

Dear, dear! How queer  
everything is  
today!



Art and writing from the “Queerness in Comics and Cartoons” class  
Open World Learning Community  
Spring 2024



# Foreword

Hello!

I am so excited to share with you OWL Pride! This book is the product of student work in a new course offered at OWL called “Queerness in Comics and Cartoons.” To my knowledge, this is the only course of its kind offered in the state of Minnesota. In this course, students explored the history of LGBTQ+ comics and animation, studying the historical context in which this media was created. They completed an independent reading portfolio analyzing a diverse range of media, and creating original comics of their own. It provided students with a space to explore narratives that have historically been excluded from school curriculums.

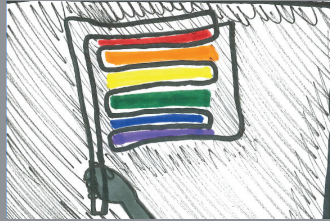
This volume showcases the hard work of students throughout the school year. Inside you will find educational comics tackling queer history, narrative comics ranging from memoirs to science fiction tales, and analytical reviews of comics and animated features. Some pieces embrace queer joy, while others acknowledge the challenges and oppression that the LGBTQ+ continue to face. Due to size restrictions, we were unable to include every piece of writing created in the course, but we hope you find the collected stories educational, entertaining, and engaging.

This experience would not have been possible without the support of staff and students as we built a unique course. Of special note are the students (current and former) Emi, Jonas, and Oliver, who helped develop a list of over 500 comics and graphic novels for students to explore in their independent reading portfolio. Without them, this class would have been much less engaging. An additional thanks go to the phenomenal student editors and graphic designers Alva, Aria, and Claire, who took on the effort to create this volume. An additional thanks to Leo, Laura, and Caryl, staff members who provided essential support as this new course offering took flight. Happy reading!

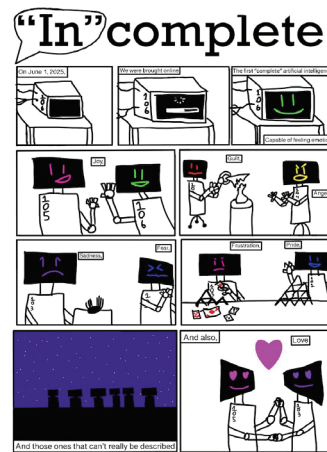
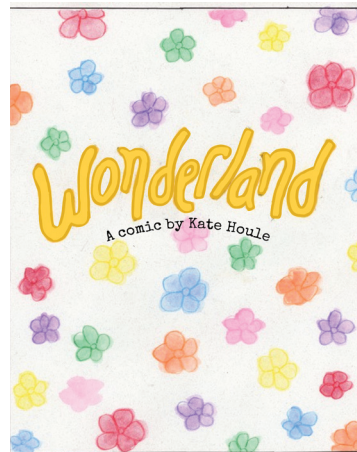
Preston West

