

BOOK RESUME: *I am Jazz* by Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings
Dial Books, 2014

Reviews

- [Booklist](#) (August 2014): “In 2011, a documentary was released about transgender Jazz Jennings. Now 13, Jennings tells her story. “I have a girl brain but a boy body,” she explains, portraying herself from early childhood on preferring the color pink and mermaid costumes to playing with “trucks or tools or superheroes,” along with a typical array of interests in dancing, soccer, and drawing. The book gives a clear explanation, even for the youngest, of how she knew that she was born different and the importance of family acceptance. Aside from a trio of small photos at the conclusion, this draws on bright watercolor illustrations done with casual realism to underscore Jennings’ determined femininity. The pictures at time go overboard on the girlishness, but both art and narrative accentuate the positive, though not without commenting on the negative. Jennings is mostly surrounded by smiling, supportive friends and family members (the film tells a similar, but more emotionally charged, story), but there are teasing peers and “confused” teachers, though most are persuaded into acceptance. “I am happy. I am having fun. I am proud!” is a reassuring message for other trans or “different” children—and their families, too.”
- [Kirkus](#) (September 4, 2014): “The story balances this acceptance with honest acknowledgement of others’ ongoing confusion and intermittent cruelty, and it briefly addresses Jazz’s exclusion from girls’ soccer in her state. Ultimately, Jazz’s self-acceptance, bolstered by her family’s support and advocacy, acts as a beacon for readers, trans- and cisgender alike. An empowering, timely story with the power to help readers proclaim, in the words of Jazz’s parents, “We understand now.” (Picture book. 3 & up)”
- [Library Media Connection](#) (November/December 2014): “This picture book tells the story of a child born as a boy, who always felt she was a girl, and the family's journey with understanding transgender issues. It opens with Jazz telling about her favorite things, such as make-up, mermaids, and high heels. Then Jazz explains transgender; “I was born this way!” Through watercolor pictures and brief text, the reader learns the adjustments Jazz made to feel comfortable in her own skin. A page at the end of the story tells about TransKids Purple Rainbow Foundation and their mission to help children be accepted in society. It also shows a photo of Jazz as a boy and then as a girl. Jazz is now 13. This book does a good job of portraying the life of Jazz Jennings.”
- [School Library Journal](#) (July 1, 2014): “Joining the ranks of new books targeted at young children that examine gender roles, such as Ian and Sarah Hoffman's *Jacob's New Dress* (Albert Whitman, 2014), this title highlights a topic that has not been well represented in children's literature in an uplifting and empowering way. Jazz's explanation of what transgender means (“I have a girl brain but a boy body”) is somewhat simplified. However, for those looking to introduce the concept to young readers or those seeking books that value differences, this illustrated memoir is a solid choice.”

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Lists

- [Rainbow Book List](#), 2015. American Library Association.

Response to challenges

- [Ogden Public Schools \(Ogden, Utah\) - March 2023](#): A parent submitted a request for three titles, including *I am Jazz* to be removed. Though the parent later rescinded their request, school officials removed *I am Jazz* and another title.
- [St. Tammany Parrish Library \(Louisiana\) - March 2023](#): “Ultimately, the board found that none of the challenged books met the criteria to be considered as harmful to minors and voted to keep them on library shelves.”
- [Palm Beach County Schools \(Florida\) - April 2022](#): “Two books about transgender kids, including Broward resident Jazz Jennings’ “I Am Jazz,” have been removed from Palm Beach County classrooms and libraries in response to a new Florida law.”
- [Andover Public Library \(Andover, Kansas\) - September 2018](#): “In September 2018, a community member in Andover, Kansas objected to three books in the public library on “moral” grounds. The books, *I Am Jazz* by Jessica Herthel, *Lily and Dunkin* by Donna Gephart, and *George* by Alex Gino, tell inspiring stories of transgender youth and have been widely lauded. In keeping with established policy on the reconsideration of library materials, the Andover Public Library director convened a committee to review the books and ultimately accepted its recommendation to keep them in their designated sections for youth. The complainant has appealed the decision.” The board later voted to retain the books.

Reference list

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