



Waves of YA, Episode 15: Casual Gay Reads

00;00;07;07 - 00;00;21;15

Sara

[SARA] Hello and welcome to Wave of YA a podcast focused on young, adult literacy brought to you by the Ocean County Library Teen Literacy Workgroup. My name is Sara and I'm the branch manager of Waretown Branch joining me today we have...

00;00;21;16 - 00;00;24;04

Cecilia

[CECILIA] I'm Cecilia, I'm from the Toms River Branch.

00;00;24;19 - 00;00;26;07

Chris

[CHRIS] I'm Chris from the Lakewood Branch.

00;00;26;21 - 00;00;29;08

Kristen

[KRISTEN] And I'm Kristen from the Little Egg Harbor Branch.

00;00;29;22 - 00;00;47;14

Sara

[SARA] In today's episode, we will be discussing LGBTQ plus reads. It feels great to be represented in literature. We are going to discuss some books and graphic novels that really show up for Pride. So do you guys prefer your LGBTQ reads with or without the romance, or could you go either way?

00;00;48;01 - 00;01;09;22

Cecilia

[CECILIA] I like romance in general, so I'm probably a bad person to ask for this question. But I do appreciate when there are characters that are just queer and that's who they are. There's no romantic portions to the story. That's not the main focus, but that is my preference for reading in general. So...

00;01;09;22 - 00;01;35;24

Sara

[SARA] I don't think I'm a big romance person, but I think it's great to see sexualities and identities represented in any way. And I do love when the romance feels organic. I don't like when the romance is inserted. Sometimes it just feels like to be like, Oh yes, this character has this sexual identity. And it's like, well, you could have just put that in the story without forcing a romance that didn't feel organic in there.

00;01;36;04 - 00;01;44;16

Sara

[SARA] But if the story plotline really revolves around this and it all ties in and makes sense, then I love it. Absolutely.

00;01;44;24 - 00;02;03;20

Chris

[CHRIS] I kind of the either way, where I normally do not like romance in my YA because I'm like there is a plot let's get going. So I still like that, even like LGBT. So like, if I'm reading a romance, I'm like, absolutely. Like, this is great, this is what I want. But otherwise I'm like, just let them be casually gay.

00;02;03;21 - 00;02;20;26

Chris

[CHRIS] Like, we don't need to shoehorn that romance in. And be, like, and it's diverse and we've shoehorned two things into it. And I'm just like, let the characters be casually gay, if they have a girlfriend and they're going to go fight crime or whatever, let's go, with like...casual gay. No, it's not. Yeah. Just, you know, jeans, stickers. It's all good.

00;02;22;06 - 00;02;51;02

Kristen

[KRISTEN] I like LGBTQ romance, but I only like the beginning of the romance. Like, I like the first book in a series when they're, like, flirting and, like, does he like me? Does he not like me? Do I like her? I'm not sure I have butterflies. Like, I like that part. Otherwise, like, casual gay is really my wheelhouse because I like the I'm doing my like I'm just doing my life.

00;02;51;02 - 00;03;06;11

Kristen

[KRISTEN] And also I'm gay or I'm bi. So I think that for me, I like the beginning of the romance, but not the full blown romance. With a capital like. Not the formal romance. Casual romance?

00;03;06;20 - 00;03;27;21

Sara

[SARA] Yeah. So you like the yearning? I think I actually, I'm the opposite. I like when it's like a solidified relationship. I really jibe with that. But I get the yearning too, I guess. I guess sometimes like Chris was saying, I'm like, okay, get on with it though. Like because you get

frustrated with the characters, especially with a really deep, slow burn, you're like, okay, come on, come on.

00;03;27;24 - 00;03;29;17

Sara

[SARA] You both like each other. Let's go.

00;03;30;23 - 00;03;49;20

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Yes. And that's what I like, because I get to yell at the book. I'm like, clearly, you are both really into each other and you just need to like make this happen. Just get on same page and then I can be mad at the book, but not for bad things that happened in the book. But just like this character is just being so stubborn right now.

00;03;50;04 - 00;04;08;28

Chris

[CHRIS] Slow burns are also like, if it's romance, it's a slow burn. You're like, We know where we're going. But when are we getting there, like how? Like I will read every fake dating relationship ever. What? They hate each other. They have to be in a fake relationship. What will happen? Who knows if they're going to fall in love? And I will read all of them because I'm like, this is what I'm here for.

00;04;09;05 - 00;04;13;01

Chris

[CHRIS] I've signed up for romance, and I've signed up for a fake relationship. Let's go. Oh.

00;04;13;01 - 00;04;16;21

Sara

[SARA] I love it when they're clear about that. I like getting what I signed up for. All right.

00;04;17;07 - 00;04;48;11

Cecilia

[CECILIA] I'm looking at my list of all the books that I wanted to talk about, and I would say, like, 50/50, like half are romance. Half are like more identity coming into your identity books. And I feel like early LGBTQ YA was all either coming out or like struggling with identity. And I think there's like a wide variety now, especially dipping into like with different genres and whatnot.

00;04;48;13 - 00;05;21;20

Sara

[SARA] Yeah, and that's absolutely nice to see. It is definitely nice to see that not be the focal point of the story. And I do think that those stories, these coming out stories, coming to terms with identities, facing society, but that those are all very important stories and it's lovely and wonderful to see those represented. At the same time, it is very refreshing to get those stories kind of wiped clean of that trauma that LGBTQ people face in everyday life.

00;05;22;08 - 00;05;31;12

Sara

[SARA] So it's just nice to get it. No homophobia, no transphobia. Everything's happy, or at least minimal. And the story is something else.

00;05;31;27 - 00;05;38;15

Cecilia

[CECILIA] Which LGBTQ plus character from your reads did you find the most compelling and interesting?

00;05;38;19 - 00;06;02;11

Chris

[CHRIS] I really like Chicky from Miss Meteor by Tehler Kay Mejia. She is pansexual and like the plot it's one of like like casual gay books, where it's like her best friend's trying to win a beauty pageant. They had stopped being friends because her best friend is literally an alien from outer space. That was her best friend's secret. and her secret was, she's like, oh, no, I like girls.

