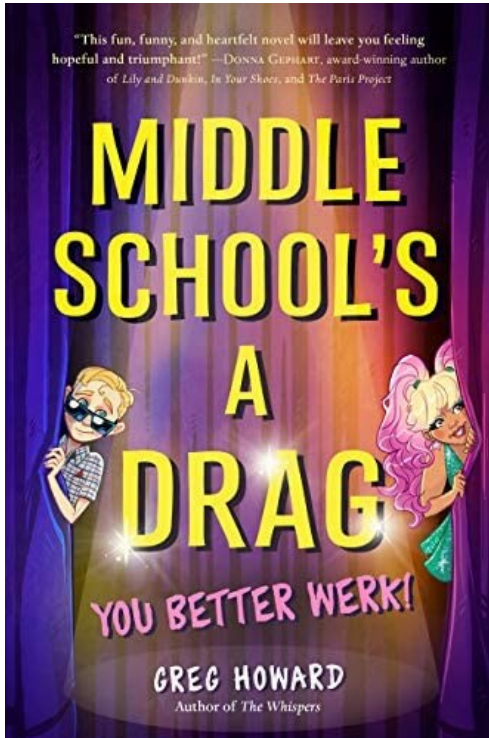


# MIDDLE SCHOOL'S A DRAG



*Juvenile*

**By Greg Howard**

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## **Book Summary:**

A twelve-year old boy becomes a talent agent for a thirteen-year-old drag queen and learns about the drag culture via RuPaul's Drag Race show.

## **Summary of Concerns:**

This book contains alternate gender ideologies; alternate sexualities; hate; and inexplicit sexual activities.

**2** /5

**Teen Guidance**  
BookLooks Review Rating

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16	<p>"I'm not a mister," he says, resting his hands on his knees. "I'm Coco Caliente, Mistress of Madness and Mayhem."            ..."It's my stage name," he says with a pointed look like I might have offended him. "My boy name is Julian."</p>
18	<p>Coco-or-Julian clears his throat. "I want to be a professional drag queen. You know, like on RuPaul's Drag Race. And I want you to be my agent."</p>
19	<p>"To help you become a successful drag queen."</p>
24	<p>Pap Pruitt will be so proud when I make Coco Caliente the biggest drag queen in all of North Charleston Middle School.</p>
25	<p>When in doubt, you can google anything. Even What is a drag queen?</p>
27	<p>Turns out, Google knows a lot about drag queens, and even some about drag kids. But all I had time to do was look at pictures.</p>
28	<p>"He's just a kid from school," I say.            "He's Latino," Lyla adds.            "Oh, that's nice," Mom says, adding careful lines of ranch dressing to her salad.            "You could use a little diversity in your circle of friends."            I stare at Mom with my mouth hanging open. I literally have two friends- one is black and one is Indian.</p>
30	<p>"Why would Mikey think a boy is cute?" Lyla asks. "Only girls are cute."            "Not to everyone, sweetie," Dad says. "Anybody can be cute to someone."            ...Sometimes I wish I'd never told my parents that I thought I might be gay. I said thought and might to soften the blow, but it wasn't any kind of blow or even a surprise to them. I thought that was kind of weird and it made me wonder if they knew I was gay even before I did. But I don't know how they could have. They were wicked cool about it right from the beginning, though. I guess I should be glad about that. I'm sure some kids who are gay, or bi, or trans probably don't have supportive parents. But sometimes Mom and Dad can be a little too enthusiastic about my gayness. Like asking me every day if I like-like boys at school. I mean, ew times ten. I'm only twelve and they're ready to sign me up for Gay Bachelor: North Charleston Middle School Edition.</p>
31	<p>I don't want to tell them what Julian's talent is before I see it for myself. If I say, He's a drag queen, it'll just spark a thousand more questions from Lyla.</p>
32	<p>"Well, his stage name is Coco Caliente, Mistress of Madness and Mayhem," I say, bracing myself for a bunch of questions.            ...I have research to do and this RuPaul's Drag Race show isn't going to watch itself.</p>
33	<p>THE WORST GAY EVER</p>
35	<p>"I've been meaning to ask you," he says to me. "Why haven't you joined the Pride Club yet? We had a meeting last week. I thought you'd be there."            I'm not sure why, but the words pride and club together give me instant back sweat. I know Trey expects me to join the Pride Club. He's not even gay and he's in the Pride Club. And he's been on my about joining ever since I told him and Dinesh that I thought I might be gay a couple of months ago. But I honestly didn't think that I might be gay. I knew. I've always known.</p>

