

Group Reconsideration Recommendation

Book Information

Title	All Boys Aren't Blue
Author	George M. Johnson
Publication Year	2020

ALA's [Library Bill of Rights](#) and the [Freedom to Read Statement](#)

Controversial Materials

- Serve every single student; does not promote one point of view over another
- Cannot reject and remove a resource because an individual or a group has found the material objectionable
- Provide access to material that may be controversial to some patrons, while also providing a process to request reconsideration

Resources consulted (include policies, articles, reviews etc.)

Selection Quality Criteria This book meets these criteria from the Selection Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support and enrich the curriculum and/or students' personal interests, extracurricular activities, and learning• Be appropriate for the subject area and for the age, emotional development, ability level, learning styles, and social, emotional, and intellectual development of the students for whom the materials are selected• Incorporate accurate and authentic factual content from authoritative sources• Earn favorable reviews in standard reviewing sources and/or favorable recommendations based on preview and examination of materials by professional personnel• Nominated and/or received awards and honorable mentions• Represent differing viewpoints on controversial issues• Provide a global perspective and promote diversity by including materials by authors and illustrators of all cultures• Demonstrate physical format, appearance, and durability suitable to their intended use• Balance gaps in the collection utilizing collection analysis data• Balance cost with need
Awards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An Amazon Best Book of the Year optioned for television by Gabrielle Union• YALSA 2021 Teen's Top Ten (announced 11/4/21)
Reviews	<p><i>Kirkus Reviews starred (February 15, 2020)</i></p> <p>Centers the experiences, desires, and agency of a queer black boy navigating his evolving selfhood and the challenges of society's conditional love for his truthful existence. Queer black existence has been here forever, and yet rarely has that experience been spotlighted</p>

within literature aimed at black boyhood. This is the context in which this “memoir-manifesto” begins, as Johnson, a still relatively young 33-year-old journalist and activist, debuts his unfolding life story within a vacuum of representation. These stories wrestle with “joy and pain...triumph and tragedy” across many heavy topics—gender policing, sexual abuse, institutional violence—but with a view to freedom on the horizon. Through the witnessing of Johnson’s intimate accounts, beginning with his middle-class New Jersey childhood and continuing through his attendance at a historically black university in Virginia, readers are invited on their own paths to healing, self-care, and living one’s truth. Those who see themselves outside the standpoint of being black and queer are called in toward accountability, clarifying an understanding of the history, language, and actions needed to transform the world—not in pity for the oppressed but in the liberation of themselves. This title opens new doors, as the author insists that we don’t have to anchor stories such as his to tragic ends: “Many of us are still here. Still living and waiting for our stories to be told—to tell them ourselves.” A critical, captivating, merciful mirror for growing up black and queer today. (Memoir. 14-adult)

School Library Journal (May 1, 2020)

Gr 9 Up-Journalist and activist Johnson takes readers through his life from childhood through young adulthood, reflecting on how his identity as a queer Black boy was shaped, refracted, and often suppressed for his own safety. Growing up in New Jersey, Johnson recounts becoming aware of his “difference” and how it necessitated choices between who he was and who he felt pressured to be. Part memoir and part manifesto, the text infuses personal reflections with observations about white supremacy, toxic masculinity, homophobia, and how these concepts affected him, whether as a boy forced to choose football over double dutch at recess or as a fraternity pledge struggling to come out on campus. Separated into acts, the book describes different members of his community (family, teenagers, friends)-a stylistic demonstration of his valuable support system that occasionally makes the narrative choppy. Still, the various tangents don’t detract from the book’s power, and the conversational tone will leave readers feeling like they are sitting with an insightful friend. There are a few detailed depictions of sexual situations and an incident of sexual abuse by a family member. Johnson handles the painful, complicated feelings around this experience with an honesty and tone appropriate for the intended audience. VERDICT This young adult memoir is a contemporary hallmark of the blossoming genre. Johnson anchors the text with encouragement and realistic guidance for queer Black youth. Recommended for YA nonfiction collections where autobiographical and social justice titles are popular.-Ashleigh Williams, School Library Journal © Copyright 2020. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

- **Booklist**, 03/01/20
- **Publishers Weekly Annex**, 04/20/20

Group Recommendation

Date of Review: November 15, 2021

Have all members of the committee read the material entirely? If not, why?