00;06;02;22 - 00;06;23;07

Chris

[CHRIS] I think I'm a lesbian, but I'm not a lesbian. So like seeing her and her best friend, like, become friends again and also, like, work together to, like, figure out how to save her friend that's an alien from turning back into Stardust and also her friend being like, okay, so you like girls, but you're also in love with Junior, who's a guy, so you're not a lesbian.

00;06;23;07 - 00;06;40;13

Chris

[CHRIS] You're Pan. Like getting to that and like watching her try and like figure that out. I just really enjoyed it. Also, like their friendship, like you, like they're going to be best friends again. So I was like, I can't wait to see them be best friends again and like watch them all to figure it out and like tell each other the truth.

00;06;40;13 - 00;06;53;27

Chris

[CHRIS] And I was like, I'm so here for this. It's like, she's definitely making a huge thing out of something where she's like, if you had talked to your best friend five years ago, you guys, you would've had nowhere near as many problems. I do also love all of these issues, guys.

00;06;53;28 - 00;06;56;15

Cecilia

[CECILIA] It is so good.

00;06;57;06 - 00;07;26;01

Sara

[SARA] Yes because I was gonna say that author also wrote the Henna Wars, which I read, I think like a year or two ago. I loved it. I cried. But that actually wasn't the character. I want to talk about today. I think I did actually want to talk about the characters from We Set the Dark on Fire, because Danni and Carmen, basically whenever my partner or I read a book or consume any piece of media together, we assign each other characters from that media, even if they don't fit.

00;07;26;01 - 00;07;51;16

Sara

[SARA] We're like, You're that person, you're that person in that couple. I remember distinctly reading that book together and like debating over who was Danni and who was Carmen. I wound up being Danni to nobody's surprise, but I really actually did, as I more read into it, I really like Danni's story because she was like a late bloomer when it came to her sexuality, not like an on purpose type thing, but just because life is busy and it gets in the way.

00;07;51;16 - 00;08;09;24

Sara

[SARA] And I really resonated with that because that's kind of what happened with me is that life was busy, it got in the way. It was easier not to focus on it. And then all of a sudden one day when you have feelings for somebody else, you're like, Oh, now I have to deal with this. So I watched Danni deal with that and it reminded me of when I had to deal with it myself.

00;08;10;04 - 00;08;50;13

Kristen

[KRISTEN] I really like WAYLON from Pumpkin to Julie Murphy's I think that's the third the Dumplin Universe and I liked Waylon a lot because he is a fat gay character. He's openly gay in his high school, but he lives in a really small town. It's weird. I'm frustrated with Waylon because he is waiting until it's his time, right? He feels stifled in this small town and he's like, Well, when I leave here and I move to Dallas or wherever, then I'm going to wear all the clothes that I always wanted to wear and I'm going to be the out gay that I want to be, right?

00;08;50;29 - 00;09;24;22

Kristen

[KRISTEN] So I'm frustrated because I'm like, Just do it now, buddy. But also that's like something I totally relate to when I think about my younger self or sometimes think about myself now I'm like, Oh, I'm just waiting for this X thing to happen before I can be the me that I want to be. And so I really resonate with Waylon for the same reasons that, I'm going to bring a different one in, in Girl From the Sea by Molly Ostertag that character, that's like I'm in this beautiful place by the ocean and it's wonderful and everyone comes here for their vacations.

00;09;24;22 - 00;09;45;13

Kristen

[KRISTEN] But I feel like I am stifled and once I can leave, my world will start. So it's like a little bit bittersweet because I love them, because they've got this yearning. But at the same time I'm

sad for them because they're waiting for their life to start, even though their life is currently happening.

00;09;45;13 - 00;10;04;23

Cecilia

[CECILIA] I don't know if anybody's read Bloom. It's also a graphic novel, but that's what it reminded me of. Like, his parents owned this bakery, and he's like, when I leave, I could be the person I am. That just reminded me of that. It's not even one of my many books on here.

00;10;04;23 - 00;10;21;07

Kristen

[KRISTEN] In Pumpkin, he's like, got a whole closet of clothes that are ready for when he feels like he's in the place where he can be himself. And, you know, it's got like cute little throwbacks to like current pop culture because he watches something that is not RuPaul's Drag Race.

00;10;21;07 - 00;10;22;11

Cecilia

[CECILIA] Yes, definitely not.

00;10;22;22 - 00;10;35;09

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Totally not. But sounds a lot like our world's RuPaul's Drag Race, it feels contemporary without having to really try, it just fits.

00;10;35;09 - 00;11;46;17

Cecilia

[CECILIA] I read Pumpkin and that was my first Julie Murphy and I was like, Ooh, I like this. I just finished this book yesterday and I was speed reading it for this podcast because I loved it so much. Loveless by Alice Oseman, who did the Heart Stopper series. The main character, Georgia is I guess it's a new adult book because she's entering college, so she's like a college freshman and breaking away from like the friend she had she meets is very outspoken roommate and she's struggling because she can't find that love, a romantic kind of love. And throughout the book, she realizes that she's ARO-ACE and the internal struggle of her not wanting to have that identity, and like, I don't want that to be me, I want to find that love and I want to have these emotions just because of what society has been saying. But then coming to realize, you know, accepting that this is who she is and that there's other kinds of love in the world, like there's platonic love.

00;11;46;17 - 00;12;05;21

Cecilia

[CECILIA] And she realizes that her friends are the love that she has. That struggle of the kind of self-discovery journey was awesome to see, especially for people who are ARO-ACE, too. And there's so many definitions, too, of different things.

00;12;06;16 - 00;12;26;01

Sara

[SARA] Absolutely and that's honestly a sexuality that really isn't, there's little representation of it in literature and we're just starting to get it. I'm sure that this means we're going to get more and that's amazing. But it really is nice to see those first few of them really hit the shelves now.

00;12;26;19 - 00;12;55;08

Cecilia

[CECILIA] The one I really loved is there were multiple characters in the book that I identified that way too. So you see people, someone from a diverse background who kind of is a mentor to her in a book, and then she realized someone else close to her is feeling these emotions and like they're helping each other. And I thought seeing the diversity of the identity in this story was also really, really good to see.

