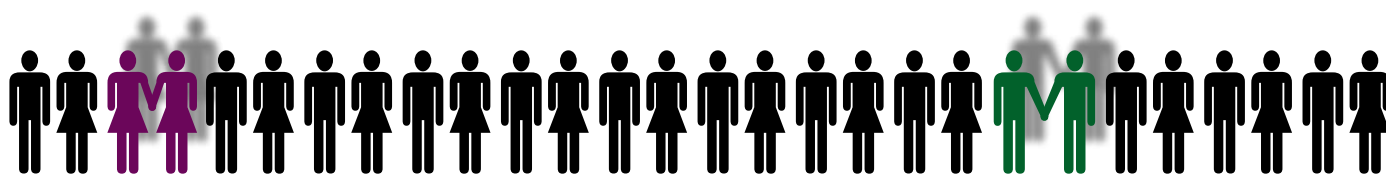


# Gay literature for teens



THERESA SASS

Children's Book Selector

As society becomes more accepting of gays, teens are coming out at a younger age than before. Making 'support literature' freely available could help ease the coming-out process. Gay literature is not only intended for gay people but for everybody who wants to gain more insight, or who has a gay friend or family member. Whilst drawing up this bibliography I came to the conclusion that these stories can break down barriers, and that readers will realise how difficult it is for gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender (GLBT) teenagers to wrestle with the perceptions of society and their own emotions.

In most of the fiction titles the plots deal with actual issues gay people struggle with on a daily basis: either a friend suspects that their friend is gay or somebody has a crush on someone gay, or a family is affected by a 'different' family member and how they struggle to come to terms with the situation.

These stories tell how gay teens are scared by the perceptions of society, the cruelty they endure in homophobic communities and also how they handle situations at school or in public. In this sense these books can actually guide young gay teens or people struggling with their sexuality on how to handle their situations and deal with emotions. Family members, friends and school friends, everyone can learn more just by reading the titles listed below.

I also discovered that most of the gay and lesbian young adult books deal with the sensitivity of the issue and the prejudice of society. This may be the reason why most gay books explore homosexuality as a device or problem to overcome. In these

books teens will discover that they are not alone and that their families are not the only ones tormented by this.

This list is intended for librarians and readers to provide guidance and to showcase what the Library Service has in stock. The list only covers books published in the last ten years but there are more titles available on the topic. Annotations were taken from reviews by selectors.

## Fiction

Alnam, Biron. **No problem, man!**- New Africa Bks., 2002.

'Rashaad is not sure if he is gay, he does some work for the Odd-Job agency which takes him to gay clubs. He joins a support group for gay men'. A South African book in the *Siyagruva* series.

Burchill, Julie. **Sugar rush.**- Young Picador, 2005.

'After 15-year-old Kim's mother abandons her family, her father claims he cannot "afford" to keep the teen in private school, so she must transfer to Brighton's tough public high school. There she meets and befriends Maria "Sugar" Sweet, a beautiful bully



who introduces her to a wild life of drinking and clubbing. Kim realises she has a crush on the naughtiest girl in school, but as their relationship turns physical, she gets increasingly possessive and confused by Sugar.'

Burchill, Julie. **Sweet.**- Picador, 2008.

Sequel to **Sugar rush**. 'Sugar, now aged seventeen, comes out of jail and finds that her husband has disappeared with their baby. Sugar finds she's more concerned to get back to her relationship with Kim. In the meantime her work as a model for two gay fashion designers ends badly.'

Burnham, Niki. **Royally crushed.**- Simon, 2004.

'Fifteen-year-old Valerie is shocked when her mother announces that she's divorcing Valerie's father and has a new relationship with a woman.'

Howe, James. **Totally Joe.**- Aladdin, 2007.

'Joe's interests and mannerisms lead everyone to conclude that he is gay, and he knows that he likes boys but knowing it and saying it are different things, especially when the school bully is so eager to label Joe. Even worse, any boy Joe likes is immediately labelled as well. These circumstances complicate things when Joe's crush, Colin, finally takes an interest in him. With the help of his supportive family and friends, Joe comes to terms with himself.'

Clinger, Rob. **Just a boy.**- Haworth P., 2007.