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36	<p>I'll have all summer to get comfortable with the idea of being an out gay. Next year I'll be an eighth grader. Untouchable.</p> <p>...Trey gives me a disappointed sigh and shakes his head. "Dude, you're the worst gay ever."</p> <p>...Trey always calls his parents Moms because he has two moms.</p>
37	<p>"It's true. Trey is a better gay than you and he's not even gay."</p> <p>..."Is joining the Pride Club mandatory? Are there gay rules that I don't know about yet? I mean, I've only been gay like...five minutes."</p> <p>...I don't want Trey to be disappointed in me or think I'm the worst gay ever, even though he's probably right about that. I didn't know there was a right way and a wrong way to be gay, but I guess I'll have to ask Google about that, too.</p> <p>..."What about you? The club is for friends of gay people, too."</p>
38	<p>"Mikey's gay and you're around him, like, every day."</p> <p>...I glance around to see if anyone heard him say the words Mikey and gay together. Thank God Tommy Jenrette is too far away to hear. It's not that I'm ashamed of being gay or anything. It's just easier being the right kind of popular than the wrong kind of popular at North Charleseton Middle School.</p> <p>..."But like you said, he's, like, the worst gay ever, so I don't think it even counts."</p>
39	<p>But after my extensive research watching three episodes of RuPaul's Drag Race-very informative show, by the way- I know now that yaaas is something drag queens say when they're super-crazy excited. Like they might say:</p> <p>Yaaas, queen! That look is a fierce!</p> <p>Fierce means "good" in drag language, as best as I can tell, but I don't speak it fluently yet.</p>
43	<p>When I told them I might be gay, Dinesh seemed the most surprised.</p> <p>...Trey and Dinesh look at each other like I just told them I'm a drag queen or something.</p> <p>..."Due. Julian is gay. Like way gay."</p> <p>...I guess I just assumed Julian was gay because of the whole Coco Caliente thing. But I guess non-gays can be drag queens, too. It's a free country.</p>
44	<p>I nod like making them swear not to tell anyone I'm gay is a perfectly normal thing to do.</p>
45	<p>I thought I would give them some time to get used to just the basic me-being-gay thing before I tell them I actually like-like someone who is also a dude.</p>
47	<p>"Nice, dude," Trey says. "Burping in a guy's face. Wow. Is that one of your smooth new gay moves?"</p> <p>...I shoot him a glare and lean forward. "I didn't know you were such a homophobe."</p>
48	<p>But I know Trey's not a homophobe, you know, because of the having two-moms thing.</p>
51	<p>I guess I should learn the difference if I'm going to be the talent agent for a drag queen. And, you know, gay.</p>
60	<p>He almost looks like a real girl. I had a pretty good idea of what to expect from watching RuPaul's Drag Race, but seeing it live and up close, well, it's a lot to take in.</p>