00;12;55;08 - 00;13;08;14

Cecilia

[CECILIA] Like, she kind of felt like, oh, it's not just me, other people feel this way, too, it's a thing. At one point someone says, Oh, is this an Internet thing? No, it's a it's a real thing.

00;13;10;00 - 00;13;29;00

Sara

[SARA] Yeah. And I think actually that kind of mimics at least how I feel it happens in real life. Like once you discover this identity, you put out feelers, and at least thankfully right, nowadays with, you know, with the Internet and with things being more open, all of a sudden, you start to and you're like, Oh, oh, there, there.

00;13;29;00 - 00;13;37;20

Sara

[SARA] They're everywhere. I just didn't know. It's interesting how quickly, once you do come out, that you really start to connect with people in your community.

00;13;38;14 - 00;13;41;04

Chris

[CHRIS] So what are some must reads for representation?

00;13;41;21 - 00;14;05;10

Sara

[SARA] I'll just start off, my must read is on, I think, most of your guys lists so you guys have probably also read it, Last Night at the Telegraph Club, yeah, by Malinda Lo, an absolute must read because it doesn't just talk about queerness, it talks about the history of queerness, the history of lesbian queerness, especially, which you don't usually get to often.

00;14;05;11 - 00;14;43;21

Sara

[SARA] And then also the impacts of this within different cultures, particularly the Chinese immigrant culture. And then what I found most important is it talks about the racism that existed and still exists within queer spaces, that while you might find a community where you're accepted here for your queerness, you're still ostracized based on your race, ethnicity, religion, etc. And then you can go to your safe place where you're accepted with your race or ethnicity or religion, but then you're not accepted for your queerness and kind of straddling that weird line.

00;14;43;21 - 00;14;54;07

Sara

[SARA] And that's still a problem that is very prevalent today. So I really appreciated that work, drawing attention to the history, but also drawing attention to the fact that this still exists.

00;14;55;01 - 00;15;15;10

Chris

[CHRIS] I also had Last Night at the Telegraph Club for the same reasons. My other one is another it was so, I swam through that, and like I need this woman to write more books so I could read all of them. My other one I chose. It was another historical fiction, Like a Love Story, by Abdi Nazemian, which is set in the early nineties.

00;15;15;10 - 00;15;40;02

Chris

[CHRIS] It's historical fiction. It is right in the middle of the worst part of the AIDS epidemic. It's weird now as an adult, we're like growing up. AIDS was such a huge, huge thing and so very in-your-face of how widespread it was, how just the numbers of people dying, especially queer people just dying from it. I mean, a huge, huge deal.

00;15;40;02 - 00;16;02;10

Chris

[CHRIS] And now, it's like really way lower numbers. There's like medication where you don't have symptoms, which is awesome, but that was so, so recent. And like, teens don't realize that because like, they weren't even alive at that point. Like, they have no memory of it. And I'm like, guys, it was like not that long ago. It's still really important.

00;16;02;10 - 00;16;18;14

Chris

[CHRIS] You're like, Oh, like the teens now are like, it's not that big of a deal. Like it was a huge deal. This is like part of LGBT history. It is a major part of recent LGBT history of like how recent this was kind of like me realizing like, hey, my mom was alive when Martin Luther King Junior was shot.

00;16;18;14 - 00;16;41;09

Chris

[CHRIS] I'm like, oh, this is the same thing of like, that's really recent for these kids that they just look out of the thing for, like reading about the history and especially recent history and getting to see that and see the different perspectives of Reza, who was an Iranian immigrant who was closeted and him, like, coming to terms with his sexuality. ah, I forgot the girl's name,

00;16;41;09 - 00;17;03;26

Chris

[CHRIS] I think Judy, her uncle was queer and like involved in the Act Up organization and like all of his activism. And then like, oh, I forgot the guy's name, I read it a while ago, and seeing him and like everyone's different perspectives on it and how they're behaving and like whether they're choosing to be out in this time or it's super dangerous and the stigma around it as well.

00;17;04;07 - 00;17;21;05

Chris

[CHRIS] It was really good. Like I cried at the ending of like I knew where this was going because partially like I was young, but like even like in middle school in the early 2000, like this was still prevalent and like still a thing that was like taught as part of your health class. It was like you didn't know about this.

00;17;21;05 - 00;17;36;24

Chris

[CHRIS] And like, I know where the stories going, cried hysterically, and I was like, Yep, cried but so, so well done and like, so important to know, like past history, like far back history and also really recent history and realize just how recent that was.

00;17;37;03 - 00;18;00;02

Sara

[SARA] Absolutely. I think it's super important and I have to give that a read because that sounds incredible. It really is something that I feel like you don't hear too much about. Before, somebody mentioned to me when this whole fun stuff started, something about, Oh, this is the first pandemic epidemic since blah, blah, blah. And it's like, well, excusing all of the other ones you forgot there was, you know, AIDS.

00;18;02;00 - 00;18;13;19

Sara

[SARA] And it does, I think, get a lot of oversight, unfortunately, we do need to keep not just the memory of it alive, but also the awareness of the fact that it is still a viable disease, alive.

00;18;13;26 - 00;18;49;00

Cecilia

[CECILIA] Yeah, I've definitely seen trends in YA books set in the eighties and nineties focusing on that time period because kids are interested in the history that sometimes educators try to hide and put in the background, then, you know, it's a part of their history too, as part of the

queer community and like finding out all those little things and Stonewall and all those things that led to what we have today and what we're still fighting for today.

00;18;49;09 - 00;19;20;26

Chris

[CHRIS] I feel like I've seen more like stuff for Stonewall because it's far enough back where it's like it's definitely history, where it's like a safe distance, where like teachers themselves feel comfortable discussing because they're like, well, it's really in the past that's like your parents or your grandparents age, whereas like it could be older siblings for this and it's like if the history but it's like yesterday kind of history where it's not as safe of a gap to like discuss like, what do you mean that was like in my like siblings lifetime.