'High school wrestler Jove Tyler looks like an average guy but he's "different". Instead of falling for Beth Stein, his caring and compassionate "girlfriend" at Templeton High, Jove develops a secret crush on his cute classmate Jason Carnivelli, who lives next door – and is happy to stay in the closet. **Just a boy** looks back at a time just short of manhood, filled with first kisses, last chances, and the same question every day: Who will accept me for who I am?'

De Oliveira, Eddie. **Lucky.**- Scholastic, 2004.

'Nineteen-year-old Sammy examines his sexuality, but he is concerned with how his friends and teammates will respond. He still thinks that he might possibly have the capability to fancy boys as well as girls.'

Freyman-Wey, Garre. **My heartbeat.**- Picador, 2003.

'This is the story of an adolescent girl with a crush on a bisexual boy who might or might not be in a relationship with her brother, a near-genius who refuses to admit that he's gay.'

Gantos, Jack. **Desire lines.**- Definitions, 2004.

'Walker, a pensive loner, avoids confrontation as much as possible – until the son of a fundamentalist preacher accuses him of being gay. Pressured by religious fanatics and his peers, he points a finger at a pair of high school lesbians, Karen and Jennifer, hoping to shift attention away from himself. His act of betrayal puts an end to his own harassment, but causes irreparable damage to the girls.'



Hines, Sue. **Out of the shadows.**- Livewire, 2001.

'After her mother's sudden death Ro lives with her mother's lover, Deb. At first Ro finds it very difficult to accept that her mother is lesbian, but ultimately Deb becomes her mainstay and guardian. She has to learn to cope with her situation at school as well as socially. She meets Jodie, and when she finds out that Jodie is gay, their friendship is severely tested.'

Kerr, ME. **Deliver us from Evie.**- Viking, 1995.

'Told by her brother Parr; this is the story of 18-year-old Evie, her Missouri farm family, and the turmoil created by Evie's love for the local banker's daughter. Evie has always been different – masculine, good at repairing machines, a strong worker on the family farm. Her mom tries to get Evie to look and act more feminine, but Evie maintains that's just not the way she is. Then Evie falls in love with a 17-year-old rich girl who loves her right back. That's about the time all hell breaks loose.'

Levithan, David. **Boy meets boy.**- HarperCollins, 2006.

'In this school, the gay kids and the straight kids all get along just fine; the quarterback is a cross-dresser; and the cheerleaders ride Harleys – yet the road to true love is still a strange and winding path, as Paul discovers when he meets the boy of his dreams.'

Lieshout, Ted van. **Brothers.**- Collins Flamingo, 2001.

'Lucas, age sixteen, who has fought to hide his knowledge that he is gay, is astonished to find that his brother who passed away the year before also went through the same emotions. He found this out when he reads his brother's diary.'

Matthews, Andrew. **The flip side.**- Mammoth, 2001.

'Robert Hunt is to play the female role of Rosalind, opposite his classmate Milena as Orlando. To his great surprise and confusion, Rob discovers that he likes dressing up as a woman, and, more importantly, he likes who he is as Rosalind: stronger and more confident than when he's just Rob. Thus begins his experimentation with cross-dressing and exploration of his own sexuality.'

Peck, Dale. **Sprout.**- Bloomsbury, 2009.

'Daniel "Sprout" Bradford, 16, does a lot of his thinking out loud, speaking directly to readers about his thoughts about secrets, lies, friendship, and love. This is the story of a boy who is comfortable with being gay, but not with some of the other truths about his situation in life.'



Peters, Julie Anne. **Between Mom and Jo.**- Little Brown, 2008.  
'Nick, 14, tells his story in flashbacks, revealing what it was like growing up with his two moms and watching their relationship fall apart. As Nick develops from a boy to a young man, he must address his own sexuality, his ties to his family, and his need to assert his individuality. This novel is an exploration of the struggles faced by same-sex couples and their children.'

Peters, Julie Anne. **Keeping you a secret.**- Little Brown, 2005.  
'Holland Jaeger goes steady with a good-looking boy. Then she meets "out-and-proud" lesbian Cece, and her life changes. The two begin an affair that eventually leads to a committed relationship. Holland loses old friends, encounters vicious discrimination, and is thrown out of the house by her hysterical mother. She finds help at the local Gay Resource Centre.'

