alliance with queer people like his moms. But Green had never heard Ronnie call himself heterosexual before.</p>
26	<p>Kandy, Randey, and River were too young to know about things like having crushes on people who called themselves cis het guys. Not that Green wanted to talk about crushes and</p>

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	gender politics this morning, but it was good to know they could. Lulu and Jan were self-proclaimed nonjudgmental feminists, and Dad always said that adopting Green meant he chose them, and that included wanting to know who they really were.
28	The room filled with the buzz of students excited about the play, on top of the regular chatter about which Miss Kris lyric was the greatest and which teachers knew the most about queer stuff, other than Mx. Abrams, of course.
29	<p>“Actually, Tracey and I were talking about the play this weekend, and we realized something. It’s cool that anyone can sign up for any part, but if someone’s nonbinary, they still have to pick a character that doesn’t match their gender, and that’s not fair.”</p> <p>...“So it’s not just that nonbinary people should get to play both boys and girls,” Jay continued.</p> <p>...“And there’s no reason the characters have to be the genders they’ve always been. Why are they all either boys or girls, anyway? I mean, really, who’s to say scarecrows aren’t enby?”</p> <p>...“Why does it have to be a Tin Man? Why can’t it be a Tin Person?”</p>
30	<p>“Queer and trans youth talking theater? Why, I’d be upset if you hadn’t asked me to join in. And thank you for advocating for open casting. Among other things, it’ll bring a new QUILTBAG + perspective to a story already rich in gay and lesbian history.”</p> <p>...He hadn’t come out to anyone until he was in college, and even then, he’d spent another five years dancing with boys before he started to explore LGBTQIAP + politics.</p>
31	Green was still figuring out their pronouns, after trying he for two years and finding it wasn’t really any better than she.
35	Mx. Abrams directed everyone to gather their things, and once they were ready, she escorted them out, like a herd of queer sheep.
37	Over the next few days, Green found themselves wondering what it would be like to play a nonbinary scarecrow.
41	<p>Green pictured themselves with straw coming out of their flannel shirt and overalls, pointing in opposite directions with crossed arms as they announced, “Of course, some people do go both ways!”</p> <p>It was hands down Green’s favorite line in the movie version, when Dorothy asked the Scarecrow about which way to get to the Wizard, and they were sure they could play it up. Maybe they’d even change the line to “some people go lots of ways!” and point all over the place.</p>
44	<p>“In that case, I thought we might talk about LGBTQIAP + connections to theater,” said Mx. Abrams. “Performance is very queer, you know.”</p> <p>“Mx. Abrams,” called out Tracey, “are you stereotyping all theater people as gay?”</p> <p>“No,” said Mx. Abrams, “but thank you for asking. I’m not saying that everyone in theater is part of the queer community, or that every queer and trans person is interested in theater. But there is a set of rich and complex connections between the two communities. The same stage that allows us to put on a mask sometimes allows us to reveal our truest selves.”</p> <p>...“In fact,” added Mx. Abrams, “gender theorists like Judith Butler explore the idea that all gender is performative. It’s not who you are, but what you do, one of the ways you present yourself to the world. In other words, how you perform in the play we call life.”</p>
45	<p>“Are sparkles gendered?”</p> <p>“They can be,” said Melissa. “But I don’t think they have to be. I mean, I’m a girl, and I wear a</p>