00;19;21;15 - 00;19;51;21

Kristen

[KRISTEN] I would just add another must read Sara you mentioned the Henna Wars, but I just want to highlight the Henna Wars because it had all of the things that I said about of romance where it's like our hands touched, oh, I wonder, do they feel the same? But also there's like some of the enemies become lovers, kind of, because they have a class project and the main character, who maybe will be her love interest, are both doing a henna stand as their business proposal.

00;19;51;29 - 00;21;16;16

Kristen

[KRISTEN] But in addition to the beginnings of a romance, the enemies become lovers, the Henna Wars is also really great talking about cultural appropriation because for the main character, henna is part of her culture and she wants to do a henna stand as her business proposal for her like end of the year project because it means something to her. And some other girls in the class are like, oh, well, maybe we could do henna because like, I'm a good artist and the ability of the main character to speak in a way that didn't shut down the other girls, to speak about what henna meant to her, why it might be problematic for other girls to be doing it when it wasn't their culture, and then to have that educational conversation and then come back and say, we're still in a competition and I'm going to beat you. So I liked all of the pieces of the Henna Wars. You also had the cultural awareness of a Bangladeshi family with a daughter who just came out as a lesbian and are telling her, no, you're not. I don't know why you would say that. And she pretty much knows like, I didn't just say that. Like, I know who I am and I'm trying to tell you who I am, so please recognize who I am. So the Henna Wars I read more recently and I thought it was a phenomenal read.

00;21;17;11 - 00;21;32;00

Cecilia

{CECILIA} Yeah, I read Hani and Ishu and I literally just wrote down Henna Wars because I love the author. I can't not mention Boys Run the Riot because manga.

00;21;32;04 - 00;21;32;26

Chris

[CHRIS] That was so good.

00;21;33;01 - 00;22;14;04

Cecilia

[CECILIA] Yes, I only read the first volume, but just having a trans gender character in manga I think is just like a huge thing for the genre. There's low key romance, but the story is about starting a fashion line, which is you also don't see like that a lot in manga, too, the more like LGBTQ manga, the better. Another one is a Witch's Love at the End of the World, although I only read the first volume. But again, it's about romance, but it's also about magic. And there's also other things going on.

00;22;14;04 - 00;22;51;02

Chris

[CHRIS] Boys Run the Riot, I read all of it and was like hunting for it. Like when is the release date? I need the next volume. So the other cool thing is the mangaka is also trans. Yes, which is also super, super rare for manga totally own voices. It's from trans representation. This is awesome. And it deals with the main character being trans but also focusing on like fashion and why fashion is so important to them as a representation of who they are and like coming out to people and see how people react.

00;22;51;25 - 00;23;12;26

Chris

[CHRIS] It was so, so good. And also there's translations in the back of the book that used to be more popular and prevalent when manga was first was popular. That kind of got away with it in some the but this has them where it goes into some of the things with translation of phrasing that we don't catch because English is not as gendered phrasing.

00;23;13;12 - 00;24;18;05

Chris

[CHRIS] We have a lot more gender neutral terms, whereas Japanese, some of it doesn't come across like how they phrased it. We're like, okay, that's a normal sentence. But they're like, your word choice, we don't catch because the translation gets explained. And then also a lot of cultural things as well around surrounding being transgender in Japan gets explained as well and different points get made and it's just really cool to have that as well because you're reading the story and you're also getting cultural background for the author and the story as well, and this character and like what they're going through specifically in Japan, also the last volume has because this was originally like a one chapter story that they got handed and it was really interesting seeing the different tone of like it had. It was deep, but it wasn't like super deep and heavy and dark. But that original story was much deeper and darker and a lot heavier. So seeing the shift in tone from like the first version of this to where it got was also really interesting.

00;24;19;03 - 00;24;44;26

Chris

[CHRIS] So I really enjoyed seeing the difference of this is what the author wrote as I, like, I have one thing to say, I want to say it and I want to make it have a punch like, oh, this is really popular, really well received. Now I can do four volumes and pull it out and make it a little bit lighter, a little bit more like easier for people who have a palate when it's not what they're normally going to go for.

00;24;45;10 - 00;25;14;04

Sara

[SARA] I love that and I'm really happy to hear about that. I'm definitely going to put in. I had no idea about this series. It is really exciting to see, especially coming from, you know, there are different places in the world where acceptance is very different. Then there's different places in America where acceptance is very different. So it's nice to see not just representation but kind of fair representation because a big weeb, I don't know the politically correct term.

00;25;15;29 - 00;25;32;17

Sara

[SARA] It's always very disappointing to see any sort of LGBT representations getting really mangled and clearly like played for a joke or something along those lines. And it's nice to see the tide changing in that regard.

00;25;33;00 - 00;25;42;23

Cecilia

[CECILIA] Yeah, it's not mostly yuri and yaoi stuff now. It's all some own voices and trickling through.

00;25;42;23 - 00;26;11;29

Chris

[CHRIS] There's a lot like cuter fluffier stuff now too. Like, which is Love at the End of the World, Strawberry Fields Once Again, they're so cute and fluffy, which is not my genre at all. I'm like, Shonen, give me the action fighting. And I'm like, these three shot volumes of, like, just cute, fluffy falling in love, is so like, I was so here for this. Like, this isn't even my thing, I like. It's so cute, though, how can you not love it.

00;26;12;12 - 00;26;20;27

Sara

[SARA] I get it. I feel the same way. I'm a big Shonen fan, but when it comes to something like a cute little Sapphic romance like fluff for days, give it to me. I don't care.

00;26;20;27 - 00;26;28;19

Cecilia

[CECILIA] Another must read. It's a J book, but J could be YA people. Frankie and Bug by Gayle Forman.

00;26;29;05 - 00;26;32;10

Sara

[SARA] I just put that on a display, so thank you for telling me that it's good.

00;26;32;23 - 00;27;01;05

Cecilia

[CECILIA] It is good. It's also set in the eighties, about a ten year old Bug who gets visited by their neighbor's nephew Frankie. And throughout the book you learn that Frankie is transgender. And because they live in California, there is more of an accepting presence than where Frankie lives in the Midwest. So it's about them, like, they kind of hate each other in the beginning.