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	...I can't get over how tall Julian is in those high-heeled shoes, and the poufy wig makes him look even taller.
63	Julian dances around the stage, moving his hips like he's singing the song, but he's actually not. That called lip-synching in drag language. It's, like, the main thing drag queens do. They do that a lot on RuPaul's Drag Race when they're lip-synching for their lives. ...I may not be an expert yet, but it sure seems like Julian has his drag queen thing down pat- the moves, the look, and the attitude.
64	After taking a dramatic bow, he steps down off the stage like he's worn high heels since he was a baby drag queen.
65	I look at each of their faces- Julian, Mrs. Vasquez, Abuela, Gabby, Lyla, Colton, Colton, Colton- trying to remember what the judges on RuPaul's Drag Race usually say to the contestants because that seems like the smart thing to do.
66	I try to remember some more of Drag Race judge responses. "Yaaas, honey!" ...I really don't have any ideas for Julian's act and I'm not even sure what the next level for a drag kid is.
67	"Colton thinks I need a bigger ending," Julian says. "Something that leaves the judges gagging. What do you think, Michael?" "Why would you want the audience to gag?" Lyla asks the question before I can. "He means gagging like losing their minds and going wild." ..."Gagging is a good thing these days," Mrs. Vasquez says. "This means that. That means this. I can't keep up." ..."You have to leave the audience gagging to death- in a good way. But we can work on the ending. It needs to be something amazing. Something...fierce. Don't worry, Julian, I have some ideas about that."
69	"Well," I say. "They'll pay you a hundred dollars if you win. And I don't see why they would stop you from doing drag. It's your talent, after all. I'm sure it will be fine."
71	"Julian's dad doesn't understand the whole drag thing."
72	"My dad left us when I was little," he says. "I don't even know where he is now."
76	I guess she doesn't have very good gaydar. Trey told me that gaydar is like radar for detecting who's gay and who's not. Sort of like an internal metal detector, but one for detecting gay people and not metal. Trey said should have a pretty good one, you know, because of me being gay and all. But honestly, mine's just as bad as Caitlyn's. ...Maybe gaydar is something kid gays have to grow into.
78	"What's his talent?" Lyla looks up from her drawing. "Wearing girl clothes, a wig, and high heels. And pretending to sing Beyonce songs." ..."It's called drag," I say. "I know what drag is," Mom says. "I just didn't know kids did it. How old is Julian?" "Thirteen," I say. "There's a lot of drag kids out there, Mom." And by out there, I mean on Google. I count them off on my fingers. "Lactatia, Desmond is Amazing, Katastrophe Jest, E! the Dragnificent..."

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87	He's acting a little bit like a diva, just like some of the queens on RuPaul's Drag Race. That's not always a good thing in the drag world.
88	<p>"Um, my mom's best friend, Manny, is a drag queen. He's good, too. I've seen him perform at Charleston Pride a few times. This one time he asked me to hold his wig for him."</p> <p>Trey nods and sits down, like he's proud of his drag qualifications.</p> <p>...He fidgets in his seat but finally stands. "Um, uh, I watched that Priscilla, Queen of the Desert movie with my sister one time when our parents were out. It was pretty funny, I guess. My sister laughed a lot. I didn't get most of the jokes, though. I was probably too young to be watching a movie like that."</p>
89	<p>Google taught me later that it's called a gay gasp. I guess I still have a lot to learn about being gay.</p> <p>...But I guess there's a lot more to being gay with all the special words, songs, and the snapping and such.</p>
92	Michael Pruitt Business Tip #359: Don't surprise your drag-kid client with straight-boy judges from school during the first rehearsal.
93	<p>"He said he'd better not ever catch me in girl clothes again."</p> <p>..."My mom tried to talk to him, but my dad's set in his ways. We used to be close and spend a lot of time together. But then he got busy with his car dealership and I got busy figuring out that I liked doing drag."</p> <p>..."When did you start?" I ask.</p> <p>..."The first time I tried on my mom's high heels a couple of years ago- you know, just playing around with Gabby- it was just so fun. And then when I found RuPaul's Drag Race, I was hooked. I studied what the queens did in every episode and tried to copy them. But Dad just doesn't understand how it makes me feel."</p>
94	<p>"No. But he's caught me in drag a few times. I think he believes there's something wrong with me, but I know there's not. He's afraid it means that I'm gay or trans or something."</p> <p>I'm not sure what to say because I'm kind of confused myself. "So, are you? Gay or trans?"</p> <p>Julian grins. "Um, hello." He waves a hand up and down his body. "Duh. Of course I'm gay."</p> <p>..."You are too, right?"</p> <p>..."Um," I say instead. "I guess so."</p> <p>...Why didn't I just say, Yes, Julian, I'm the gayest gay in the history of gays? It was scary when I told Trey and Dinesh, but I didn't say, I guess I'm gay. I said I thought I might be gay. Crap. Trey's right, I'm the worst gay ever. But Julian doesn't call me the worst gay ever for saying I guess so.</p>
95	<p>"You know. Being gay."</p> <p>..."Michael," he says, a wide grin stretching out his cheeks, "there's no right way or wrong way to be gay."</p>
103	It's funny, I knew I liked boys instead of girls way before Colton ever came to North Charleston Middle School, but there wasn't ever a boy that I actually like-liked. I mean, I'm only twelve and I don't think a lot of dudes my age are thinking about like-liking someone yet.