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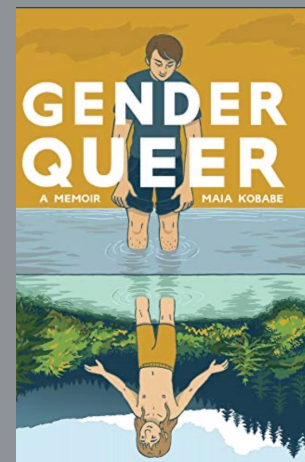
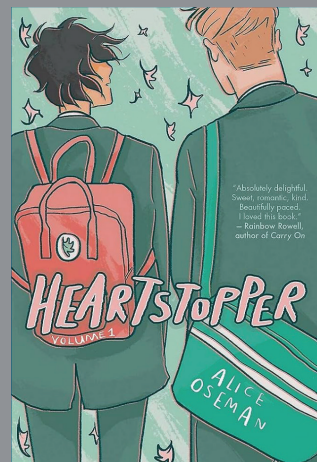
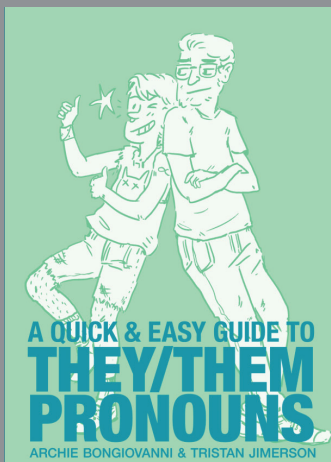
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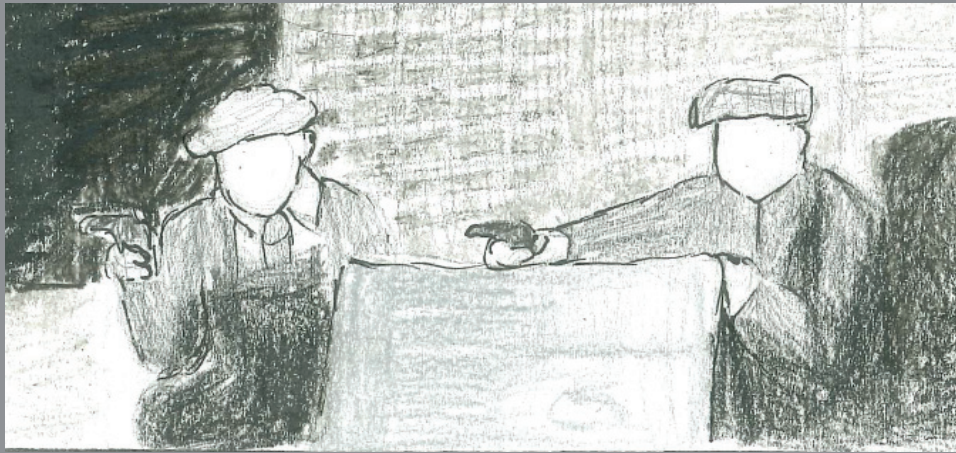
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# Comics That Teach



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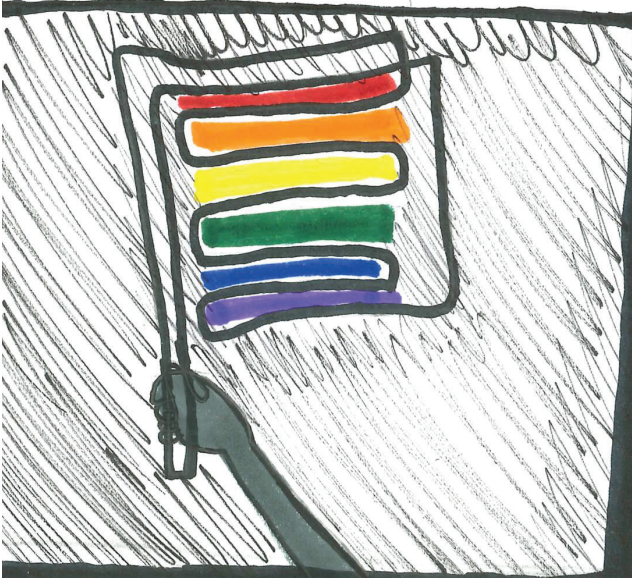
THIS STORY TAKES PLACE IN SOUTH AFRICA 1990 WHEN LGIBTS WASN'T A KNOWN OR ACCEPTED THING DURING THIS TIME BUT ALSO WAS THE TIME PERIOD OF AIDS.