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	<p>lot of sparkles, yeah, but I don't wear sparkles because I'm a girl, and I'm not a girl because I wear sparkles. Take my older brother, Scott. He's as straight-boy as they come. But sometimes he wears nail polish. He says it's beautiful, plus it hides his dirty fingernails from football practice."</p> <p>...Sometimes Green felt like they were acting, especially when they decided not to wear a pink clip or a glittery pair of sunglasses because they didn't want people to assume that they were a girl. Which, Green realized, came right back to the question of whether sparkles were gendered or whether it was all an act. Maybe they would wear something sparkly to be a nonbinary scarecrow.</p>
46	<p>Even Leila, who had been in the middle of talking about Marlene Dietrich, a bisexual woman actor from black-and-white films who used to dress in tuxedos and top hats, finished abruptly with, "And so, like, that was cool," then pulled out her phone.</p>
49	<p>Green thought it might be cool to have a beard themselves someday, but that would mean taking testosterone, a hormone that would have all sorts of other effects on their mind and body, including possibly growing less hair on the top of their head when they got older. Green wasn't ready to make that decision, at least not yet, which didn't matter because they couldn't get a prescription at their age.</p> <p>Their doctor had mentioned hormone blockers, which weren't hormones themselves, but would stop estrogen and other chemicals already in their body from running all the puberty programs. The doctor said that they were the right age for treatment if they chose it, and she was probably right, since their body was starting to get a little curvier, both at their chest and around their hips. But when Green looked in the mirror, they liked the way their body flowed. They sometimes thought about having a curvy body and a beard at the same time, and that sounded like they would need more hormones, not fewer.</p>
51	<p>"Now let's say that kid likes a bisexual girl. That doesn't matter, right?"</p> <p>"Of course not."</p> <p>"Or a transgender girl," said Green.</p> <p>"Girls are girls, so I don't see why you're even asking." Dad was a proud trans-inclusive feminist. He even had a shirt that said so, which Green thought was cool most of the time, except when Dad pointed it out, which was extremely uncool.</p> <p>"Well, what if this straight boy likes someone nonbinary?"</p> <p>..."Okay, but that means they aren't straight anymore, doesn't it?"</p> <p>"I'm saying that people get to define their own relationships."</p> <p>..."Well, I'm on the U.S.S. Cis Het White Guy."</p> <p>...Dad laughed. "Fair enough. I'm on the one for Sensitive Rockers. Point is, I'm your dad, and I love you, and I'm always here for you, but also, I'm not a nonbinary kid growing up in the twenty-first century. Couldn't hurt to talk with someone a little more like you about this."</p>
52	<p>Green's bag wasn't as busy as Rick's, who covered his with as many buttons and pins as would fit, but they had a few queer patches and a glittery button that said I Believe in Unicorns.</p>
53	<p>Em was enby, and used they at Rainbow Spectrum, but they used she and her in class and at home. There were also a few kids at Rainbow Spectrum who introduced themselves with "she or they, it doesn't really matter," but most of them startled when Green actually used the second option. For the other kids, they was always the second option.</p> <p>...Everyone had the right to what worked for them, but Jay was the only other kid who knew about having to decide when and how to correct your teachers when they used the wrong</p>

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	<p>pronouns for you. Jay had started going to Rainbow Spectrum at the beginning of last year, same as Green. They started using they/ them pronouns soon after and changed their name to Jay.</p>
57	<p>He was hanging out with Melissa, Kelly, Leila, and Rick, a queer island among a sea of middle schoolers waiting for the front doors to open.</p>
58	<p>Ronnie might not mark all the checkboxes for a nonbinary kid’s friend-who-was-cute-and-maybe-something-else-might-happen, but the idea of spending more time with him sure did sound like fun.</p>
59	<p>As if he’d heard what Green was thinking, Mr. Sydney continued, “You all know that everyone is encouraged to play their roles as the gender of their choice, and we will make adjustments to the script as necessary. For example, I believe we will be having a Tin Queer this year.” ...“Okay, so the flying monkeys. Some of us were talking, and it’s not that monkeys are racist, but sometimes Black people have been compared to monkeys, which is pretty racist. So it’s kinda sketchy to have them be the servants for the Wicked Witch.”</p>
62	<p>Ronnie had called himself a heterosexual guy, and no matter what Dad said about people defining their own relationships, Green was pretty sure that meant Ronnie liked girls.</p>
67	<p>“Are you saying you might be queer?” they asked. “Or LGBTQIAP + in some way? I mean” — Green paused—“ well, some of the letters anyway. I mean, you’re not L.” Green gasped. “Are you?” “Nah.” Ronnie grinned. “One of my moms is a lesbian, but it’s not my style. I guess I’m not really in a space to put words on it.” He shrugged. “I’ve always liked girls before ...” “Before?” Green’s eyes and heart grew wide. “I just mean I don’t want to limit myself. I’d think you, of all people, would get that.”</p>
69	<p>They didn’t even know about crushes, much less what it meant to have a crush on a boy who might be straight but didn’t want to limit himself.</p>
74	<p>But mostly, how mind-bendingly baffling he was to a simple queer nonbinary kid like Green.</p>
79	<p>“At least it’s not as bad as being straight.” ...“I’m sorry. It’s just, you’re the one who said you were a cis het guy. But you also don’t want to limit yourself.” ...“So, which is it? Are you straight or not?” ...“Does it matter?” Ronnie shrugged. ...“I mean, it kinda does.” “It’s just a label.” “Yeah, a label that means that you only like girls.” “I know that.” “And either you do or you don’t.” “It’s just ... it’s complicated, okay?” “It’s really not, though. If ...” Green could hear the words you like me in their head, but they couldn’t say them out loud. Or wouldn’t. The answer could be no, and that would be even worse than Ronnie saying he was straight.</p>
83	<p>They opened their eyes to a big red splotch in their underwear. Worse, the toilet bowl water was orangey pink. It had happened. They had known it would happen, but they thought they would be at home. There was already a pack of pads in the bottom drawer in the bathroom for when the</p>