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115	"Are they gay, too? Are you gay, little girl! Is your whole family gay?" ...She probably doesn't even know what gay means.
117	One big, old, entire-crowd gay gasp.
121	"Are you gay?" Lyla says. ..."It's none of your business if I'm gay or not," I say. She glances up, all angelic eyes and rosy cheeks. "Lots of people are gay. It's nothing to be ashamed of."
127	"Well, I can't wait to see you perform, Coco," Mom says. "You can call me Julian when I'm in my boy clothes," he says, smiling real big. "Coco Caliente is just my drag persona."
128	"He's way better than some of those contestants on RuPaul's Drag Race and he's only thirteen."
129	Sandwiched between them, I keep hitting Repeat on one of the gazillion videos we found on YouTube of drag queens doing death drops. Sometimes they call them a shablam. The one we're watching is from RuPaul's Drag Race and it shows a queen walking into the workroom for the first time and then all of a sudden dropping all the way to the floor on her back with one knee bent under her.
130	Julian gives me a dramatic eye roll. "So? I'm a plus-size queen. You know, a big girl?"
131	When he's all dressed up as Miss Coco Caliente, he doesn't seem to care that he's a big dude in a dress. ...Julian shrugs. "Like Lady Gaga says, Don't be a drag, just be a queen." ...Because he chooses to be brave. He chooses to be a queen.
132	Just like sometimes Try and I make fun of how skinny Dinesh is and he laughs as much as we do. On RuPaul's Drag Race they call it throwing shade.
139	I think I hear the words freaks and queers a couple of times. It's pretty obvious now that Tommy knows about my whole gay thing, but I still can't figure out how he knows.
140	"Trey, you said the other day that your mom's friend Manny is a professional drag queen, right?" ..."Yeah," Trey says. "He's really good, too. Why?"
170	"Is this your new girlfriend, Gay Mikey?"
171	He points to me, Colton, and Julian one at a time. "You, your little sissy girlfriend, and this he/she, illegal tub of lard."
175	Especially when the vice principal is a suspected homophobe, and the assistant basketball coach, and your drag-kid client just gave the captain of the team a bloody nose.
183	"Whatever, Gay Mike." ..."And your gay, right?" ...Why, yes, Tommy Jenrette, I'm a proud gay kid. I'm here and I'm queer. Get used to it. ...Of course I'm not gay. Gay people suck. I like girls. Girls rock. I want to, like, kiss them and everything. There's nobody not gayer than me.