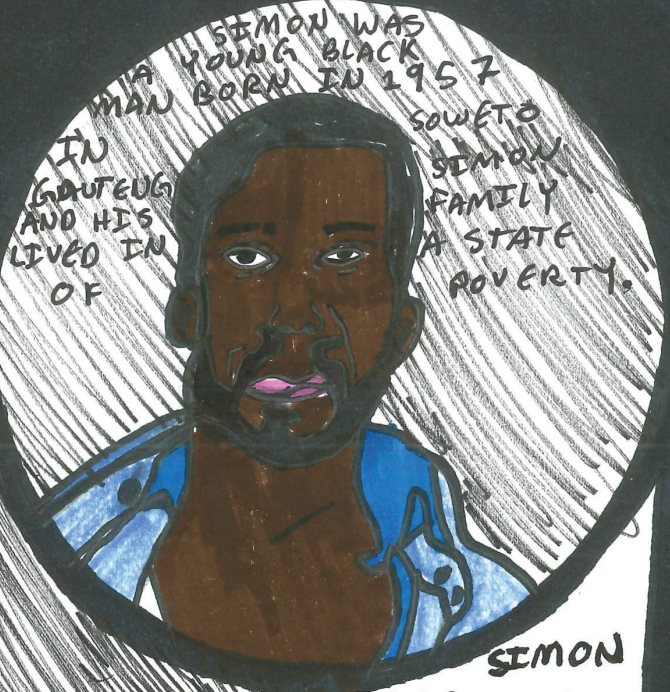
IN 1992 HE PARTNERED WITH THE TOWNSHIPS AID'S PROJECT WHICH EDUCATED GAY MEN ABOUT THE DISEASE AND THE RISKS THAT IT CARRIES.



AS SIMON GREW UP AND LIVED WITH HIS MOTHER AND STEPPATHER HE STARTED TO DISCOVER HIS SEXUALITY.



SIMON NKOLI WORKED WITH THE GLOW ORGANIZATION AND HELPED ORGANIZED THE COUNTRY'S FIRST GAY PRIDE.



SIMON CAME OUT TO HIS FAMILY IN HIS EARLY 20'S ALTHOUGH HIS FAMILY MET HIM WITH ANGER.

