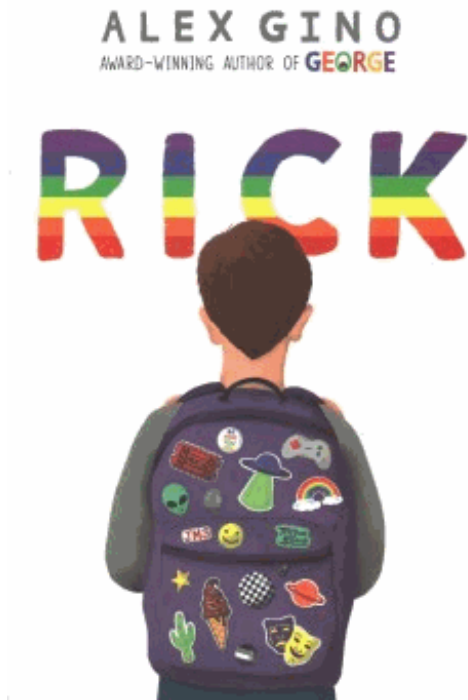


# RICK



*Juvenile*

**By Alex Gino**

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## **Book Summary:**

An eleven-year old boy joins his school's Rainbow Spectrum club and decides that he is unsure of his sexuality.

## **Summary of Concerns:**

This book contains alternate gender ideologies; alternate sexualities; mild hate involving sexuality.

**1**  
**/5**

**Child Guidance**  
BookLooks Review Rating

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19	<p>"Check out the hottie!" Jeff said in greeting. He tossed his head vaguely across the schoolyard.</p> <p>"Which one?" Rick hated when Jeff called girls hotties. He made it sound like they were sexy pancakes.</p> <p>..."Yeah, I'd like to see more of her, if you know what I mean." Jeff elbowed Rick in the ribs. Rick knew what Jeff meant, and Jeff knew that Rick knew what he meant, but Jeff continued anyway. "With her clothes off."</p>
20	<p>"No, dude, I told you! She was super naked. And hot too. Everyone was staring. Men, women, kids. Even the fish."</p>
24	<p>"Wait, is that you, G-?"</p> <p>Melissa stopped him with a raised finger as well as her voice. "I don't use that name anymore. You can call me Melissa."</p>
25	<p>"So you're..."</p> <p>"I'm a girl. A transgender girl. I wanted to come to school as myself last year, but my mom said I should wait for a fresh start in middle school."</p> <p>"That makes sense, I guess."</p> <p>Melissa shrugged. "It would have been nice to stop hiding sooner."</p> <p>"That makes sense too." Rick gave a small, awkward smile. He would have thought it would be weird to meet a transgender girl, but it wasn't, really. At least, not if the girl was Melissa.</p>
28	<p>By then, the idea that George could be a girl seemed a bit less sensible, and the idea that it would freak Jeff out because he had talked about whether she was cute was a bit more appealing.</p>
52	<p>PLATO WAS GAY, EVEN DURING SCIENCE CLASS</p>
58	<p>"I heard that Plato was gay," said a boy in the back row. Several kids snickered. A kid with a high-pitched voice joined in. "I heard all the ancient Greeks were gay."</p> <p>..."Yeah, there's nothing wrong with being gay. It's just how some people are," said a girl with a long braid running down her back.</p> <p>"This is no talk for the classroom," said Mr. Vincent.</p> <p>..."Wait, what's no talk for the classroom? That Plato was gay, that some kids laughed, or that we said there was nothing wrong with being gay?"</p>
59	<p>"Has anyone heard of the Rainbow Spectrum? It's an after-school club for LGBTQIAP+ rights. I know about it because my sister helped start it a couple of years ago, when she was in eighth grade."</p> <p>Rick wondered what a meeting for gay kids was like and what they did together. Did they talk about how to be gay? Or how they knew if they were gay? And did you have to know whether you were gay or bisexual or whatever to go? Rick didn't even know what all the letters stood for.</p>
61	<p>Rick was still thinking about the Rainbow Spectrum that evening. Sometimes Rick wondered whether he was gay because he had never had a crush on a girl. But he had never had a crush on a boy either, so how could he be gay?</p> <p>...Instead, Rick opened his laptop. He typed into the internet search box how do you know if you're gay? The results page was filled with quizzes, so Rick clicked on one.</p>

