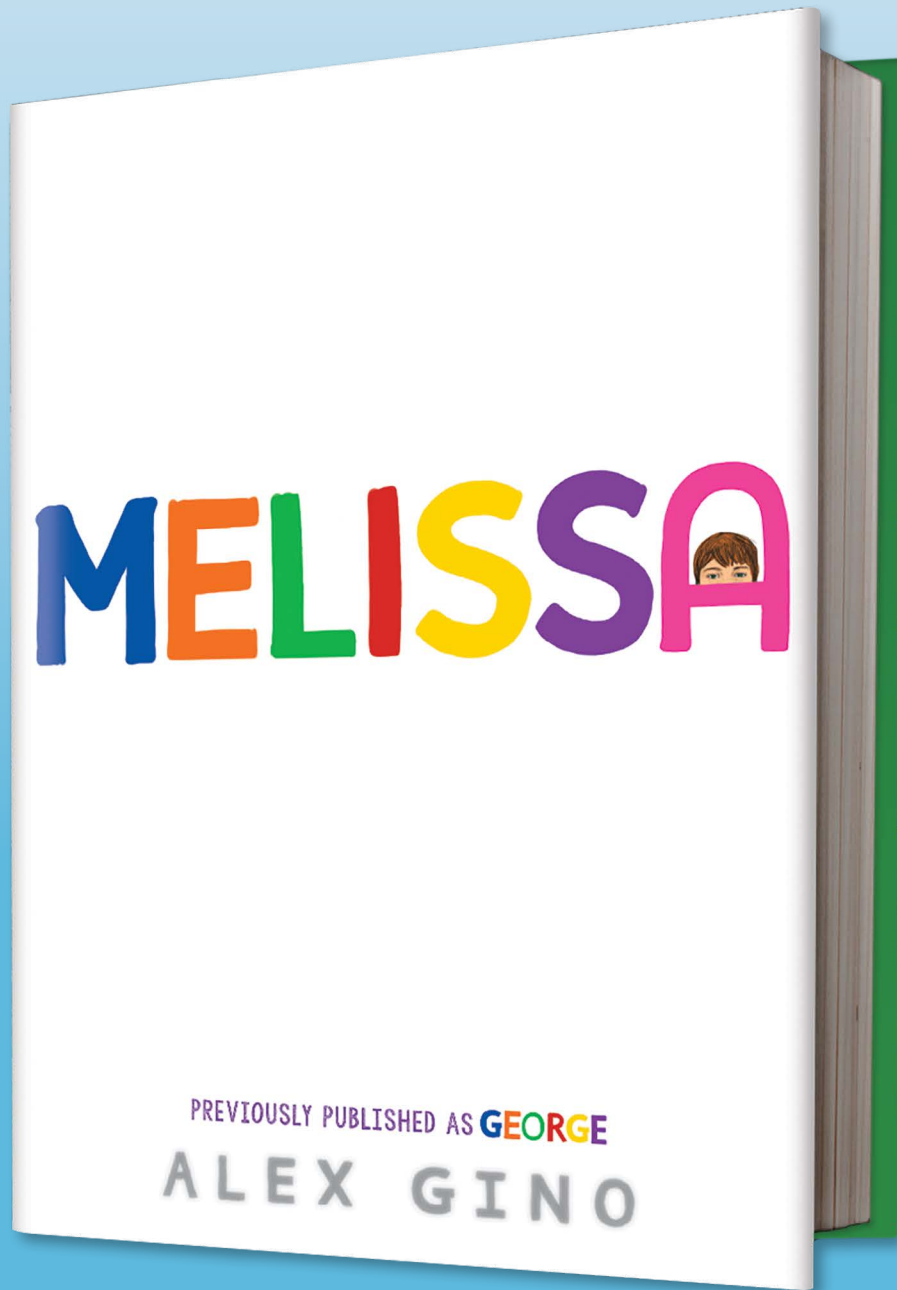


DISCUSSION GUIDE

MELISSA

BY ALEX GINO

AGES 8-12
GRADES 3-7



 SCHOLASTIC

ABOUT MELISSA



The unforgettable debut from Stonewall Award winner Alex Gino.