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	<p>day came.</p> <p>But here they were, in the grocery store men’s room, showerless and padless. Their underwear was a bloody, sticky mess and who knew how much more was coming before they made it home. They wrapped a few layers of thin toilet paper around their underwear and bunched up a wad on top of that. When they stood, there was a red smear at the front of the toilet seat, which they wiped down.</p>
85	<p>Green felt good to know they weren’t unwillingly headbanging to some heteronormative love story or, worse, some song about women’s bodies being hot like pie, which was more than you could say for most music.</p>
87	<p>“There’s a lot of different ways of expressing your gender, and lots of things that people think are about gender but aren’t actually at all.”</p>
89	<p>“Like, I know my body is AFAB,” said Green, which stood for Assigned Female At Birth. “And I know I’m not on blockers. So, I probably shouldn’t have been surprised, but I still was.”</p> <p>...“Are you going to be Ally Dad, telling me that since it’s my body, nothing about it is a woman’s?”</p> <p>“I mean, you’re not wrong,” said Dad.</p> <p>“It sure feels like my body hasn’t picked up on the nonbinary memo.”</p> <p>“Maybe. But maybe that’s cisgender normativity taking residence in your head.”</p> <p>Green perked up. They loved when cisgender anything was to blame, especially when they weren’t the one to point it out. Just because it was common, or normative, that people who menstruated were women didn’t mean that everyone was, or that they were better somehow. It’s just that there were so many cisgender people, and most people assumed everyone was cisgender.</p>
97	<p>Lulu said that some people who menstruated celebrated their connection to the moon, and that she had been part of some meaningful ceremonies when she was in her late teens, but that it was also okay to find the whole thing unpleasant.</p> <p>...It was more that their body felt weird, which, when Green thought about it, was probably true for a lot of cisgender people when they got their first periods too.</p> <p>...There were even kids from conservative families who didn’t know periods existed.</p> <p>...Green had done a little more reading about hormone blockers. They would stop your period, but they would also stop your body from developing in other ways, and Green couldn’t say for sure that they wanted that.</p> <p>...Between that and not even knowing what straight was anymore, Green was confused. They needed to confer with someone who understood these things.</p> <p>...It wasn’t even just about bodies and curves and hair and hormone blockers and whether Melissa liked them, which was probably a rude way to start a conversation that Green had just said was about them, not her. It was also about nonbinary people who didn’t make good best friends, and about boys who you liked so much you didn’t know how to talk to them.</p>
99	<p>“I mean, mom joke? I didn’t mean to misgender you.”</p>
100	<p>“I don’t know whether he likes me though. I don’t even know if he likes people like me. He’s straight.” Green paused. “Well, not straight. But not not straight either.”</p> <p>Melissa wrinkled her nose. “What does that mean?”</p> <p>“I don’t know. He’s the one who said he’d always liked girls before.”</p> <p>“Well, that sounds like he likes you.”</p> <p>...“If he’s not willing to call himself queer, does he really see my gender?”</p> <p>...“Yeah. She knew she was bisexual, but she hadn’t dated a girl before, and then there was</p>