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67	It was a sign for the Rainbow Spectrum. There were rainbows at the top and bottom of the poster, and big, bold letters that read All Are Welcome.
68	"Whoa, Rick. Check this out. A buncha gay kids are meeting up! Gross!"
69	"And then that lesbo tried to tell me that I was harassing her!" ..."And before you answer that," said maybe-Mark, "you oughta know my aunt's a lesbian."
70	"So now you guys are gonna go all gay on me too?" ..."I'll tell ya this: There was a kid in my class in fourth grade, and he was gay, and I punched him in the stomach."
90	He wasn't sure whether it would be worse if it was empty, with just Kelly, Leila from science class, and the faculty adviser staring at him, or full of gay kids and lesbian kids and bisexual kids and transgender kids.
94	<p>"Hi, I'm Zoe, I'm in eighth grade, and I'm bisexual. My preferred pronouns are she and her. And I'm here because I think LGBTQIAP+ rights are really important."</p> <p>"Thank you, Zoe. To be clear, you don't need to tell us your sexual orientation if you don't want to," said Mr. Sydney.</p> <p>"Oh, but I want to !" said Zoe. "How is someone supposed to ask me out if they don't know I might be interested?"</p> <p>The two kids wearing the spring musical T-shirts went next- Xavier, who shared that he had been coming to the group since he'd started sixth grade two years ago, and Yaya, who announced that he was "supergaaaaaaay" with a wave of his hand.</p> <p>"I'm Ellie, lesbian, eighth grade. She, please," said the girl with the cupcake hat. A soft-spoken kid with dark hair and bright red glasses said, "Hi, I'm Mika. And I guess I use she and her, but I never really thought about it before."</p> <p>...Green saw some puzzled looks from around the room and clarified, "Enby from NB, or nonbinary."</p> <p>Mr. Sidney addressed the class. "Nonbinary refers to people who do not identify as either male or female. Do I have that right, Green?"</p> <p>Green nodded.</p> <p>"And your preferred pronouns?"</p> <p>"I'd prefer not to have pronouns at all," Green said with a shrug.</p> <p>Yaya joined in. "It is kind of messed up that we talk about the pronouns we prefer. Like it's our favorite flavor of ice cream or something."</p> <p>"Right?" said Zoe.</p> <p>"What if we ask what pronouns a person uses?" asked Ellie.</p> <p>Green nodded. "Okay. Hey, everybody, I'm Green. I'm in sixth grade, and I use the pronoun I. And I have no idea what you all are supposed to do."</p> <p>..."You could use the singular they," said Yaya.</p> <p>"What's that?" asked Leila.</p> <p>"Ooooh! The singular they!" Kelly's already naturally musical voice sounded ready to break into song. "I read about that this summer. Like They don't want to use either he or she for their pronoun."</p> <p>"I am an English teacher, you know," said Mr. Sydney, frowning.</p> <p>"I know. And I also know that we already use the singular they all the time," said Kelly.</p>

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	<p>..."I asked whether you would use it for them, and you didn't even notice."            ...Zoe spoke up. "Melissa used the singular they. She asked if you would use it for them, but she was only talking about one person."</p>
99	<p>"I think he means, 'Do you want to use they?'" said Kelly.            ..."I'm in sixth grade, and my pronouns are he and his. I'm a straight guy, as far as I can tell, but moms are queer."</p>
100	<p>"I'm Leila. I'm in sixth grade and use she and her, and I don't really know yet, but I've been doing a lot of reading and thinking, and I might be bisexual."            ..."Hi. My name is Melissa, and I use she and her. I'm in sixth grade, I'm Kelly's BFF, and my connection to the community is that I'm a transgender girl."</p>
102	<p>"Then what's the A for in LGBTQIAP+?" asked Kelly.            "Asexual," said Zoe. A few kids nodded, but others looked confused. "Asexuality is when you don't have any interest in, like, ever doing the deed with anyone."            The word asexual buzzed in Rick's head like a fly looking for a place to land as introductions continued around the room.            ..."I'm so glad this group exists. I'm in seventh grade, and my pronouns are they and them."            That made it Rick's turn. "Hi, I'm Rick, I'm in sixth grade, and I'm a he."</p>
103	<p>Some students wanted a place to talk about the problems they were dealing with, especially at home. Others wanted to protest local businesses that didn't support LGBTQIAP+ rights.</p>
105	<p>If Rick had a phone, he would look up the word asexual.</p>
106	<p>But today, Rick was on a mission. He pulled out his laptop and typed asexual.            ...Asexual means you weren't sexually attracted to people, or didn't want to do that kind of thing with them. You could want to have a boyfriend or a girlfriend, though. If you were aromantic, you weren't romantically attracted to anyone.            There were other words too, like grayromantic and graysexual to describe people who were occasionally attracted to people romantically or sexually, and demiromantic and demisexual for people who only had those feelings after developing a deep connection.</p>
109	<p>And lots of people online shortened asexual to ace, which sounded downright cool.</p>
116	<p>"Do you think I'm gay?" asked Rick. Rick didn't think he was gay.            ..."Have you ever heard of someone being asexual?"            "Sure. There's an ace girl on my dorm floor, but you can't be ace."            "Why not?"            "You're too young. Don't worry about it. I'm sure it'll work out for you soon enough. Enjoy being a kid while you can."</p>
118	<p>PRONOUNS AND PURPOSE</p>
120	<p>"Why did you come to Spectrum last week?"            Rick froze.            "I mean, whoever you are, that's your business, and that's cool and all. I just thought that you were...Well, Kelly thinks you're a homophobe."            ...A homophobe was someone who didn't believe in rights for LGBTQIAP+ people.            Diane had called Thomas that when he used the word gay as an insult.</p>

