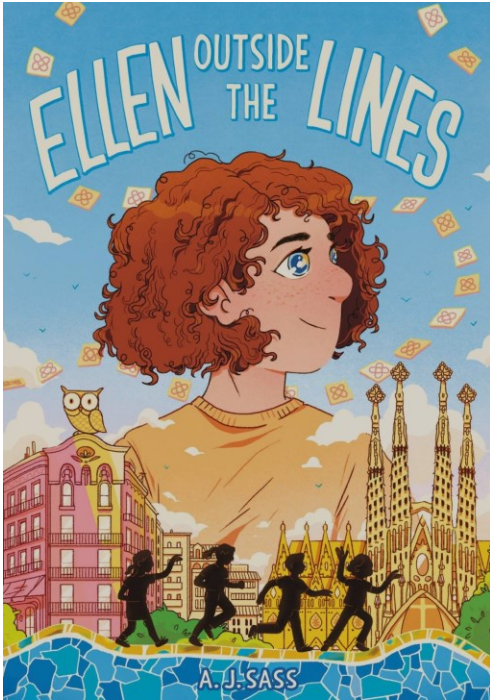


ELLEN OUTSIDE THE LINES



Juvenile

By A. J. Sass

ISBN: 978-0-7595-5630-0

Book Summary:

During a middle school field trip to Spain, a thirteen-year-old girl with autism befriends a girl claiming to be nonbinary.

Summary of Concerns:

This book contains alternate gender ideologies; alternate sexualities; and controversial social commentary.

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Child Guidance
BookLooks Review Rating

Page	Content
1	Climate change is making the oceans rise. People are cutting down trees, endangering entire forests, along with thousands of animal species. But Dr. Talia says problems like those are “out of scope.”
23	“I’ve just got a few announcements. First, I’d like to introduce the adult chaperones. Y’all already know me from school, of course. Then there’s Ellen’s dad, Mr. Katz”—he gestures toward Abba—“ and Emmaline’s and Madison’s moms, Mrs. Delfina and Mrs. West.
24	“You were being mean,” Andy whispers back. “I wasn’t. I just want to know: boy or girl?” “Neither.” The voice is quiet but clear.
34	“Yeah, what’s up with her? Or is it him? And why did Isa say ‘neither’ when Gibs asked, do you know?”
60	“Not other kids. Xavi.” She turns back to the wardrobe and lifts a skirt and blouse combo, right as the shower shuts off. “Or Meritxell for you, I guess? I didn’t realize you liked girls like that.” “Oh.” My face gets hot. I’d always thought it was no big deal, like all of Laurel’s boy crushes, but maybe I’m wrong.
71	“What are your pronouns?” Isa asks. “Sorry, what?” “You know, like he and she,” Isa says. “What words do you use?” “Oh.” Andy’s brows rise. “He, I guess.” ...“My pronouns are they, them, and their,” Isa continues. “They is for a group of people,” Noah-James cuts in, “not just one.” “Nope, not always,” Isa shoots back. ...“People use it all the time when they don’t know the gender of the person they’re talking about,” Isa explains. “That’s how I use it, too.” There’s a category for pronouns in my dot diary, a page I created when I started taking Spanish. It’s got entries for English and Spanish, plus Hebrew. But each entry only has two sets of words: one for boys, the other for girls. They, them, and their don’t fit on my lists. Not in any language. “Because you’re not a boy or a girl?” Andy asks. “That’s what you said at the airport, right?” “Yeah.” ...“So why are you staying on the girls’ floor then?” “Because people don’t know what to do with someone different from what they’re used to.” Isa shrugs. “They figure it out eventually, or they don’t. Not my problem.”
73	“Pronouns?” Isa asks. For a moment, I think Noah-James—Gibs—might refuse, but he just rolls his eyes. “I’m a guy. Obviously.” “So he, him, his. Good to know.”
74	“And I use she, her, and hers for pronouns—but I also like yours.” Isa grins. “No reason you can’t use both.”
80	As Isa studies my screen, I take a moment to try out they, them, their pronouns in my head.
142	Two words catch my attention. Isa’s written @ signs over both o’s in “artistos callejeros.” “What’re those for?”