00;27;01;05 - 00;27;28;15

Cecilia

[CECILIA] Like, you know how kids do like, oh, I have to spend the summer with this kid I don't know. And then they're gradually becoming friends and accepting each other. And Frankie learns about the community. And there is a little bit of touching on racism and stuff because Bug is bi-racial and Frankie's uncle is gay, which is why he accepted him to learn about his life in California.

00;27;28;15 - 00;27;46;07

Cecilia

[CECILIA] And you can get away from the Midwest and like here's a bright new life over here. It is really cute. There is one scene that had me very much sobbing in the book like, like in a like, oh my God, sort of way. I couldn't go without mentioning that one.

00;27;46;22 - 00;28;08;08

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Well, now that you couldn't not mention that one, I have another one that I can't not mention because you just opened the door to J, and so then I have to mention Redwood and Ponytail. Redwood and Ponytail is the most adorable novel in verse. And it's first love, first figuring out who I like. And it's two very different girls.

00;28;08;19 - 00;28;34;15

Kristen

[KRISTEN] One is stereotypical cheerleader type and the other is like stereotype jock like, and just them developing their friendship and then figuring out that their friendship might be more. And the support of the parents as this is happening is just like a phenomenal read. I am not usually into a novel in verse, but this one was phenomenal.

00;28;34;28 - 00;29;05;23

Cecilia

[CECILIA] Okay, you opened another door. I forgot about this one and it's one I just read recently, a Million Quiet Revolutions by Robin Gow. I don't know if that's how they pronounced

their last name, but it's also in verse, which is why it triggered me to this one. And it's about two trans boys who fall in love. It's written in verse and they write to each other in letters as if they were trans soldiers in the American Revolution.

00;29;06;16 - 00;29;23;07

Cecilia

[CECILIA] And it is just it's very cute. It's a little on the older teen side, so no, not J, but and it was really good. It was very well, well written. And you get, you know, disparate perspective because they're both having different lived experiences.

00;29;23;19 - 00;29;34;14

Sara

[SARA] A wholesome T for T, I'm here for it. What representation or what genre are you picking up or looking forward to seeing when you're reading LGBTQ Plus IA reads?

00;29;34;23 - 00;30;03;03

Cecilia

[CECILIA] I never thought I'd say this, but historical and I'm not a big historical fiction or historical fantasy, but there is a couple of kind of historical fantasies that I've had my eye on, but I just, I don't know, I just really enjoy like, I'm romance, so, like, I'm not literally the romance genre, but I like romance. So seeing that in there, I love like a love story too.

00;30;03;03 - 00;30;24;06

Cecilia

[CECILIA] So I guess the eighties is historical, question mark? I guess the nineties is also historical. I would love to see a historical LGBTQ nineties supernatural romance. That's my preferred genre as of right now.

00;30;24;26 - 00;30;43;17

Sara

[SARA] By the time that this comes out, season four will be out, by the way. Yeah. So I think I just kind of like to read what I like to read. Otherwise I'm picking up sci fi, I'm picking up fantasy, I'm picking up the occasional read outside of that if somebody says, Oh, this is really, really good. But generally that's what I go for.

00;30;44;07 - 00;31;46;24

Sara

[SARA] So I tend to gravitate more to Sapphic reads, reads with lesbian main characters, or a lesbian relationship, if there's going to be one, but I'll enjoy them no matter what. And I do, I think tend to look for own voices. I wasn't, um, doing this deliberately at first, but then I remember I picked up a book, I read the first five pages and I felt like discriminated against by how they were like describing like the main character, even though like it was supposed to be like, but it was so like the stereotypes, the misunderstandings of the community. So I flipped to the back and I read about the author, not own voices at all outside of both gender and race.

And I was like, you really, really, really missed the mark here. And since then, I've kind of been just a little nervous when I did my toes into something, when somebody is like writing outside and out of their own wheelhouse, so to speak.

00;31;46;24 - 00;32;06;06

Chris

[CHRIS] I am also looking for more historical fiction. I do like a lot of historical fiction, so I was like, oh, I forgot how much I like it, even though I read it often, as I read a lot more fantasy. So, like, more historical fiction, more fantasy because seeing the different time periods, that's definitely like part of history that doesn't get discussed in the school.

00;32;06;06 - 00;32;31;22

Chris

[CHRIS] We definitely all missed out on having any of that mentioned while we were growing up. Still, to get to see that and getting to see that part of history, I would love more of that. And then also more ACE representation. You mentioned Loveless and I forgot about that even though I was like, Oh, I have to read this and it's like on my to be read list, I was like, all I can come up with is Vanilla by Billy Merrell.

00;32;32;04 - 00;32;46;01

Chris

[CHRIS] And despite checking that out like four times, and never actually reading it, so I'm like, I don't even know if that's like, good. But that's the one thing I could think of that's like Y and ACE, and I was like, what else is there, then, besides these two?

00;32;46;23 - 00;33;10;23

Cecilia

[CECILIA] Tash Hearts Tolstoy, I think, and Radio Silence, too, has a ACE representation in there. I feel like it's never really at the forefront. Like it's always like, oh, and this character is ACE, too, look, there is representation in here. It's never like the main character. But Loveless definitely discusses.

00;33;11;07 - 00;33;31;21

Chris

[CHRIS] Of course the back of the book does, like because the two protagonists were dating in middle school and they're really a gay couple and then they're going into high school and like one is like, Ha, you want to do more? And I have like no interest. It's like definitely dealing with that, but I haven't read it. So, like, I only know what the back of the book says.

00;33;32;26 - 00;34;05;09

Kristen

[KRISTEN] I would definitely agree that more historical fiction is definitely a place that I would like to read more. So like I end up defaulting to nonfiction for it to like get that history piece. So like All Boys Aren't Blue by George Johnson is a fabulous read that has what's it like to come of

age as a queer man in a community that doesn't necessarily want queer men want their men to be queer?

00;34;05;27 - 00;34;30;04

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Just really powerful nonfiction reads. The 57 Bus from a few years ago. I don't live in California and I don't necessarily know that I was paying attention to the news at the time. The 57 Bus is really powerful because it's got this side that hate and fear and also shows the side that is the target of that hate and fear.