Yes, all members of the review committee read the book in full.

Recommend for Following Collections:

K-5: No
6-7: No
8-9: No
10-12: Yes

Justification and comments (include majority and minority positions):

After careful and thoughtful review and discussion of this title in its entirety, the committee decided to retain the book in the collections at the 10-12 grade level.

It is important to remember that as a part of the reconsideration process, the entirety of the work must be considered, not just an excerpt pulled from the whole. While the parts objected to (the sexual abuse and first sexual experience) are explicit, they do not reach the level of obscenity as defined by the Iowa Code 728.1 and upheld in **U.S. Supreme Court case of Miller vs. California:**

First, the average person, applying contemporary community standards, must find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to prurient interests; second, that it depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct as defined by state law; and third, that the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.

Furthermore, the objectionable part(s) comprise less than 5% of the total work. In the memoir, the author shares their life story, experiences, and overcoming adversity as well as their own experiences with abuse and sex. In its entirety, *All Boys Aren't Blue* has both literary and artistic value, having earned high and/or starred reviews from multiple professional review sources.

According to the American Library Association's ***Access to Library Resources and Services for Minors: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights***, "lack of access to information can be harmful to minors. Libraries and their governing bodies must uphold this principle in order to provide adequate and effective service to minors." Sexual abuse by a family member is a difficult subject but one that is all too real for many students. This work allows students to see an example of someone else not only surviving the experience, but being able to work through it. This book is also empowering with the message of the author overcoming racism, homophobia, and sexual assault. Johnson brings awareness to microaggressions against the black and queer communities, their cumulative effect, and how society has normalized these behaviors. He also provides examples of how to survive and get through difficult times. *All Boys Aren't Blue* can provide hope to teens experiencing tough situations and their struggle to find their identity.

The inclusion of *All Boys Aren't Blue* also meets both the selection policy criteria of “providing a global perspective and promoting diversity by including materials by authors/illustrators of all cultures” and *The Interpretations of the Library Bill of Rights*, which states:

Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.

This memoir provides value and inclusion of an underrepresented voice. The interactions between the author and their family show how their support impacted their experience. For someone reading the book who is a support person for an LGBTQ person, this memoir could offer guidance and empathy for them as well. This title fills a void in our collections in the memoir/biography section as the voice of a black and queer author is underrepresented.

Another reason for inclusion, as stated in the American Library Association's *Diverse Collections: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights*, is that a diverse collection should contain content by and about a wide array of people and cultures to authentically reflect a variety of ideas, information, stories, and experiences. Johnson's memoir represents more than one marginalized group, providing perspectives from both black and queer. It depicts extraordinary family support, something that many black, queer homeless teens don't receive. As an under-represented part of the collection, the inclusion of this “own voices” memoir meets the *Library Bill of Rights I and II*:

- I. *Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.*
- II. *Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.*

Moreover, legal precedent supports the inclusion:

- **Right to Read Defense Committee v. School Committee of the City of Chelsea, 454 F. Supp. 703** (D. Mass. 1978)
- **Minarcini v. Strongsville (Ohio) City School District, 541 F.2d 577** (6th Cir. 1976)

Finally, while the subject matter can be sensitive and mature, high school students are skilled self selectors. While reviews vary somewhat in collection placement, most indicate that it is appropriate for grades 9+. When selecting something of choice, high school students will not read literature they are not interested or invested in. No one will read this book by accident, but rather, will do so by choice and with the purpose of understanding their own world better. The American Library Association's *Access to Library Resources and Services for Minors* states *the need for minors to have no restrictions to access of library materials, so placing it at the 10-12 high school level is appropriate*:

Libraries should not limit the selection and development of library resources simply because minors will have access to them. A library's failure to acquire materials on the grounds that minors may be able to access those materials

diminishes the credibility of the library in the community and restricts access for all library users.

Reviewing Committee: District Administration and District Certified Teacher Librarians

Note: This document is forwarded to