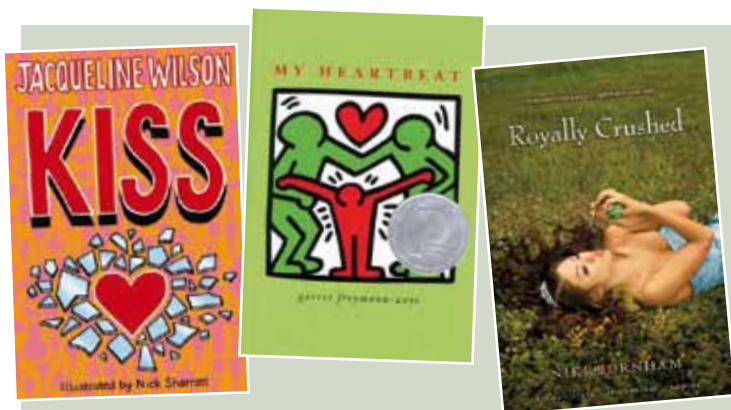
Phillips, Suzanne. **Burn.**- Young Picador, 2008.  
'Cameron, a high school freshman, becomes an easy target for the varsity bullies after a chance comment by a coach who notices his short stature and long hair from behind and directs him to the girls' gym. As the taunts of "gay" or "fag" drive most of his friends away, Cameron's anger escalates. When he is assaulted in the locker room and photos of his nude body are posted on the Internet, he begins to break down and his desire to retaliate is explosive.'

Rettig, Liz. **Jumping to confusions.**- Corgi Bks., 2008.  
'Cat thinks she is fat and boring. Meanwhile her twin sister Tessa is skinny and can get any boy she wants. Josh is the cute new arrival to their town and Tess seems keen to sink her teeth into him. But Josh seems strangely uninterested in Tess, and as he and Cat become friends, Cat thinks she's got to the bottom of the mystery: maybe Josh just isn't into girls at all.'

Sanchez, Alex. **Rainbow boys.**- Simon Pulse, 2003.  
'Three gay high school seniors, Jason, Kyle, and Nelson, deal with the difficulties of coming out and with all of the other problems that plague and perplex homosexual teens. The teens struggle with issues ranging from coming out to first love to an HIV scare.'

Sanchez, Alex. **Rainbow high.**- Simon Pulse, 2005.  
Sequel to **Rainbow boys**. 'Nelson Glassman and Kyle Meeks, best friends for many years, are gay teens at Walt Whitman High School. Kyle becomes romantically involved with basketball jock Jason Carrillo, while Nelson embarks on a strained relationship with Jeremy, who has tested positive for HIV. Jason comes out to his team-mates and endures public scrutiny on television, eventually he loses his athletic scholarship.'

Steinhofel, Andreas. **Centre of my world.**- Andersen P., 2006.  
'Phil, 17, knows he is gay, and that his free-spirited mother totally accepts him. All his life he has dreamed of finding the American father who walked out on mom. Phil loves the gorgeous athlete



Nicholas, but Nicholas is afraid to come out in their conservative community.'

Wilson, Jacqueline. **Kiss.**- Doubleday, 2007.  
'When a game of spin-the-bottle results in Carl kissing Sylvie's new friend, Miranda, and refusing to kiss her, Sylvie begins to doubt her attractiveness. But when Carl suddenly insists on including his new friend, Paul, on all their outings, especially his birthday party, Sylvie is even more confused. While at Kew Gardens, Miranda suggests a game of hide-and-seek, and when Carl finds Paul in the bushes, he instinctively kisses him with disastrous, gay-bashing results.'

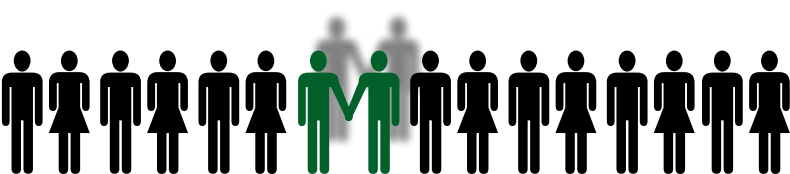
Wittlinger, Ellen. **Hard love.**- Schuster, 2004.  
'This story revolves around John Galardi, a teenager struggling to come to terms with the break-up of his parents' marriage and a lack of intimacy with his mother in particular. He explores his feelings by writing a "zine", and this brings him into the orbit of the exotic Marisol, a zine writer with issues of her own, which include her own adoption and newly-discovered lesbianism. The book never comes across as either too PC or preachy, in fact, most readers will be able to identify with the underlying themes of first love and establishing an identity of one's own.'