00;34;30;26 - 00;34;55;23

Kristen

[KRISTEN] So the 57 bus was like a really powerful nonfiction that if I don't have enough historical fiction, then I'll just go to the nonfiction section and like get my own. Just do it the other way. Right? But I would agree with more representation of ACE characters as like the showstopper, like the main event, because ACE individuals are the main event in their own lives.

00;34;55;23 - 00;35;23;04

Kristen

[KRISTEN] They're not always supporting characters like we're not always supporting characters. Right. And also seeing more trans representation, that is not a book stopper. The conversation doesn't stop at like this individual is a trans woman and there they go, they're, now they're gone and not in any more scenes, but trans people doing their lives, being protagonists in our YA books because representation matters.

00;35;23;06 - 00;35;36;22

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Seeing someone that's like you as the main character, that's doing the cool stuff and not just the person that sits in the car waiting for the cool guys to come back. That's important.

00;35;36;27 - 00;35;52;21

Sara

[SARA] Absolutely. I mean, I do think this ties into the topic that we wanted to get into. But throwing in real quick, I did read the graphic novel Across a Field of Starlight, and I don't think there was anybody straight in that entire graphic novel, which I love.

00;35;52;25 - 00;35;53;21

Cecilia

[CECILIA] Love one that happens.

00;35;53;23 - 00;36;02;05

Sara

[SARA] Because it's the far, far future, there are AI's with souls, so why not? None of it's real.

00;36;02;05 - 00;36;35;22

Sara

[SARA] So that was great and that was really refreshing. But that being said, I'm still really on the hunt for a trans femme main character in a sci fi or fantasy series. So if you guys have read one, please let me know. And yes, I know that there are plenty of graphic novels, the graphic novel, graphic novels I feel like always are the first ones to really have these identities represented, and then they eventually will leak into the more traditional literature.

00;36;36;03 - 00;36;47;02

Sara

[SARA] But I'm really looking for one that I can listen to as an audiobook right now, and I cannot find any. And it is driving me crazy. So if you don't have one, that's your assignments.

00;36;47;28 - 00;37;09;22

Cecilia

[CECILIA] I think that's definitely a representation that is underrepresented is trans femme. Definitely. I was struggling to find books for like book lists that had that representation on there. Not the question yet, but that's definitely what I'd like to see more. And people of color, too, on voices.

00;37;09;22 - 00;37;16;05

Sara

[SARA] Let's just jump forward to what do you still wish we would see more of in LGBTQ-plus YA literature?

00;37;16;12 - 00;37;35;06

Chris

[CHRIS] One of the things is like parents and I know YA tends to just not have parents because parents are getting in the way of running around and like solving the mystery, trespassing, breaking laws, figuring out what you're doing when you have like your parents influence involved as well to be like, well, where are you? So like kind of in general, like that kind of what?

00;37;35;20 - 00;38;02;14

Chris

[CHRIS] You still have parents, you're not all orphans. Where are they? Like, this isn't an 80's movie, but like, have like, seeing the character's parents. And a lot of times I feel like for the LGBT books, we'll see the parents that are aren't as accepting and characters dealing with that, which is a huge deal. It is reality. But like there was also the other end we're like some parents were like totally fine, totally accepting, very supportive.

00;38;03;06 - 00;38;29;13

Chris

[CHRIS] That's like I need to see more of that, of like no, their parents are fine with it. That is also a possibility because like just only seeing like parents that aren't accepting isn't great where you're like, oh, well, you're a teen and you want to come out to your parents, but everything you've seen is like the parents not handling it well. Is it encouraging to be like, let me like tell my parents who are my adults who love me and I love them and I trust them to take care of me.

00;38;29;29 - 00;38;44;24

Chris

[CHRIS] But everything you read is like your parents might not love you still like or like not be accepting and take time like having like more parents are like, thank you. Like, I'm glad you feel safe telling me like having that interaction more...

00;38;44;24 - 00;38;45;21

Cecilia

[CECILIA] Positive parents.

00;38;45;21 - 00;39;03;00

Chris

[CHRIS] that is like yes, positive parents both parenting and being like cool like they don't get to solve the mystery, but like or whatever of like what else is going on in the plot but also like having parents are like or they're already out and the parents are like, like same sex partner or whatever.

00;39;03;00 - 00;39;12;14

Chris

[CHRIS] Like, totally fine. If like, oh, this is your dating, the rules still apply. Like, you guys, if you have a sleepover, have to sleep in different rooms now, like you're still dating them.

00;39;13;20 - 00;39;46;09

Cecilia

[CECILIA] Well, that was one of the things of a Million Quiet Revolutions, you got the two different perspectives of the parents. One parent was very accepting and the other parent was Dad battle. Don't talk to me about that kind of thing. The other book where there's positive parents and they actually play a main role in the book, is that Zara Hossain is Here and the main character is bi and the parents are very accepting in a culture which normally wouldn't be accepting.

00;39;46;09 - 00;40;27;23

Cecilia

[CECILIA] But like I am seeing a little by little, a little bit more positive parents in there besides trans femme, gender fluid characters. I think we're seeing a little bit more trickling in and gender queer characters. Can't Take That Away by Steven Salvatore, each chapter starts off with how the character identifies in that moment or in that day. So I would like to see more of

that because I think that is an identity that is a little bit underrepresented, along with asexual and ARO-ACE identities and finding you can have different sexuality than how you feel romantically.

00;40;27;23 - 00;40;48;07

Cecilia

[CECILIA] I know, Let's Talk About Love by Claire Kann. The character is asexual but bi-romantic, and it explicitly explains that to her friends in the book and explains what it means. And I, I think that's important to show teens and adults who read these books as well.

00;40;48;19 - 00;41;14;09

Sara

[SARA] Absolutely. That's an important distinction. I think also the gender thing, the trans femme thing was a thing I brought up immediately as well. And the trans femme stories that are out there, they're a little bit older and they're all so sad and I get it and they're real, but they're so sad. And I would like one to be not so sad and just happy.

