

GLSEN Rainbow Library 9th Grade - 12th Grade Book List

All the books on the below list are included in the 2025-2025 School Year Rainbow Library collection. With each title is a full-text review from *School Library Journal* (SLJ) or *Booklist Reviews* (printed with permission from the publishers), along with the awards the title has won. We encourage you to use this information when making book recommendations to students or when discussing these titles with families or other school staff.

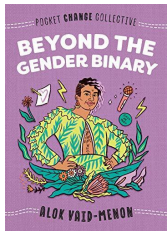
Rainbow Library books are selected based on reviews from major journals, such as *School Library Journal*, *Kirkus*, and *Booklist Reviews* and feedback from hundreds of educators and school librarians who previously received Rainbow Library sets. The grade-range for each title is in line with the grade-range provided by *School Library Journal* (or if unavailable, reviews from other reputable journals). Nearly all these titles have won awards or have been featured on reputable lists, such as the American Library Association (ALA) Rainbow Book List. To purchase LGBTQ+ affirming titles for grades K-12, please visit bookshop.org/shop/RainbowLibrary. A portion of proceeds goes back to supporting this program.



Ace of Spades

Faridah Abike-Iyemide • Best for 9th Grade - 12th Grade • Thriller-Mystery

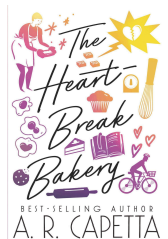
2022 NAACP Image Award Winner for Outstanding Literary Work - Youth/Teens. 2022 ALA Rainbow Book List Top 10 Titles for Young Adults. School Library Journal Best Young Adult Books of 2021. ALA William C. Morris Debut Award Finalist. YALSA 2022 Best Fiction for Young Adults Finalist. "Chiamaka Adebayo and Devon Richards are selected Senior Prefects during their final year at the elite Niveus Academy. Chiamaka is ambitious, unapologetic, and social climbing. She sets her sights on the Snowflake Ball, a Yale acceptance letter, and legacy rich boy Jamie Fitzjohn. Devon is low-key, inhibited, and reserved. He does not want to make waves with his music, Juilliard aspirations, and homosexuality. Chiamaka and Devon are surprisingly linked when a shady figure known as Aces exposes their secrets and lies to Niveus and Devon's impoverished neighborhood through harassing texts. They slowly discover their friends, classmates, and faculty as fairweather and realize they are not only targeted because of the secrets and lies: Their status as the only Black students poses a threat to a secret white supremacist network at Niveus. Chiamaka and Devon must work together to ensure they make history as the first Black graduates or die trying at the hands of Aces, who will do anything and everything to prevent their upward mobility. Readers will love this thriller-mystery reminiscent of Gossip Girl and Get Out. The plot keeps readers guessing. Themes of systemic racism, structural white supremacy, microaggressions, class distinctions, and LGBTQIA+ identities will also resonate with readers. VERDICT: A revelatory, buzzworthy debut." (School Library Journal, Donald Peebles)



Beyond the Gender Binary

Alok Vaid-Menon • Best for 7th Grade - 12th Grade • Autobiography

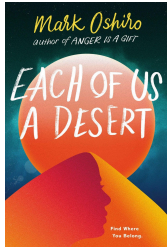
2021 ALA Rainbow Book List. 2021 In the Margins Award - Winner. "Activist and artist Vaid-Menon writes with purpose and passion about the harmful impact of judging gender non-conforming individuals through the lens of the gender binary. The author, who grew up in an Indian American family in College Station, TX, recounts how their experience, their life, and their way of moving through the world were not only viewed as wrong but as something to be ashamed of. They explain, "Overnight, so many of the things that I loved not only became associated with femininity but with shame." They share their process of personal growth during adolescence and young adulthood, which led to self-acceptance, pride, and the freedom and joy that accompanied that awareness. The second half of this short, powerful book breaks down the arguments that are often leveled against people who live beyond the gender binary. These arguments are divided into four categories: dismissal, inconvenience, biology, and the slippery slope. Each argument is defined and then Vaid-Menon brilliantly explains how damaging, short-sighted, and often hypocritical these assertions can be. Overall, the message is empowering, informative, and supportive, offering young people a beacon of hope in what can be a dark time. VERDICT: An affirming, thoughtful read for all ages. Recommended." (School Library Journal, Jody Kopple)