When people look at Melissa, they think they see a boy named George. But she knows she's not a boy. She knows she's a girl.

Melissa thinks she'll have to keep this a secret forever. Then her teacher announces that their class play is going to be *Charlotte's Web*. Melissa really, really, REALLY wants to play Charlotte. But the teacher says she can't even try out for the part . . . because she's a boy.

With the help of her best friend, Kelly, Melissa comes up with a plan. Not just so she can be Charlotte—but so everyone can know who she is, once and for all.

BE WHO YOU ARE.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Melissa and Rick used to be friends, but something changed when Jeff moved to town. Why do you think Rick changed? How could he try to be a better friend to Melissa?
2. Melissa wants to talk to her mom about how she feels and who she is, but she's not sure how to. What are some things that her mom did that made it more difficult for Melissa to talk to her? What are some things she did that made it possible for Melissa to finally open up?
3. Do you think it's fair that the boys and girls can't try out for the same parts in the play? How does it make you feel when people say that some things (like pink or blue) are only for boys or girls?
4. Why doesn't Melissa want one of the other roles Ms. Udell offers?
5. Melissa finally decides to stand up to Jeff after she hears him making fun of Charlotte. Why do you think Melissa cares so much about Charlotte?
6. Kelly says, "Ms. Udell is wrong. You should be Charlotte." (p. 134) Do you agree with Kelly? Should Melissa have a chance to be Charlotte too?
7. When Melissa tells her family the truth about herself, her mother and brother have different reactions. How do they react? How does it make Melissa feel?
8. At the end of the performance of the play, Melissa thinks: "Charlotte was dead, but George was alive in a way she had never imagined." (p. 157) What does this mean?
9. Principal Maldonado tells Melissa's mom, "Well, you can't control who your children are, but you can certainly support them, am I right?" (p. 160) Do you think Melissa's mom understands what she means? Why does Principal Maldonado tell her this?
10. Melissa's mom says, "I just don't want you to make your road any harder than it has to be." (p. 170) What are some ways Melissa's life is already hard? Can you think of some ways her life might be made easier?
11. Why do you think Melissa's mom gives her back her bag full of magazines?
12. The morning she and Kelly are going to the zoo, Melissa gets up early and goes out to swing. Talk about how you think the swinging makes her feel and why she has chosen to start her day that way.
13. Kelly doesn't have to ask Melissa to pose for any pictures during their zoo day. Why do you think that is? What things are different for Melissa that day?
14. The tagline for *Melissa* is: "Be Who You Are." Discuss what this means to you. What are some ways that you can be who you are? What are some ways that you can support other people in being who they are?
15. Who in the book would you try to be like if a friend told you something they were nervous to share? Who would you try not to be like? What did those people do that was helpful or hurtful?
16. Why is Melissa's name important to her? Why are names or nicknames important? What power does using someone's name hold? How does the author use pronouns in this book for Melissa in narration and in dialogue, and how did that affect your understanding of her as a character?

Note: These questions about the main character in this book use her chosen name, Melissa, and her pronouns: she/her.

ALSO AVAILABLE FROM ALEX GINO

ABOUT *YOU DON'T KNOW EVERYTHING, JILLY P!*



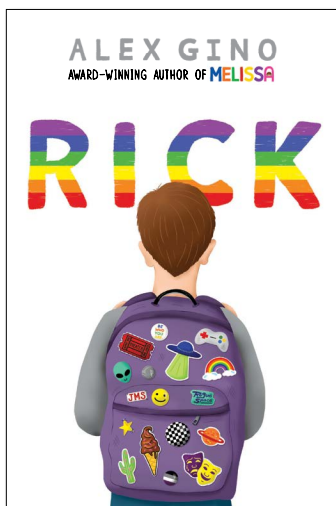
Jilly thinks she's figured out how life works. But when her sister, Emma, is born Deaf, she realizes how much she still has to learn. The world is going to treat Jilly, who is white and hearing, differently from Emma, just as it will treat them both differently from their Black cousins.