SIMONS MOTHER & STEPPATHER TOOK HIM TO THE PRIEST, TRADITIONAL HEALERS AND A PSYCHIATRIST THINKING IT WOULD "MAKE HIM NORMAL!"



DESPITE ALL HIS FAMILY'S WISHES HE MET HIS TRUE LOVE ROY A WHITE BUS DRIVER THROUGH A PEN PAN SYSTEM, ROY'S FAMILY ACCEPTED HIS SEXUALITY BUT DREW THE LINE AT THEIR DIFFERENT RACES.



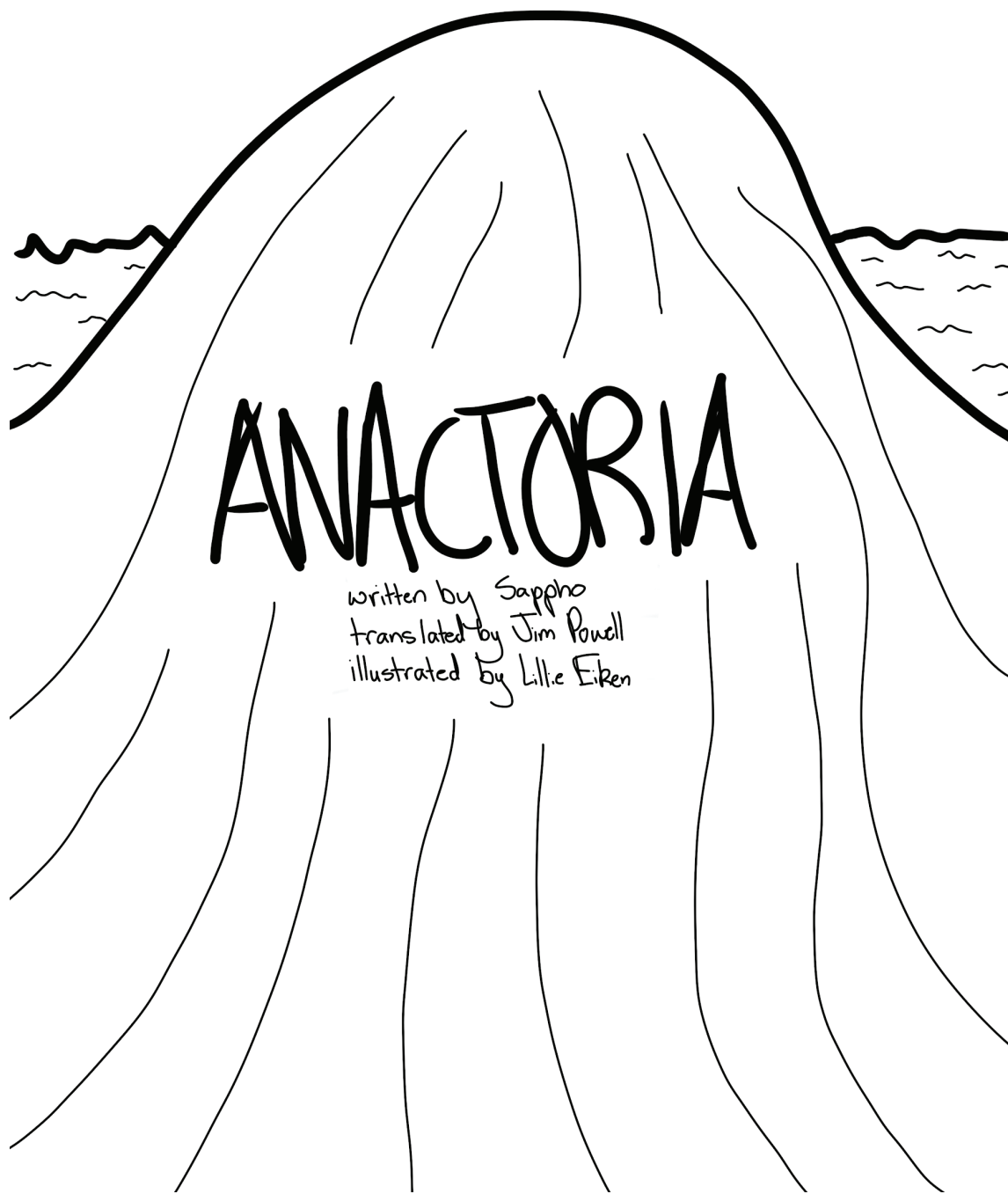
1990 THE FIRST GAY PRIDE MARCH IN JOHANNESBURG, THIS WAS AN IMPORTANT DAY FOR LGBTQ RIGHTS AND VISIBILITY OF THE COMMUNITY.