The Heartbreak Bakery

A.R. Capetta • Best for 9th Grade - 12th Grade • Romantic Fiction

2022 Lambda Literary Award Winner. "In the vein of many contemporary LGBTQ+ young adult novelists—among them Malinda Lo, Alex Sanchez, Kacen Callender, Leah Johnson—A. R. Capetta's *The Heartbreak Bakery* delivers on the idea that queer and trans teenagers can find hope, love, community, and maybe even a little bit of magic. And there's plenty of magic to be found at the Proud Muffin, a queer-owned bakery that doubles as an LGBTQ+ community space in Austin, Texas, where our headstrong protagonist, Syd (no pronouns, please), has worked ever since convincing owners Alec and Vin to let a high-school senior be a full-time baker... Of course, heartbreak abounds in *The Heartbreak Bakery*, but so, too, does love, and crucially, Capetta holds more than just romantic love up to the light. Relationships with chosen family, friends, and community are given equal weight here, polyamory is considered just as valuable as monogamy, and the titular heartbreak doesn't surround anyone's identity. LGBTQ+ characters are allowed to experience joy, fall in love, and break up. Between all that, a groundbreaking agender protagonist, a love interest who uses both he/him and they/them pronouns, and a cast of complex queer and trans characters, this book proves a necessary addition to the young adult romance genre. Every scene involving magic baking is pure perfection, and the romance is as mouthwatering as Syd's recipes, all of which will make readers want to pull out a bowl, a baking sheet, and a sprinkle of their own magic." (Booklist Starred Review)



Each of Us a Desert

Mark Oshiro • Best for 9th Grade - 12th Grade • Speculative Fiction

2021 ALA Rainbow Book List Top Ten YA. BuzzFeed Best YA Speculative Fiction of 2020. NPR Best Books of 2020. Publishers Weekly Starred Review. "In a future where the world is mostly dry desert after La Quema burned everything, Xochitl is counted on in Empalme to pass on the truths confessed to her by the villagers to the god Solís—an essential task that must be done to keep dark truths from manifesting as dangerous pesadillas. Exhausted from the heavy burden of this ritual and beginning to question her role as cuentista, a role she never chose and does not want to spend the rest of her life doing, Xochitl makes the drastic decision to keep a story her friend gave to her—a story that could have dire consequences for Empalme. This act sets off a chain of events that cause Xochitl to abandon her duties as a cuentista and leave Empalme, and which entwines her destiny with that of Emilia, daughter of Julio—a dangerous man who brings death with him everywhere he goes. As Xochitl and Emilia embark on their journeys, their separate searches bring their destinies closer together. Exploring the world outside Empalme, Xochitl begins to question everything she thought she knew about herself, the world, and about Solís. VERDICT: A cross between Lois Lowry's *The Giver* and Tehlor Kay Mejia's *We Set the Dark on Fire*, this haunting story will stay with readers just like the stories Xochitl has kept." (School Library Journal – Selenia Paz)



Dear Mothman

Robin Gow • Best for 8th Grade - 9th Grade • Fantasy

Lambda Literary Award - Middle Grade Winner, 2024 "Sixth-grader Noah is struggling after his best friend Lewis's unexpected death. No one seems to understand his deep grief, and now that Lewis is gone, no one knows that Noah is really Noah, not the name he was given at birth. The only connection Noah can find is to Mothman, a mythical cryptid that was a subject of fascination for Lewis. Noah begins leaving letters out for Mothman at night, writing of his isolation, sadness, and quest for understanding. When Mothman begins leaving scribbles in the notebook overnight, Noah's curiosity grows. As he slowly begins making friends, he introduces them to Mothman as well, and to his own true self. A book that so honestly depicts a transgender, autistic character is a rarity, and Noah's story is truly beautiful. His letters to Mothman, interspersed with first-person prose and occasional sketches, speak to a boy struggling to find himself after the one person who truly knew him is gone. Mothman may be symbolic to Noah's own journey, but the magical realism aspect of the book adds another, deeper layer as Noah begins to find his own strength and share who he is. VERDICT A triumphant coming-of-age story about gender identity, strength, and friendship, as well as the different ways that people discover who they are." (School Library Journal, Kristin Brynsvold)



