

Second Reaction: The Power of Standing Up for Yourself

Alex Gino. *Melissa*. New York City, NY: Scholastic Press, 2022. Print.

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PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED AS **GEORGE**
ALEX GINO

Alex Gino spins a beautiful tale of a young transgender girl, who is trying to reinvent herself among her peers and adults to star in her classroom's play as Charlotte in *Charlotte's Web*. This representation of a young transgender child brings exposure to how being transgender is not a choice, but how a person feels, their internal truth. This book describes Melissa's experience of what can happen when your internal knowledge of your own gender differs from your sex assigned at birth and the struggles that can occur when trying to align them. This book allows students who may also be experiencing this to know that there are multiple options and ways to feel while broadening others' knowledge about things they have never considered.

This school production is what allows Melissa to break free from the box of “George” that defined her up until this point. Redefining who you are at any age takes a lot of courage and strength and Melissa is trying to do this at only ten years old. With constant setbacks like her teacher’s belittling, a violent bully, and having only her friend Kelly in her corner, Melissa struggles to have people see her as she sees herself.

Despite all of this, Melissa perseveres because she understands that being true to yourself is more important than making other people feel comfortable. If everyone was comfortable with life all the time, there would be no change. Melissa confronts this very directly by challenging everyone’s previous conceptions of her and making them realize that she is Melissa and has always been Melissa. The story ends on an uplifting note with Melissa introducing herself by her once private name and beginning the rest of her life without any secrets about who she is.

This final scene leaves the reader with a lasting feeling of hope for Melissa. It makes you realize how being true to yourself can be so freeing and how denying people that feeling causes such severe internal conflict. Alex Gino allows the reader the opportunity to see through Melissa’s eyes and feel the emotions alongside her with their writing.

About the Author

Jordyn Dewey (she/her) is an undergraduate student in Elementary Education. She is an avid reader and has worked in multiple research labs about increasing diversity within the classroom.