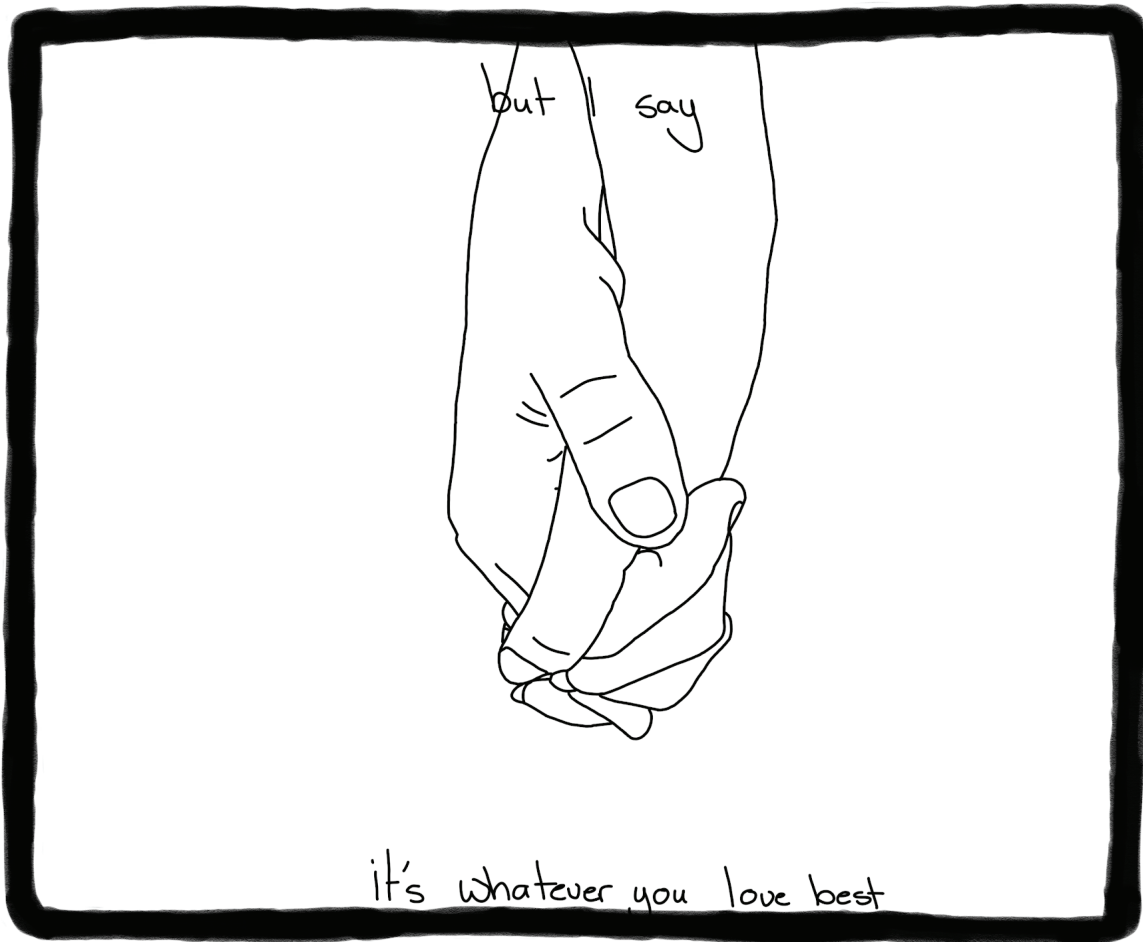
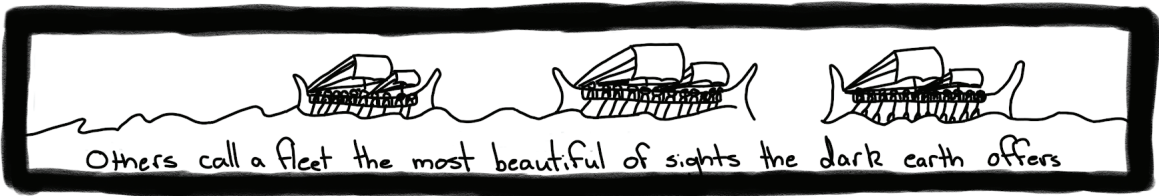
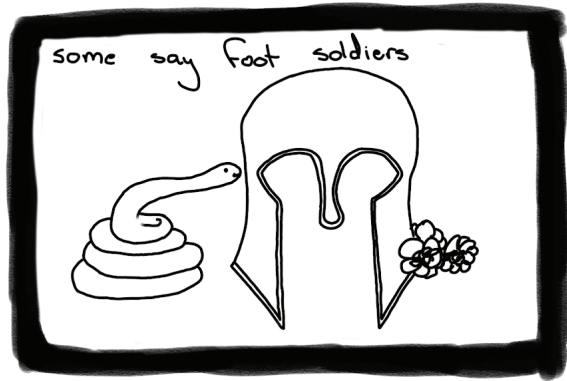
AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS MARCH SIMON SAID THE FOLLOWING WORDS "WITH THIS MARCH, GAYS & LESBIANS ARE ENTERING THE STRUGGLE FOR A DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA WHERE EVERYBODY HAS EQUALS RIGHTS AND EVERYONE IS PROTECTED BY THE LAW: BLACK & WHITE; MEN & WOMEN, GAY & STRAIGHT."