00;41;14;09 - 00;41;23;03

Sara

[SARA] And if you have to make it take place, like I said before, about the Across a Field of Starlight, if you have to make it take place, then in the future fine.

00;41;23;03 - 00;41;52;21

Sara

[SARA] Just make it not so sad. But I do want to acknowledge also Chris's point regarding parents and stories, because I do think that was very novel and it's great to get good reactions. I have seen some books with good reactions. I'm still, Henna Wars actually did pretty well. I'm looking for books with, medium reactions, because I feel like that hits the closest to home because that is most real.

00;41;52;21 - 00;42;16;07

Sara

[SARA] So if you want to do real reactions, I think positive reactions are great and do happen and we should have them there to encourage this. But the medium reactions are generally it. Not understanding. Having to do more research. Saying the words I'll love you no matter what instead of I'm proud of you for coming out and the mixed feelings that come with that.

00;42;16;13 - 00;42;27;22

Sara

[SARA] So I would like to see more of that and I think we are starting to see more of that instead of like, you know, the crazy no, no, no, no, no parents or the of course I love you. Yes, yes, yes, parents. The in between.

00;42;28;18 - 00;42;35;03

Cecilia

[CECILIA] I think, did you read Felix Ever After? Anybody read that?

00;42;35;20 - 00;42;40;01

Kristen

[KRISTEN] No, I see it often and I always want to. And then I.

00;42;40;16 - 00;42;41;03

Cecilia

[CECILIA] It's got a gorgeous cover.

00;42;41;10 - 00;42;48;03

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Yeah, it has a fabulous cover and it calls to me every single time and then it'll go out and it'll come back and I'll miss it.

00;42;48;18 - 00;42;59;10

Cecilia

[CECILIA] I think that one had a medium reaction in it semi accepting but still using their dead name which...

00;42;59;26 - 00;43;02;21

Sara

[SARA] It'll take me time to get used to it. Yes, yeah,

00;43;02;21 - 00;43;10;00

Cecilia

[CECILIA] Yeah, that kind of thing. Oh I forgot. That's not what you go by anymore. Oh, I used the wrong pronouns. I'm sorry.

00;43;10;20 - 00;43;56;26

Cecilia

[CECILIA] Like, medium reaction. And that is also another book where and this is another thing I would love to see continue a trend. But feeling one way and one identity in the beginning of the book and then realizing there is more to yourself than that one label like maybe because you're not always stuck in one thing. People are constantly evolving and changing and realizing, well, this fits me a little bit better, which is what happens in Felix Ever After, which is what happens with a couple characters in Loveless and realizing, you know, you don't have to stay one way forever.

00;43;56;26 - 00;44;24;18

Cecilia

[CECILIA] Like that's what being a teen is. It's like kind of you're constantly changing and evolving and who you are now is not who you are always are going to be. And your feelings are

constantly changing and evolving and you can identify as a lesbian and then like realize you're bisexual or vice versa, or you're constantly, you know, meeting new people, coming across different terms and whatnot, so.

00;44;24;18 - 00;44;28;19

Sara

[SARA] That's part of being a teen, and guess what, part of being an adult, too.

00;44;28;22 - 00;44;46;01

Chris

[CHRIS] Yeah, I do. There's been more of a slowly of, like, messy teen endings. Yeah. Like it used to be like it is wrapped up with a bow. And we talk about this in one of the other podcasts here. We're like, there's many layers to you as a person. Why not? This is my box. You're like, These are all my boxes.

00;44;46;01 - 00;44;47;21

Chris

[CHRIS] I have all of this. I'll take all of them.

00;44;47;28 - 00;44;53;00

Cecilia

[CECILIA] You may check multiple boxes!

00;44;53;09 - 00;45;19;26

Chris

[CHRIS] Even like also like at the end or not like and I figured it out and I can live on happily knowing the answer like their answers are like that's part of like becoming an adult, being you have no answers as you realize that you're older, like no one has answers, no one will come down and be like, you are correct, this is the answer and the solution. There's no deep to tell you that 42 is the answer. You're just like, well, I think I know, maybe, who knows?

00;45;19;26 - 00;45;25;03

Sara

[SARA] But why won't you come out and tell me?

00;45;25;03 - 00;45;28;09

Chris

[CHRIS] I hope you're like, Oh,

00;45;28;09 - 00;45;31;13

Sara

[SARA] Diagnose me, random quiz on the Internet.

00;45;32;00 - 00;45;48;07

Cecilia

[CECILIA] Well, that was a part in Loveless because she was taking the Kinsey scale test and it kept coming back like there was no answer for her. And she was like, I'm taking it wrong. How have I not, like, done this test right?

00;45;48;16 - 00;46;56;09

Chris

[CHRIS] Or throw in Cemetery Boys because I feel like, like I kept aggressively book-topping this for like the first year after it came out and like it's so good. It's Aiden Thomas's first book. I don't like the second book as much, but like it's a retelling of Peter Pan, that one, but Cemetery Boys is fantastic. Yadiel's trans, he's trying to prove to his family, like, and they've got like that middling reaction of like sometimes like grandma is like just dead naming him left right and center of, like, no. His parents are supportive and he has some family of brujos and brujas, and when you turn whatever age he's turning in this book, you go you get your magic powers and or it was the year before, and they're like you can't, you're trans, like this kind of work harbors like a religious aspect in there, too, of like well, does their God support this? And like that's part of the debate with the family of, well, you can't do the ceremony to become a bro because we're not sure how God's going to react. We don't think it's going to be cool.

00;46;56;18 - 00;47;20;06

Chris

[CHRIS] And then he ends up being haunted by Julian Diaz, who is a gay ghost, who's like the tough, bad kid. And he, like, did not realize he's like, oh, my God, you're gay. He's like, Yeah, did you not know? And it's like who's guilty was haunting them and like, they're solving a mystery together. There's, like, casual gay because, like, this is like a huge part of it, but also, like, who murdered Julian?

00;47;20;15 - 00;47;41;24

Chris

[CHRIS] Well, that problem, too, and just like the ending was so good. And like, I love this. I love the ending. It like, it does kind of wrap it up and like have like a nice little bow on it, but like, it needed that bow of like, yes, I support and like so good and also like representation of Mexican culture as well.