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124	<p>"To start today, I'd like to switch up one thing about our introductions, based on something I read. This time, let's make stating your pronouns optional, no matter what they are- he, she, they, ze, or something else."</p> <p>Green looked relieved.</p>
127	<p>"Well, it starts with Q, like queer, so I like it," said Green.</p> <p>"Good eye!" said Mr. Sydney as he wrote the word queer running down vertically, starting with the Q from QUILT BAG. "I came out at a time when we mostly talked about our community as gay or gay and lesbian." He wrote the words using the starting G and L on the board. "And I genuinely appreciate the inclusivity of LGBTQIAP+, but it was a little unwieldy on my tongue. So I did some sleuthing and found this gem that a feminist artist named Sadie Lee came up with. Any ideas what the other letters stand for?"</p> <p>"Bisexual!"</p> <p>"Transgender!"</p> <p>"Intersex!"</p> <p>The words flew at Mr. Sydney, and he wrote them down as fast as he could.</p> <p>"Asexual!"</p> <p>Rick didn't call I out loud, but in his mind, he added and aromatic.</p> <p>"That just leaves the U," said Kelly, "and I'm unsure what that means." Kelly chuckled at her own joke but Mr. Sydney wrote it in.</p> <p>..."QUILT BAG," said Yaya. "I like it. I's super sayable."</p> <p>"Way easier than LGBTQIAP+," Xavier agreed.</p> <p>"It's not that much easier," said Zoe.</p> <p>"One of my moms makes quilts," said Ronnie, "and I really like that word, because quilts are made up of all these different little bits. And each one of them is just a weird thing on their own-"</p>
129	<p>"But what about P, for pansexual?" said Leila, an eyebrow raised.</p> <p>"Oh, right!" said Yaya.</p> <p>"We can keep using the plus sign to say we know that we can't ever cover it all," said Ellie.</p>
131	<p>Zoe's hand was up immediately. "I think we need to have better books in the library. I mean, look at us, we're the Rainbow Spectrum and we're still learning a lot of stuff."</p> <p>"Yeah," said Xavier. "And some kids might not have friends they can talk to about QUILT BAG+, so if they could find some good books in the library, it could really help them."</p> <p>"That's very thoughtful of you," said Mr. Sydney.</p> <p>"But books cost money."</p> <p>"We could have a fundraiser," said Ellie.</p> <p>"We were saying at the end of last year that we wanted to get more involved in educating the whole school on queer issues," said Yaya.</p> <p>"So let's get dancing!" said Zoe. "All in favor of raising money to get new books with queer content into the school library, raise your hand." So many kids raised their hands that they didn't even bother counting them.</p>
133	<p>"There's a rich history of queers in theater."</p>
139	<p>Going to the Rainbow Spectrum? Learning the word asexual?</p>