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	...I guess I could just say, I don't know if I'm gay or not, Tommy Jenrette. And it's none of your business, anyway, so thank you very much and have a nice day.
185	"Everyone has some kind of talent. You have two kinds- playing basketball and drawing. Maybe you should spend more time working on those and less time shoving kids like Colton around. Or calling people freaks, losers, and he/she. Or saying gay like it's a bad word."
214	Melissa Chambers recites one of Shakespeare's sonnets like she's getting ready to tongue-kiss the audience.
221	It's the day after the talent-show tryouts- also known as the day of Manny the drag queen's shablam class in Julian's garage.
222	And even though he's sort of dressed in boy clothes right now, Manny's a real-live professional drag queen.
231	I want to hug him, because that seems like the good-friend thing to d. But we're right in the middle of homeroom. And if we hugged, all the kids would think that's super gay- which is funny because of the whole me-being-gay thing. I'm still not 100 percent sure about Colton, though. My gaydar needs a tune-up. Or a jump start. There should be a place where you can go to have that done. Like a gaydar service station or something.
244	But this is probably definitely Julian's last chance to perform as Coco Caliente, Mistress of Madness and Mayhem, in front of the entire student body of North Charleston Middle School and to show all the haters what a drag-kid superstar looks like.
253	"That's Julian's father out there, not yours. Because you are Coco Caliente, Mistress of Madness and Mayhem, and Miss Coco isn't afraid of anything. Coco is the baddest drag kid in all of North Charleston Middle School." ..."Are there any other drag kids in North Charleston Middle School." ..."You're right, Michael. I'm the baddest drag kid in the entire universe."
254	"Why be a drag when you can be a queen?" Julian says.
256	Whether I'm ready for all of North Charleston Middle School to know I'm gay or not, now they do. I mean, I know that just because you're wearing a short sparkly dress, a wig, and gobs of makeup it doesn't mean you're gay, but let's face it: In middle school, it pretty much does. ..."Look. It's Gay Mikey and the he/she freaks."
261	Julian looks back into the audience and just smiles real big with his Coco Caliente face, waving to the crowd like the amazing queen he is. Colton takes my hand in his and- OMG!- I'm holding hands with a boy. Onstage. In a dress. In front of the entire student body of Nort Charleston Middle School.
268	It wasn't Sadie and Fifi's best performance, but the Art Booters of North Charleston Middle School just might not be ready for a drag kid either- even though I'm pretty sure the rest of the world is judging by the crowd's reaction to Julian's performance.
273	The lobby outside the auditorium is packed with parents chatting about teachers, students saying goodbye to each other for the summer, and one plus-size drag-kid talent-contest winner being swarmed by people wanting to congratulate him.

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275	"Ew, Dad," I say. "That's my friend, Colton." Lyla is hanging on to Dad's leg and swinging back and forth. "Is he your boyfriend?"
278	He stands in front of his father, facing him like a talented, proud drag kid with a ton of pizzazz would.
284	And before you know, Colton Sanford does the weirdest thing ever. He leans in and kisses me on the cheek. And I mean an air-kiss. I mean, like, a his-real-live-lips touched-my-cheek-skin kind of kiss.
286	And most important, I don't feel like I'm going to hurl like I always thought I would the first time I got kissed.
289	<p>"Dragutante is a nonprofit that hosts an annual event to provide a platform for young artists (under eighteen) to fully realize their self-expression onstage. This full-day event will create a safe place for young, creative future drag queens to experience the drag lifestyle behind the scenes, as well as onstage! Providing this opportunity to get to know celebrity drag queens will show families who are uneducated about drag culture that it is something to be celebrated." From the website of dragutante.org</p> <p>"Cofounded by Cyndi Lauper, Lisa Barbaris, and Jonny Podell, True Colors United implements innovative solutions to youth homelessness that focuses on the unique experiences of LGBTQ young people. In the United States, 4.2 million youth experience homelessness each year, with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth 120 percent more likely to experience homelessness than their non-LGBTQ peers. True Colors United is committed to changing that." From the website of truecolorsunited.org</p>
292	Drag kids extraordinaire Desmond is Amazing (Instagram @desmondisamazing), Katastrophe Jest (@katastrophejest), E! The Dragnificent (@ethedragificent), and Lacatatia (@queenlactatia)- for inspiring me to bring Coco Caliente to life in the middle-grade world.