00;47;41;24 - 00;47;55;14

Chris

[CHRIS] And it's like so, so good. I was like, everyone should read this book. And I just like kept handing that book off to people for like a year. And I started handing off the Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea after that, it's like, read this book now. Now that I showed you to one, read this other one.

00;47;55;14 - 00;47;59;10

Chris

[CHRIS] Oh, Mermaid, Witch and the Sea, one of the characters is genderfluid or non-binary, I forget which.

00;47;59;10 - 00;48;01;26

Sara

[SARA] It's what you were looking for, Cecilia, there's one.

00;48;01;26 - 00;48;07;21

Cecilia

[CECILIA] I have had it on so many displays, and not read it yet.

00;48;08;19 - 00;48;19;17

Chris

[CHRIS] I keep I think I keep putting it on displays for you as well, for like any of the virtual ones, that like everyone should read this, there's pirates and mermaids, and it's LGBTQ. There's got layers.

00;48;19;27 - 00;48;47;08

Sara

[SARA] One, I read it. I think it's a recent one that came out. She Gets the Girl. It's by the author of Five Feet Apart. I don't know if you guys have read it. Very cute. Very I want to say conventional. I mean, yes, it is a Sapphic love story, but like otherwise, it is a conventional romance. One of the characters made me mad in like the first few chapters, and I was like, I don't want to read this anymore, but I was like, Oh, I'll just keep reading it.

00;48;47;08 - 00;49;07;08

Sara

[SARA] It has really good reviews. And I did, and I'm glad that I did because it did wind up turning around and the character did wind up not being defined by their one bad moment that they had, like all human beings are. So I'm glad that I gave her another chance and I gave the book another chance because it was cute and it was happy.

00;49;07;08 - 00;49;18;04

Sara

[SARA] And so if you're looking for just like a cute traditional Sapphic romance she gets, the girl is great and like such a breeze to read, you'll absolutely fly through it.

00;49;18;22 - 00;49;43;20

Kristen

[KRISTEN] I also read Fresh by Margot Wood. This one, I think has some mixed reviews how people feel, but it's new adult. So the protagonist is in her freshman year of college and she is got a lot of stuff she's figuring out. She maybe doesn't know what direction she's going in. She's bisexual and is trying to, I think she's in a class that's like about romantic love.

00;49;44;18 - 00;50;07;04

Kristen

[KRISTEN] And so like, as one does as a freshman at college, I guess she decides she's just going to go like love. Lots of people. So lots of the characters are within the LGBT community in some way. And she learns things along the way. And it's one of those that's written in a way that she breaks the fourth wall and comes back and she's like talking to you.

00;50;07;04 - 00;50;32;20

Kristen

[KRISTEN] She's got a lot of footnotes, but I really enjoyed it because it is a true representation of trying to figure out like where you fit in the world, where you fit on a spectrum of heterosexuality or is she bisexual? What does she want? She doesn't know what she wants. So I really enjoyed it for those pieces. And like, you know, you get halfway through and you're like, know what you want, would you stop doing this?

00;50;33;12 - 00;50;54;17

Kristen

[KRISTEN] But it was a fun read and it had like a little bit of bite because she's a very sarcastic writer. And so the character is also very sarcastic, which I really enjoyed. So that was a recent read that I thought was worth my time. Also, *At the End of Everything*, I don't know if anyone read *At the End of Everything*, it might be too soon.

00;50;54;23 - 00;51;01;07

Kristen

[KRISTEN] This one's Marieke Nijkamp, but I can't ever pronounce it same author as.

00;51;02;01 - 00;51;04;08

Cecilia

[CECILIA] Is that the one set in the juvenile detention center?

00;51;04;08 - 00;51;30;12

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Yes. Yes, it is. And this is very recent book that came out, and it's set in a juvenile detention center, but like, I don't, like a virus that spreads through respiratory droplets, starts tearing through the surrounding world. So these kids are in a juvenile detention center, and they notice that like the guards leave and then like the guards just don't come back.

00;51;30;24 - 00;52;00;17

Kristen

[KRISTEN] And so one of the characters is constantly called by the guards, by their dead name. So it's told in multiple perspectives. And one of the other prisoners challenges the guards, which guards don't often respond well to. And so that's like the beginning of the book. And then you follow each of these individual characters. Some are more like prominent than others and telling like how they get through.

00;52;01;12 - 00;52;27;08

Kristen

[KRISTEN] Basically something that was like eerily similar to what's happened in the COVID pandemic. It's about found family. It's about protecting the ones that you love. It's about caring for people when they're sick. It's just like a fabulous book. And then there was this added element that one of the characters like that character that was a choice by the author and intentional choice.

00;52;27;08 - 00;52;52;01

Kristen

[KRISTEN] And every author has the ability to make those choices about representation, to decide, is this character going to be LGBT? Is this character going to be a white character? Is this character, they're making intentional choices. And I feel like this brought a depth to the book that would have been missed otherwise. And it has a very powerful end.

00;52;52;01 - 00;53;20;09

Kristen

[KRISTEN] And I've heard from other people who have read it that they would love to hear more of the back stories of kids that are now in this pandemic situation in a juvenile detention facility. And they have to, like, make their own decisions. I think that's the only place that that one was lacking for me is like I want to know more about the characters because they were so well written and so well developed as like full figures but only in this small, narrow circumstance.

00;53;21;00 - 00;53;26;00

Kristen

[KRISTEN] But that one was definitely a fabulous read with some great representation across the board.

00;53;26;11 - 00;53;48;28

Sara

[SARA] Awesome. Thank you so much. I definitely added so many of those to my list and they are currently being shipped to me. Thank you for joining us today. If you are in need of support, we invite you to please visit the Trevor Project dot org or PFLAG dot org for information resources or to connect with life support, representative or local support groups.

00;53;49;12 - 00;54;04;17

Sara

[SARA] Be sure to check out the Ocean County Library's website for more podcasts and events on our website calendar of events page. All titles mentioned in today's episode can be found through the Ocean County Library, free with your library card. Until next time, happy reading.