A big fantasy reader, Jilly makes a connection online with another fantasy fan, Derek, who is a Deaf, Black ASL user. She goes to Derek for help with Emma but doesn't always know the best way or time to ask for it.

As she and Derek meet in person, have some really fun conversations, and become friends, Jilly makes some mistakes . . . but comes to understand that it's up to her, not Derek, to figure out how to do better next time—especially when she wants to be there for Derek the most.

Within a world where kids like Derek and Emma aren't assured the same freedom or safety as kids like Jilly, Jilly is starting to learn all the things she doesn't know—and by doing that, she's also working to discover how to support her family and her friends. With *You Don't Know Everything, Jilly P!*, award-winning author Alex Gino uses their trademark humor, heart, and humanity to show readers how being open to difference can make you a better person, and how being open to change can make you change in the best possible ways.

ABOUT *RICK*

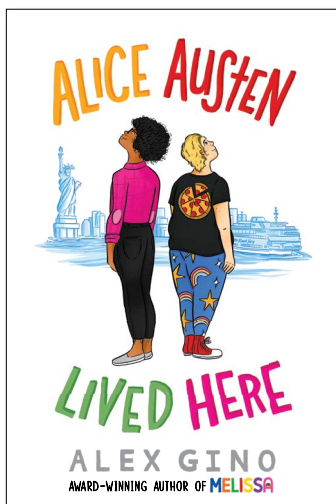


Rick's never questioned much. He's gone along with his best friend Jeff, even when Jeff's acted like a bully and a jerk. He's let his father joke with him about which hot girls he might want to date even though that kind of talk always makes him uncomfortable. And he hasn't given his own identity much thought, because everyone else around him seems to have figured it out.

But now Rick's gotten to middle school, and new doors are opening. One of them leads to the school's Rainbow Spectrum club, where kids of many genders and identities congregate, including Melissa, the girl who sits in front of Rick in class and seems to have her life together. Rick wants his own life to be that . . . understood. Even if it means breaking some old friendships and making some new ones.

As they did in their groundbreaking novel *Melissa*, in *Rick*, award-winning author Alex Gino explores what it means to search for your own place in the world . . . and all the steps you and the people around you need to take in order to get where you need to be.

ABOUT *ALICE AUSTEN LIVED HERE*



Sam is very in touch with their own queer identity. They're nonbinary, and their best friend, TJ, is nonbinary as well. Sam's family is very cool with it . . . as long as Sam remembers that nonbinary kids are also required to clean their rooms, do their homework, and try not to antagonize their teachers too much.

The teacher-respect thing is hard when it comes to Sam's history class, because their teacher seems to believe that only Dead Straight Cis White Men are responsible for history. When Sam's home borough of Staten Island opens up a contest for a new statue, Sam finds the perfect non-DSCWM subject: photographer Alice Austen, whose house has been turned into a museum, and who lived with a female partner for decades.

Soon, Sam's project isn't just about winning the contest. It's about discovering a rich queer history that Sam's a part of—a queer history that no longer needs to be quiet, as long as there are kids like Sam and TJ to stand up for it.