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	<p>“Nothing clue-related. I just made them gender neutral.”</p> <p>“Like the Spanish version of they, their, and them?”</p> <p>“Sorta. You know how words that describe women usually end in-as, and for men it’s-os?”</p> <p>“Yes.” I learned this in Spanish last year.</p> <p>“Well, the @ sign with an s at the end is the gender-neutral version you can use for nonbinary people, or just groups in general. Some people use an x instead—like they’d say Latinx instead of Latino or Latina—but I think the @ sign is more fun to write.”</p> <p>I consider this. “So, if you needed to put something like this into categories, it could be ‘men,’ ‘women,’ and... ‘nonbinary?’”</p> <p>“Yep,” Isa says. “‘Other’ could work, too. Or ‘gender neutral.’”</p> <p>Excitement surges through me. It makes sense when Isa explains it like this. Now I have a new dot diary list to put under my pronouns category.</p>
179	<p>“Do you like boys or girls?” I ask. “Or other nonbinary people?”</p> <p>“You mean like what types of people do I get crushes on?”</p> <p>“Yes.” My face heats up as doubt forms in my stomach. “Is that a rude question?”</p> <p>“Some people might think so, but it’s not to me,” Isa says. “And I like everyone.”</p> <p>...“Well, not everyone everyone. I just mean I don’t care if you’re a boy or a girl or something else. If I like you, I like you. Does that make sense?”</p> <p>It’s new for me, just like having the extra pronouns list in my dot diary.</p> <p>...“Do you only like girls?”</p> <p>“Um”—I completely forget to tell Isa if their question’s rude or not—“all I know is I have never thought a boy is cute.”</p>
223	<p>“Now people will notice you,” Madison says. “Boys and girls.”</p> <p>I wonder if the same goes for nonbinary people, then push the thought away, hoping the makeup will conceal my flushed cheeks.</p>
224	<p>If clothes don’t make you a boy or a girl, what does? Hair? Makeup? And how do you know if you’re nonbinary?</p> <p>Isa is so sure of herself, so confident. Then there’s me, who sometimes has trouble pinpointing what I’m even feeling.</p>
230	<p>“Okay, am I, like, the only one here who’s not gay?”</p>
234	<p>“My old name was Isabel.”</p> <p>...“I think”—I tilt my head up to them, meeting their gaze for a split second—“Isa fits you much better.”</p> <p>“Yeah.” Isa’s exhale is half breath, half laugh. “No question.”</p> <p>“I still don’t get why they put you on the girls’ floor when you’re not one, though.”</p> <p>...“My parents looked at tons of schools before they found Lynnwood, all because the public schools couldn’t handle my pronouns.”</p>
235	<p>“If you’re not a girl, why are you wearing a skirt?”</p> <p>“I know some people get annoyed by this, but I’m going to answer your question with another question.” Isa leans forward and wets more tissues. “What makes a skirt a ‘girl thing?’”</p> <p>...“So, to me, it’s just another label—and not even a good one. No one complains when a Scottish guy wears a kilt, right? Because it’s a Scottish thing. And when someone like Laurel wears a skirt, it’s a girl thing.</p> <p>“When I wear one?” Isa dabs the tissues against my other cheek. “It’s an Isa thing.”</p> <p>...“About how there’s no reason people can’t use more than one set of pronouns?”</p>

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	<p>“Right. Some people do. There’s a kid who uses both he and they in my therapy group.” ...“But how does that work? Does that mean they’re a boy or nonbinary?” “It means whatever they want it to mean.” “That doesn’t make sense.” I shake my head, and the tissue tumbles out of Isa’s hand.</p>
236	<p>“Categories help me understand things. I make lists so everything has a place.” More silence. More dabbing. “But I can also see why they’re bad.” “Not bad,” Isa says. “Sometimes they just don’t tell the whole story.” I think of the game Laurel and I play, creating lives for people based on how they look. Maybe we only ever skimmed the surface of each person but missed the bigger picture. Our assumptions could’ve been totally wrong. “So you have these very specific categories,” Isa says. “How do I fit into them?” “I had to make a new list,” I admit. “Okay, I love that.” Isa’s grin lights up their whole face. “And honestly, labels are cool, but sometimes people need more than one to describe themselves. Sometimes pronouns change because someone’s still trying to figure things out, you know? It’s all good. Okay, done!”</p>
240	<p>I do a quick translation on my phone. Ellen (she/ her + they/ them) ‘a pie’ means ‘on foot’. I hold my breath, waiting for someone to say something about my pronouns.</p>
300	<p>“Do you know what Pride Month is?” I ask. “Yeah,” Andy says. “I mean, kind of. It’s to celebrate boys who like boys and girls who like girls, right?” “And people like me,” Isa chimes in. And dads like Abba. And Ellens like me. ...“There’s going to be a parade later today.” I show Andy and Isa the rainbow-colored poster. “I have to stay at the hotel to watch Señor L’s movie, but I thought you might want to go.” “... With your dad?” Andy asks. “Yes. He wouldn’t even ask why you want to attend, either, I bet.”</p>
303	<p>“There’s a parade happening for Pride Month,” he says. “That’s for people who—” “I know what Pride is,” Gibs interrupts. “I’m not dumb.” Isa snorts. “Usually, anyhow.” “You don’t have to come if you don’t want,” Andy says. ...“Of course I’m going.” Gibs spears the last piece of jamón on his plate.</p>
309	<p>Some have their faces painted and others hold rainbow flags. There are other flags, too, in almost every primary, secondary, and tertiary color. ...Boys hold hands with other boys, same for girls with girls. Sometimes I can’t figure out if I’m looking at someone who’s a boy, a girl, or some other gender. That’s okay. There’s room to add categories in my dot diary for all types of people—and also for myself. ...Isa passes the phone to Gibs, then Andy, and finally Abba, who lifts it high enough for me to see rows of acrobats tumbling down the street. Each person wears one color of the rainbow flag, their movements perfectly in sync. It feels like a holiday. A celebration of every identity. Each unique set of pronouns, maybe</p>

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	<p>more than one set for some people. ...“Happy Pride, Ellen,” Isa yells. “Happy Pride.” I wave back, both hands flapping. And I mean it. Especially the happy part.</p>
313	Isa waving a tiny flag with yellow, white, purple, and black stripes.
321	<p>Then I process what Isa said. “You called me ‘they.’” “You changed it in the group chat, so I figured I’d try it out.” Isa studies me. “Is that okay?” “Yes.” Slowly, I nod. “You can use either set.”</p>
333	1. Señor L refers to Isa being nonbinary as “unique circumstances” (here). Why does he phrase it in such a vague way? Do you think it was rude?