The Lesbiana's Guide to Catholic School

Sonora Reyes • Best for 8th Grade - 12th Grade • Realistic Fiction

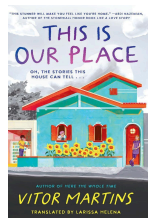
Winner - 2023 Lambda Literary Award - Young Adult. Finalist, 2022 National Book Award for Young People's Literature. Goodreads Finalist for Best Teen Book of the Year. Walter Honor Award Winner. Pura Belpré Honor Book. "Yamilet Flores and her brother, Cesar, are set to start the school year at Slayton Catholic, both leaving behind unhappy pasts at Rover High. Cesar has a habit of getting into fights at school for reasons Yamilet can't figure out, and Yamilet is struggling with a betrayal by ex-best friend Bianca, who revealed to others Yamilet is gay. Hoping to avoid a similar situation at Slayton, Yamilet pretends to be straight as she navigates the school. Soon she falls in with a good group of friends that includes Bo, a Chinese American girl who is kind, intelligent, confident, and out. Working hard to make money in case she is kicked out of home when her truth is revealed, Yami doesn't always pay attention to what's happening with Cesar. Yamilet is refreshing and genuine, starting off as someone who does not always stand up for herself and evolving into someone fiercely protective of her family, her friends, and herself. Yami and Cesar, who both struggle with a sense of shame, deal with their feelings differently while also providing each other with love and support. Yami glows with pride for her Mexican and Indigenous ancestry, and although she stands out in Slayton, where most of the student body is white, she finds support from many kind and considerate classmates. Difficult topics, such as suicide, are explored. VERDICT Filled with humor and love, this fast-paced novel will have readers immersed in Yamilet's world, rooting for her and her loved ones all the way." (School Library Journal, Selenia Paz)



Guía para las lesbianas en un colegio católico (Spanish version)

Sonora Reyes • Best for 8th Grade - 12th Grade • Realistic Fiction

"Yamilet quiere que la conozcan por su impecable raya del ojo y no por ser una de las únicas lesbianas en su nuevo instituto católico. La cuestión es que es difícil fingir ser heterosexual cuando Bo, la única chica abiertamente queer en la escuela, es tan irritantemente perfecta y, bueno..., tan atractiva. A sus dieciséis años, Yami tiene claras sus prioridades: mantener a su hermano lejos de los problemas, enorgullecer a su madre y, lo más importante, no enamorarse. Pero, para lograrlo, tendrá que luchar contra sus instintos y empezar a comportarse como las chicas heterosexuales que hay en su instituto. Aunque eso nunca se le ha dado demasiado bien..." (From Publisher)



This Is Our Place

Vitor Martins • Best for 9th Grade - 12th Grade • Realistic Fiction

Global Literature in Libraries Initiative Translated YA Book Prize, 2023 Winner. “Martins's second novel is a delightful LGBTQIA+ rom-com that crosses among three teens who live in the same house, Number 8 Sunflower Street, during different years. In 2000, Ana frets about telling her single dad that she's gay and then learns that they are moving away from the house and from her girlfriend. Ten years later, Gregorio comes to visit his aunt in the same house and develops a crush on the food delivery boy. Then, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Roberto, his mother, and sister are housebound there and Berto tries for an online romance with a boy who has admired the photos he takes from his window. Each story is both sweet and realistic, with an adult playing a significant role in the central teen character's life. Martins adds inspired charm by making the house itself the narrator of the whole novel, a feat which makes impossible our knowing anything beyond what goes on inside the house, in its yard, or what other characters say within its hearing. There is racial diversity in the cast. VERDICT With its Brazilian setting and multiracial cast, this well-realized tale's tightly woven development delivers warmth and humor.” (School Library Journal, Francisca Goldsmith)