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	<p>this whole thing where she was worried that I thought she was saying that maybe I wasn't a girl, which wasn't true at all, and we had to have a big talk about how it was okay to be unsure about what she thought but it wasn't okay to assume she was sure about what I thought."</p>
101	<p>If Green was going to ask Melissa about hormone blockers, it was going to be now.</p>
102	<p>"Of course not. So my question, which you don't have to answer, is: You're on blockers, right?" Melissa nodded. It wasn't something she talked about a lot, but she had told them about it. Her doctor prescribed hormone blockers to keep her body from making lots of testosterone and going through puberty. ... "That's what my therapist calls it when I ask her a question that maybe I should be asking myself. For me, hormone blockers were barely a decision at all. It was more like asking me whether I wanted to be able to breathe.</p>
103	<p>"I don't want to decide more slowly. I just wish it wasn't an issue, like I didn't have to decide at all. I want to be a Mx. Potato Head, and put on whatever eyes and feet I want, and change them when I don't like them anymore." ... "Sometimes gender feels like a pop quiz I have to take every day ... and I've never studied. I don't even know where the textbook is. Binary people have it so easy." "It's not easy being a girl, even if you're cisgender!" ... "You could be a girl every day, too, if you wanted," Melissa offered, then batted her eyes to signal her sarcasm. "Yeah," said Green. "Tried that. Failed. Definitely not a girl." Even the word made Green's tongue curl, when they used it for themselves. "One good thing about hormone blockers is that they're temporary," said Melissa. "So if you do change your mind, you just stop taking them, and everything in your body starts up again." "Yeah, I read that," said Green.</p>
104	<p>And the lines between what was queer and what wasn't were getting fuzzier than ever. ... "I'm glad blockers are the right thing for you," said Green.</p>
110	<p>"That's one take on it, sure, but it's a story about finding your people. Did you know that for a long time the QUILTBAG + community considered The Wizard of Oz to be a queer allegory?" ... "Judy Garland was gay?" cried Mika. "No," said Mr. Sydney. "At least, I don't think so. But she starred in a movie that was all about how she couldn't be herself at home, at a time when most gay people weren't welcome to be themselves with their families. In fact, at a time when most people couldn't be out, a lot of men would signal that they were a Friend of Dorothy as a way to say that they were interested in other men." "I can see it," said Talia. "Dorothy's stuck in this boring Kansas world, and she wants to go somewhere different. If I were the only gay guy I knew in Kansas, I might want to leave too." "Exactly!" said Mr. Sydney. "Especially if you were worried that you might get beat up. Or worse," he said, shaking his head. "For a long time, Hollywood was one of the few places it was relatively safe to be gay. You still had to be careful, but Hollywood was built on secrets, and a lot of those secrets were about who was queer."</p>
111	<p>Green thought about people who couldn't say that they were queer, not because they didn't know, but because it wasn't safe. They had to hide whether they wanted to or not. Green</p>

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	wondered what people who weren't sure whether they were queer did if they didn't have a safe place to ask questions and try out possibilities.
114	<p>"Like lesbians after they burn their tongues?"</p> <p>Even Mr. Sydney laughed. "No, and it doesn't stand for theater lesbians either. At least, not officially."</p>
122	<p>"But what if you're the only nongirl I ever like?"</p> <p>"Hold on!" said Green. "Did you just basically say you like me?"</p> <p>...Green thought Ronnie's lips touched theirs first, but later, Ronnie swore that it was Green who had started it. Soft on soft, warm on warm, brief and light as a breeze, they kissed.</p> <p>"Can we do that again?" asked Ronnie, so close Green could feel Ronnie's breath on their lips.</p> <p>"Yes, please," said Green, trying to keep a goofy smile under control.</p> <p>They kissed a second time, and then a third, each light peck a moment of what was to come.</p>

Derogatory Term	Count
Queer	26