\*Wittlinger, Ellen. **Love & lies: Marisol's story.**- Simon, 2010.  
This sequel to **Hard Love** effectively continues the story from Marisol's point of view. 'The characters are well drawn and believable, and the interpersonal relationships realistic. Along with her friends, readers can see early on that Marisol's relationship with "the teacher" is courting disaster. Witnessing Olivia's jealousy and mistreatment and wishing Marisol would finally open her eyes creates effective page-turning tension.'

## Non-fiction

**Balancing act: South African gay and lesbian youth speak out.**- New Africa Bks., 2005.

'A project of the Gay and Lesbian Archives of South Africa (GALA). In this book twenty-one gay and lesbian South Africans speak out about their family and friends, their childhood, their hopes for the future, problems, et cetera. This is also intended to be linked to life-orientation classes in secondary schools and there is also a twenty-page section of notes for teachers.'



\*Bloch, Joanne. **Ukulungiselela imeko: ulutsha oluthandana nabe-sini.**- New Africa Bks., 2005.

Teenagers of South Africa who are involved in gay/lesbian relationships speak out.

Endersbe, Julie K.- **Homosexuality: what does it mean?**- LifeMatters, 2000.

Provides an overview of sexuality and sexual orientation including coming out, support systems, risks and fears, prejudices and healthy sexual behavior.

\*Huegel, Kelly. **GLBTQ (Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender questioning): the survival guide for queer & questioning teens.**- Free Spirit Publications, 2003.

'A great choice for teens that are gay or questioning their sexuality or even those who would like to know more about what it's like to be queer. Giving an honest perspective, teens tell their stories, both the negative and positive, of their experiences with sex, drugs, and suicide attempts. This book also provides teenagers with checklists and other resources to help them figure out when is the right time to come out. It is an open and frank discussion about sex that is important to all readers regardless of their age. It provides invaluable lessons for teenagers on how to engage in safer sex and how to say no to unwanted sexual advances.'

\*Nagle, Jeanne. **GLBT teens and society.**- Rosen Pub., 2010.

'This helpful guide for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) teens covers in general what it means to be GLBT and gives guidance on issues like "a sense of self", conflicts and road-blocks, health and wellness, social issues, the role of the media, and finding support.'

\*Orr, Tamra B. **Home and family relationships.**- Rosen Pub., 2010.

'This helpful guide teaches gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) teens how to maintain healthy familial relationships. Strategies are shared for coming out to parents and siblings, and advice is given on how to communicate with others, as well as how to understand and react to the emotions of others.'

\*Payment, Simone. **Friendship, dating and relationships.**- Rosen Pub., 2010.

'This book explores GLBT teens' relationships with themselves, their friends, and the people they date. Issues such as getting over a breakup, dating and online safety, safe sex, and coming out to



one's friends are presented in a comprehensive, engaging manner. The authors sort out gender identities; societal reactions; and misconceptions about being gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. Strategies for coming out to parents and friends suggest taking gradual steps that focus on mutual respect and understanding.'

*For more books on this subject or for further reading librarians can consult the following guides:*

Tucker, Nicholas. **The rough guide to books for teenagers.**- Rough Guides, 2003.

This title looks at literature for teenagers, with reviews of over 200 titles with the intended age group provided. The arrangement is thematic, for example, crime, humour, fantasy, et cetera, and there is an index. A very interesting range of books is discussed.

\***The ultimate teen book guide.**- Black, 2010.

'This volume includes reviews of more than 700 fiction titles, non-fiction, classics, and graphic novels that will be of interest to young adults. The reviewers are popular authors, librarians, and teens themselves. Brief entries of one half to one page per title are easy to read with black-and-white images of book covers, suggested ages, and additional recommendations included. The lively reviews are sorted alphabetically by title, indexed by author, and cross-referenced throughout the volume.'

\*Worth, Richard. **Life at school and in the community.**- Rosen Pub., 2010.

This helpful guide teaches gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) teens how to maintain healthy family relationships. Strategies for coming out to parents and siblings are shared, and advice is given on how to communicate, understand and respond to the emotions of others.

*Note: \*Titles still on order*

