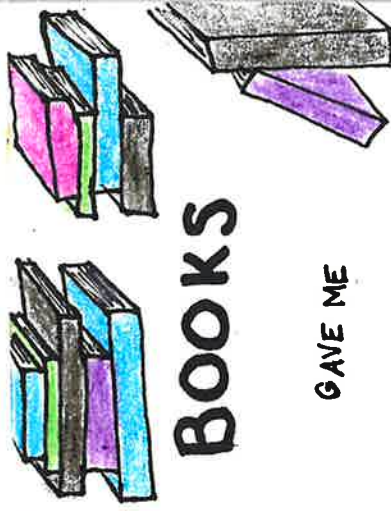




I was a senior in high school in 2013 when I picked up the book "Will Grayson, Will Grayson" by John Green and David Levithan in my school's library.



BOOKS

GAVE ME

EMPATHY

(and other reasons we should read freely and widely)

BY ARLO

At the time, I was "accepting," in the bare minimum sense, of my queer friends and fellow students, but I also believed on a religious level that "being gay" was wrong. I took opportunities to say things like "I don't have a problem with whop people choose in private, but I don't want to see it" or "marriage is a religious tradition, and it's meant to be between a man and a woman." And I only reflected on these on a very shallow level.

My Empathy-Building List:

Against White Feminism
by ReFaia Zakaria

Queerly Beloved
by Susie Diamond

Fat Chance, Charlie Vega
by Crystal Maldonado

Six Crimson Cranes
by Elizabeth Lim

The Downstairs Girl
by Stacy Lee

Flygirl
by Sherri L. Smith



READ BOOKS.

DRINK WATER.

NOTE IN ELECTIONS.

USE YOUR LIBRARY.

BE KIND.



But when I picked up this book that featured a queer character in first-person and showcased flamboyance and queer joy, I came to the almost immediate realization that I had not been viewing the queer people in my life as full people. Queerness is not a choice. I believed strongly in God, and I realized that God

makes people queer. And if that was the case, I needed to be more kind. I needed to be actually accepting. In order to live my values and be kind, I was going to need to change how I thought and speak about queerness.

KINDNESS FIRST.

COMPASSION FIRST.

EMPATHY FIRST.

I don't know how much longer it might have taken me to develop that empathy if I hadn't read that book. It still took me years to realize I was queer and genderqueer, but in the meantime, I learned how to put my money where my mouth is, so to speak, and start treating people like I valued them. Empathy and compassion are the highest part of the human experience.