Northranger

Rey Terciero • Best for 8th Grade - 12th Grade • Graphic Novel

2024 ALA Rainbow Book List Top Ten for Teen Readers “A creative retelling of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, this graphic novel follows queer Latinx teen Cade Muñoz as he is forced to spend his summer working at a ranch in rural Texas to help support his family. Cade dreads being away from his only oasis, the movie theater in his hometown of Abilene. However, he finds an instant connection with the ranch owner's son, Henry Tyler, who shares his interest in horror movies. The two begin spending time away from the ranch in the evenings, and Cade begins to develop feelings for Henry. But amid their newfound romance, he still can't help but wonder about the dark rumors surrounding the Tyler family. Will his summer come to resemble the horror movies he loves so much? Terciero captures the experience of growing up queer in rural America. Cade faces homophobia, ignorance, and racism, and both he and Henry question how to come out to their families. Henry's struggles with grief, depression, and suicidal ideation are handled with compassion. Pages drawn entirely in sepia tones contribute to the eerie tone of the story. Overall, this is a great read whether readers are familiar with the source material or not. VERDICT A heartfelt romance that captures the experience of growing up queer in rural America, this is recommended for all graphic novel collections.” (School Library Journal, Jillian Girardea)



Boys Run the Riot (Book 1)

Keito Gaku • Best for 8th Grade - 12th Grade • Manga

2021 ALA Rainbow Book List Top 10 YA. School Library Journal Top Ten Manga of 2021. Top Ten Manga Of 2021. "Ryo is a trans guy who is struggling to be clear with his family and friends about his identity. He feels most at ease in his favorite street fashion, and he adores the way that clothes help the wearer express their true self. He's startled when he realizes a new classmate Jin, who he'd dismissed as a potential bully, shares his love of fashion and proposes they team up to start their own brand. Can Jin be the friend and confidant Ryo's been hoping to find? This series from trans creator Gaku eschews the tropes and pitfalls of manga's comedic takes on gender identity and instead presents a grounded, character-driven look at life as a trans guy in Japan. A standout title among a selection of recent manga addressing the reality of queer life, this is a must-have for teens." (School Library Journal)



Messy Roots

Laura Gao • Best for 7th Grade - 12th Grade • Memoir

Publishers Weekly Starred Review. School Library Journal Starred Review. Horn Book Starred Review. "Born in Wuhan, China, young Yuyang grows up surrounded by rice paddies, riding water buffalo with her mischievous cousins under the watchful eyes of her grandparents. But soon she joins her parents, who are attending graduate school in the United States, and she finds herself in a frightening, overstimulating world. Her teachers and classmates can't pronounce her name, and she drops her Chinese name for "Laura," after then-First Lady Laura Bush. Gao describes the American public school system, where she felt desperate to fit in and become the star basketball player; the University of Pennsylvania, where she was able to carve out her identity; and life as a young professional in San Francisco before circling back to Wuhan today and the specter of the COVID pandemic. Her voice is grounded yet humorous; she illustrates a more nuanced Wuhan than the one depicted in current media, while conveying the difficulty of being a part of American society yet never feeling truly at home. Underpinning her external struggles is Gao's deeper understanding of herself as she reckons with her sexual identity, eventually coming out as queer. Depicting her hometown in thick, organic brushstrokes and a warm palette, she evokes a sense of peace and beauty and a longing to return to her origins. For scenes in America, Gao relies on a muddy palette that suggests the challenges of fitting into an uncomfortable environment. VERDICT A tender story of self-acceptance that lifts the story of Wuhan beyond COVID and shines light on a region with a rich culture and history." (School Library Journal, Elise Martinez.)