

Kiss Number 8

Colleen AF Venable, illus. Ellen T. Crenshaw

First Second, 2019

Reviews

- [School Library Journal](#) (Feb. 1, 2019): “This graphic novel addresses transphobia, sexuality, and hypocrisy. The art’s retro feel serves the story well and is most powerful when depicting the contrast between truth and lies. The characters aren’t especially deep but they help frame Mads’s world. The resolution is realistically complicated, highlighting Mads’s agency as she manages her conflicts. Though characters spend more time than necessary proclaiming their trans- and homophobic views, Mads’s decisiveness and the clear look at how so-called ‘values’ can mask harmful attitudes make this a thought-provoking book. **VERDICT** A solid addition to YA shelves.”
- [School Library Journal](#) (Feb. 3, 2023): “This is a complex story with well-developed characters, both textually and visually, as well as a ton of detail about how family relationships work with a religious background. [...] By making this fiction, Mads’ struggle can be explored in more depth, with nuanced representation of the complexity of feelings and relationships and expectations. With its layers and emotional verisimilitude, *Kiss Number 8* is a lengthy and rewarding read, a true modern masterpiece.”
- [Kirkus](#) (Dec. 8, 2018): “It’s a story of family and friendship and love in all its forms, perfect for the graphic novel format and elevated by the combined art and narrative. [...] The characters shine, fully human and permitted to be flawed. Hope prevails. A rare blend of tender and revolutionary.” Starred review.
- [Publishers Weekly](#) (Dec. 24, 2018): “Venable (*Mervin the Sloth Is About to Do the Best Thing in the World*) creates a remarkably full picture of Amanda’s life—family, school, church, baseball, the local music scene, and the corresponding and overlapping relationship dynamics. Amanda’s decisions—confronting her family about the secret, exploring her sexuality—lead to realistically messy consequences that are not easily remedied, and the way these open up and close off areas of her life is handled well. Black-and-white cartoon art by Crenshaw (*Test Your Baby’s IQ*) complements the narrative, offering distinct characters and conveying what the dialogue alone can’t. A queer coming-of-age story that earns its powerful emotional impact.” (Starred review).

Awards

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Lists

- [National Book Awards Longlist for Young People’s Literature](#), 2019
- [New York Public Library Best Books for Teens](#), 2019

- [TAYSHAS \(Texas Library Association\) Reading List](#), 2020

Response to Challenges

- From an open letter published at PEN America, in response to the removal of *Kiss Number 8* and other titles from the Leander (TX) Independent School District: “We stand by our works and reject the argument that their inclusion in Leander’s book club reading lists is somehow “inappropriate.” However, we do so not only because we believe in the literary merit of our books, but because we believe in the capacity of these and all books to expand the reader’s frame of reference—challenging them to confront new ideas and allowing them to explore other perspectives. We are sending this letter to you today not simply to stand up for our own books, but to stand against censorship in our schools. We call on you to resist this misguided effort to ban books and graphic novels, and to revoke any current bans and suspensions for the dignity and equality of all.” ([PEN America](#))
- Statement from the Vandegrift High School Banned Books Club in Leander, TX on their decision to read *Kiss Number 8*: “We believe that it is vital to expose students to these concepts, instead of censoring us from things that are completely common.” ([The Story Exchange](#))
- Larry Walton, president of the Patmos Library board in Jamestown Township, MI, after residents voted to effectively defund Patmos Library due to the presence of LGBTQ+ teen and adult titles, including *Kiss Number 8*: “We stand behind the fact that our community is made up of a very diverse group of individuals, and we as a library cater to the diversity of our community.” ([Bridge Michigan](#))
- Patmos Library interim director Matthew Lawrence, on the same incident: “I love my country, and I believe what is happening is going against the First Amendment. [...] The people who need the library the most can’t vote because they are children.” ([Bridge Michigan](#))
- Jamestown resident Connor Cook, on the same incident: “No one wins in this and the people who lose first are our kids. [LGBTQ+ people] are not going anywhere, so I just hope your kids have a library.” ([USA Today](#))

References

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“2020 TAYSHAS Reading List.” Texas Library Association. Retrieved July 7, 2023, from <https://txla.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/TAYSHAS-2020-Annotated-List.pdf>

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