RESOURCES

The Genderbread Person genderbread.org

TransKids Purple Rainbow Foundation transkidspurplerrainbow.org

National Center for Transgender Equality transequality.org

National Coalition Against Censorship | Book Challenge Crisis Hotline ncac.org/book-challenge-crisis-hotline

National Council of Teachers of English | Affirming Gender Diversity through ELA Curriculum and Pedagogy ncte.org/statement/guidelines-for-affirming-gender-diversity-through-ela-curriculum-and-pedagogy

National Council of Teachers of English | Intellectual Freedom Center ncte.org/resources/ncte-intellectual-freedom-center

Publishers Weekly | Alex Gino Debuts New Title and Cover for Groundbreaking Trans Novel publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-book-news/article/87750-alex-gino-debuts-new-title-and-cover-for-groundbreaking-trans-novel.html

Teen Vogue | How to Use Gender-Neutral Words teenvogue.com/story/how-to-use-gender-neutral-words

The Trevor Project | Guide to Being an Ally to Transgender and Nonbinary Youth thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Guide-to-Being-an-Ally-to-Transgender-and-Nonbinary-Youth.pdf

The Trevor Project | National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health (2021) thetrevorproject.org/survey-2021

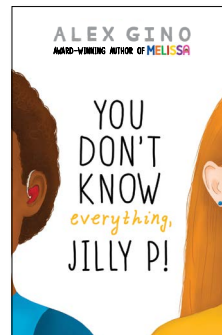
The Washington Post | FAQ: What you need to know about transgender children washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2021/04/22/transgender-child-sports-treatments

PRAISE FOR ALEX GINO



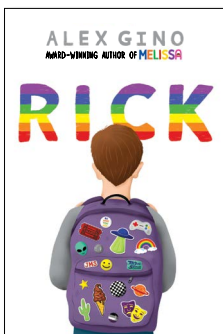
PB: 9781338843415 • \$8.99
HC: 9781338843408 • \$18.99
Also available in ebook and audio formats.
Ages 8–12

- ★ **Booklist**
- ★ **Kirkus Reviews**
- ★ **Publishers Weekly**
- ★ **School Library Journal**
- Stonewall Book Award
- Lambda Literary Award
- E. B. White Honor Book
- CBC Children's Choice Book Award (Debut Author)
- National Parenting Publications Awards Silver Award
- 19+ Best Of and State Reading Lists



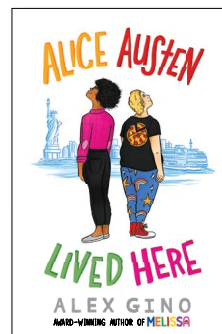
PB: 9780545956253 • \$7.99
HC: 9780545956246 • \$16.99
Also available in ebook and audio formats.
Ages 8–12

- ★ **Kirkus Reviews**
- ★ **Publishers Weekly**
- ★ **School Library Journal**
- A Bank Street College of Education's Best Children's Book of the Year
- A Kirkus Best Book of the Year
- Connecticut Nutmeg Award Reading List
- Iowa Children's Choice Book Award Masterlist
- Maine Student Book Award Reading List



PB: 9781338048117 • \$7.99
HC: 9781338048100 • \$17.99
Also available in ebook and audio formats.
Ages 8–12

- ★ **Booklist**
- ★ **Kirkus Reviews**
- ★ **Publishers Weekly**
- ★ **School Library Journal**
- A Bank Street Best Children's Book of the Year (Outstanding Merit)
- Jane Addams Children's Book Award Finalist
- Maine Student Book Award Reading List



HC: 9781338733891 • \$17.99
Also available in ebook and audio formats.
Ages 9–12

- ★ “. . . a testament to the power of intergenerational queer community.”
—Publishers Weekly, starred review
- ★ “An essential story to non-LGBTQIA+ and LGBTQIA+ kids alike.”
—Booklist, starred review
- “Gino successfully continues the shift seen in Rick from stories about discovering identity to discovering one's place in their community.”
—Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

Photo © Blake C. Aarens



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ALEX GINO loves glitter, ice cream, gardening, awe-ful puns, and stories that reflect the diversity and complexity of being alive. *Melissa* (previously published as *George*) was their first novel. They are also the author of *Rick*, *Alice Austen Lived Here*, and *You Don't Know Everything, Jilly P!* For more about Alex, please visit alexgino.com.