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143	"And then I learned the words asexual and aromantic."
147	<p>"Not only that," said Grandpa Ray. "I was a Garantulan woman."            ... "Quite the detail about your old grandpa, huh?" Grandpa Ray smiled, mostly with his eyes.            "Are you still my grandpa?"            "What are you talking about?"            "Are you saying you want to be a woman? Or, I mean, you are a woman?" Rick added, remembering what he had learned from Melissa and Spectrum about wanting to be something versus being it.            Grandpa Ray shook his head. "Oh no, not at all."            "Wait. If you're not a woman, then what are you?"            "Well, you could call me a crossdresser, but really, I'm the same Grandpa Ray I've always been. Just like you're the same Rick you've always been. We know a little more about each other now. That's all. And just like I wouldn't tell anyone about you without your permission, I hope you won't tell anyone about me."</p>
158	"Yeah, well, it works," said Zoe. "No one at Baptiste ever got pushed or shoved or yelled at because anyone thought they were gay. We even had a trans kid come out in third grade. I'll bet there are more now."
170	"Grandpa Ray. You're gonna need to get a little better with words if you plan to talk to anyone at Space Con. Yes, I want to go with you. And yes, I want you to dress up however you want. Even if that means dressing up as a woman. Especially if that means dressing up as a woman! But maybe not as a Garantula."
174	The words Rainbow Spectrum Cabaret were in bold cursive, and a spotlight shone on a shadow figure. Underneath that, the poster said, Be Who You Are! And in smaller print, Tickets \$1-20- give what you can. All proceeds will be used to purchase LGBTQIA+ titles for the Jung Middle School Library!! Followed by the date and time of the show. At the bottom was a note that read, If you see anyone messing with this sign, please report it. Ally with us to fight hatred.
177	"What?! You're gonna call off our friendship over some stupid poster about some gay kids?" Jeff's face was turning red.
178	<p>"Yeah, I've been going to Spectrum."            "Yeah, I've been going to Spectrum," Jeff mimicked.            "You've been hanging out with those freaks. What, are you gay or something?"            "Something." Rick stood upright, feeling the wet streak on his cheek grow cold.            "What the hell is that supposed to mean?"            "I'm questioning." Rick heard his voice echoing back at him, ringing as true as it was nervous.            "You mean, you don't even know what you are?"</p>
201	The final product was being rolled onto a cardboard tube when Grandpa Ray emerged from the bathroom. He wore a long black dress with a thick red sash over his shoulder, a red wig back in a bun, and lots of large silver jewelry, like Senator Smithfield wore when she addressed the Pristine Council.
206	<p>"Not when Gamma Ray is sitting right there as a possibility!"            "Gamma Ray!" Rick didn't know whether to give Grandpa Ray a high five or a hug, so he did both.</p>

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211	<p>"I'm not worried," said Rick. "Have you ever heard of being asexual? Or aromantic?"</p> <p>"I can take a guess what it means. But you're too young to be something like that."</p> <p>"I'm almost twelve."</p>
215	<p>The tickets were a dollar each, and the winner would get to keep half of the money that was raised. The other half would go to the fund for getting more QUILTBAG+ books into the school library.</p>
216	<p>She was dressed in jeans and a simple black long-sleeve shirt, and she wore a pin that said Support Trans Kids.</p> <p>"I love you, Mom," sad Melissa.</p>
221	<p>Rick did the steps and hand claps he'd learned the week before, and thought about the QUILTBAG+ people in his life. Melissa. Green. Himself. He thought about Grandpa Ray dressed as Senator Smithfield. And he thought about real friends, people like Ronnie, who were excited to find out more about him.</p>
226	<p>Language is changing swiftly around us, especially for the QUILTBAG+ community. I'm not a historian, but I'd like to provide at least a little context here for some of the language that has been used to refer to people who are straight (attracted to the opposite sex) and cisgender (gender matches the one assigned at birth). Only fifty years ago, people generally spoke of the gay community, or the gay and lesbian community, since gay, a word to describe people who are attracted to the same sex, often refers only to me. Lesbian describes women who are attracted to other women. In the 1970s and 1980s, bisexual people, who are attracted to more than one gender, called for visibility, and by the 1990s, many people and organizations spoke of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual (KGB) community.</p>
227	<p>Over the last twenty years or so, especially in the last five to ten, more and more people and groups have recognized that when we talk about our community, we need to acknowledge transgender folks (whose gender doesn't match their gender assigned at birth), intersex people (who are born with, or later develop, sex characteristics that do not fit traditional definitions of male or female bodies), asexual individuals (who are not attracted to anyone, or only in specific situations), and pansexual people (who are attracted to many genders). Around the same time, many activists reclaimed queer as a more radical way of talking about our community, especially by people who didn't want to fit in with the straight culture.</p> <p>...That doesn't mean that TQIAP+ folks are new to the LGB community, but that we as a culture are learning more comprehensive ways to talk about ourselves.</p>
228	<p>The most common acronym these days to represent this range is LGBTQIAP+ (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Intersex Asexual Pansexual and more). The plus sign acknowledges that our understanding of sexuality is growing, and that many people use other language to describe themselves. I've also used the term QUILTBAG+ (Queer Unsure Intersex Lesbian Transgender Bisexual Asexual Gay and more) in this book, as coined by feminist artist Sadie Lee in 2006.</p>
229	<p>However, I don't think QUILTBAG+ is perfect- I wish it included pansexuality, and some people don't like the -bag ending. I hope that I have done justice to the real-</p>

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	<p>life process of developing language in the way I represent the Rainbow Spectrum's conversations. And I look forward to what comes next as we continue to refine language to meet our needs.</p> <p>If you've been thinking about your own gender and/or sexuality, you can research online for terms that might help you put a name to how you're feeling. And if you don't know how you're feeling, there's language for that too- questioning and being unsure are real parts of life, especially if you might not be straight or cisgender.</p>
231	Great appreciation for the young people at schools, libraries, and groups around the country who have let me into their spaces over the last few years to talk about being young and QUILTBAG+.