

Dear Alex Gino,

Your book *George* has inspired me in many ways. It got me thinking about how life is not fair especially to specific groups of people I hadn't really ever thought about before, people unable to really be themselves. It also inspired me to be true to myself and not let anyone's expectations or judgments make me change who I am.

Your book made me think more about how life can pose totally unexpected problems that are very hard to deal with. George was born in a boy's body, but he feels like he's really a girl. He worried about whether his mom would still love and accept him for who he felt he really was if he told her. He couldn't be himself with friends and classmates which caused him to limit his friends to only one close friend. People shouldn't have to be scared of what people think of them, especially their own family members. In your book when George told his mom he felt like a girl, she couldn't accept it. Mothers are supposed to love you no matter what, even if you aren't what they hoped you would be. When I thought about that I realized when George's mom didn't accept him, he sort of shut down and became discouraged.

After I read this book I thought about how it's not a bad thing if a girl says that she is a TOMBOY and she can enjoy the outdoors, run, climb, and like sports and the more traditional boy colors like blue and green. A Tomboy is usually seen as a positive trait. On the other hand, if a boy says that he wants to do ballet, sewing, playing with dolls, or that he likes pink or purple he'll risk being teased and not being accepted by others. It isn't fair, and it doesn't make sense.

If a boy wants to go and play dress up they are limited as to what they can get dressed up as, without being called names or being made fun of. They can wear a pirate costume or be a superhero, but if they wanted to wear a princess costume or something "girly" they will be thought of as something less than a boy. I even thought about how sometimes if a boy doesn't want to fight with someone and they want to resolve the issue with words, they will be thought of as a wimp because they don't want to fight. Boys are not supposed to cry or show emotion but they are supposed to act tough. That seems so ridiculous because everyone has emotions and everyone should be allowed to feel and show all of their emotions.

I also thought about how many people like George have to live their life scared of what people will think of them, forced to hold in this really big secret their whole life. I thought about how there was a whole issue about Bruce Jenner/Caitlyn Jenner having lived his whole life hiding a big secret for many decades because of what other people would think. Even though Bruce Jenner was famous, accomplished, rich, and admired by millions, he still had to struggle with what people would think of him for 60 years before he let out his big secret. If that was so hard for a world famous athlete, it made me realize how much harder it would be for a child like George to have such a huge secret in middle school that they couldn't share with anyone, because even their parents might not understand or accept their feelings.

After reading this book I gave my friends a list of words and asked them to tell me if each word described boys or girls. The words like blue, green, sports, interrupting, being physical, science, math, writing, computers, building, getting in trouble, risky behavior, scary, fighting, teasing, driving fast, inventing, and exploring were ones most people said described a boy. The words Barbie, dresses, hair, stylish, worried about appearances, gossiping, well behaved, quiet, reading, giggling, using correct grammar, getting along, clubs, groups, driving safely, fancy clothes, being helpful, pink, purple, and following rules were ones most of my friends chose as describing a girl. I thought that in a way society brainwashes us as if everybody should fit into the boy and girl boxes that society has created.

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I thought of how many people think that they will be judged because they don't fit in with "society's expectations". Society tells us we need to want to be normal to fit in. I thought about parents, and even my parents - how they were brought up to believe these things. Most of the kids that make fun of people who think, act or look differently, are doing what they have been taught by society, and by their parents who also believed in some of "society's expectations". I believe that it is time that we changed these expectations, as we know now that a person's physical body doesn't determine who they are or who they like or what they like or how they feel.

Ever since I read your book I have been more confident in myself and I have been trying to put myself in other people's shoes *before* I speak. Your book helped me better understand how people would feel when they can't be themselves. I think your book helped me become a better person, someone who will stand up for people who are being put down and someone who will accept others as they want to be. I haven't found any other book that talks about this issue of a teenager who feels like they don't belong in the body they were born with. It made me realize that not only should kids be reading your book but so should adults and parents, because even though change is scary no one should have to feel afraid to be themselves.

Thank you, Alex Gino. Your book led me to have many discussions with my librarian, my parents, and my friends. Your book and the issues it raised helped me be someone who is more supportive of people who face stereotypes like the ones in your book, about who people are and how they should act. Your book made me realize that maybe I can help the next George be accepted throughout their life, and I can also help the next mother of George better accept their child if they have that challenge. I want to make sure that the next Bruce Jenner can be Caitlyn from the beginning, when they first feel that way. I don't want anyone to have to live their whole life hiding the secret of not feeling the gender that the doctor told them that they were born with. Your book made me want to help others accept themselves and others without prejudice or any stereotypes.

Finally, your book made me realize how lucky I am to be comfortable with myself, and to feel like I belong in my own skin and to have parents and friends who support me just as I am.

Sincerely,  
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