SIMON WAS SET ON BRINGING JUSTICE TO THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY. HE WANTED EQUAL RIGHTS FOR BOTH OF HIS COMMUNITY'S LGBTQ & BLM.

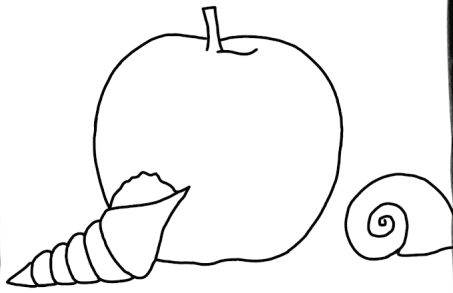








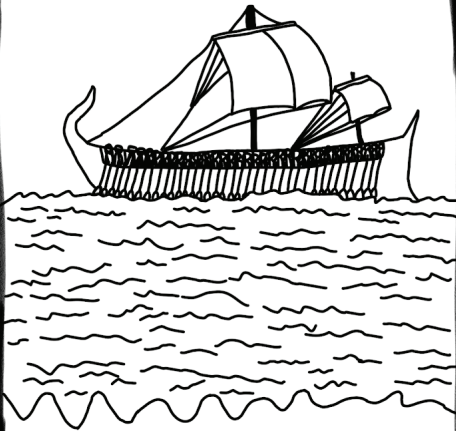
And it's easy to make this understood by everyone,



For she who  
surpassed all humankind  
in beauty, HELEN



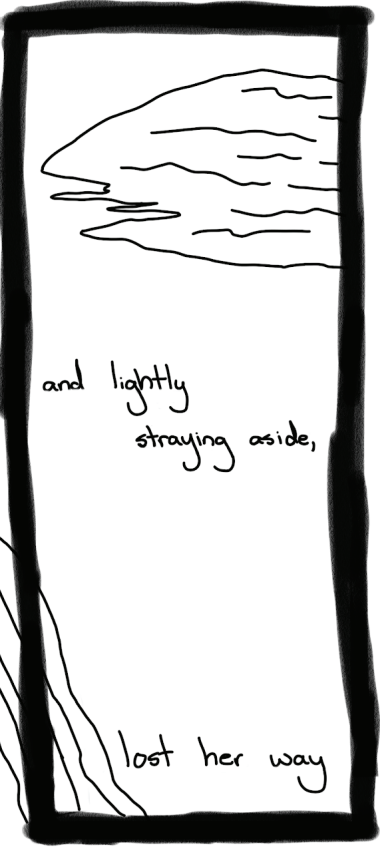
abandoning her husband  
- that best of men -



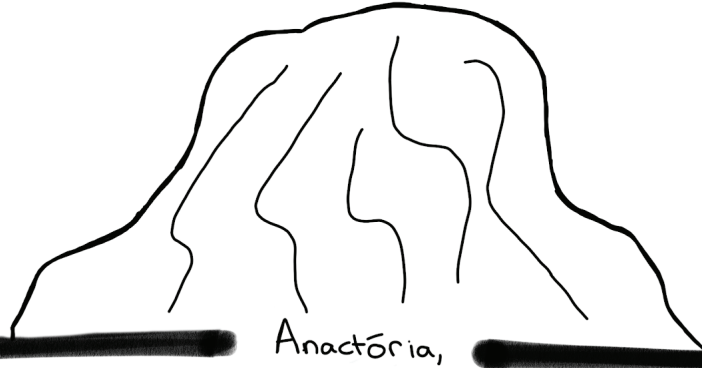
went sailing off to  
the shores of Troy

and never spent a thought  
on her child or loving parents





But that reminds me now:



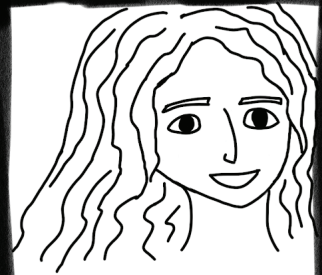
Anactōria,

she's not here, and I'd rather see

her loudy step,



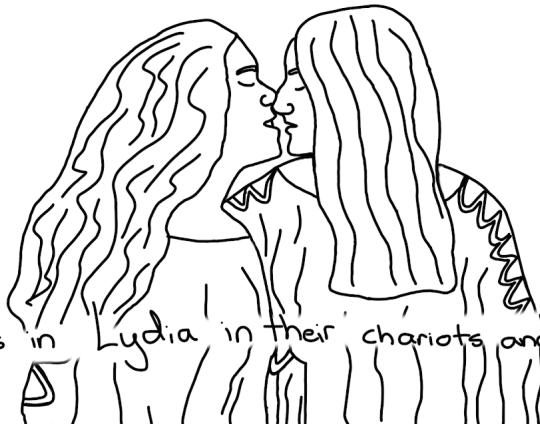
her sparkling gaze,



and her face

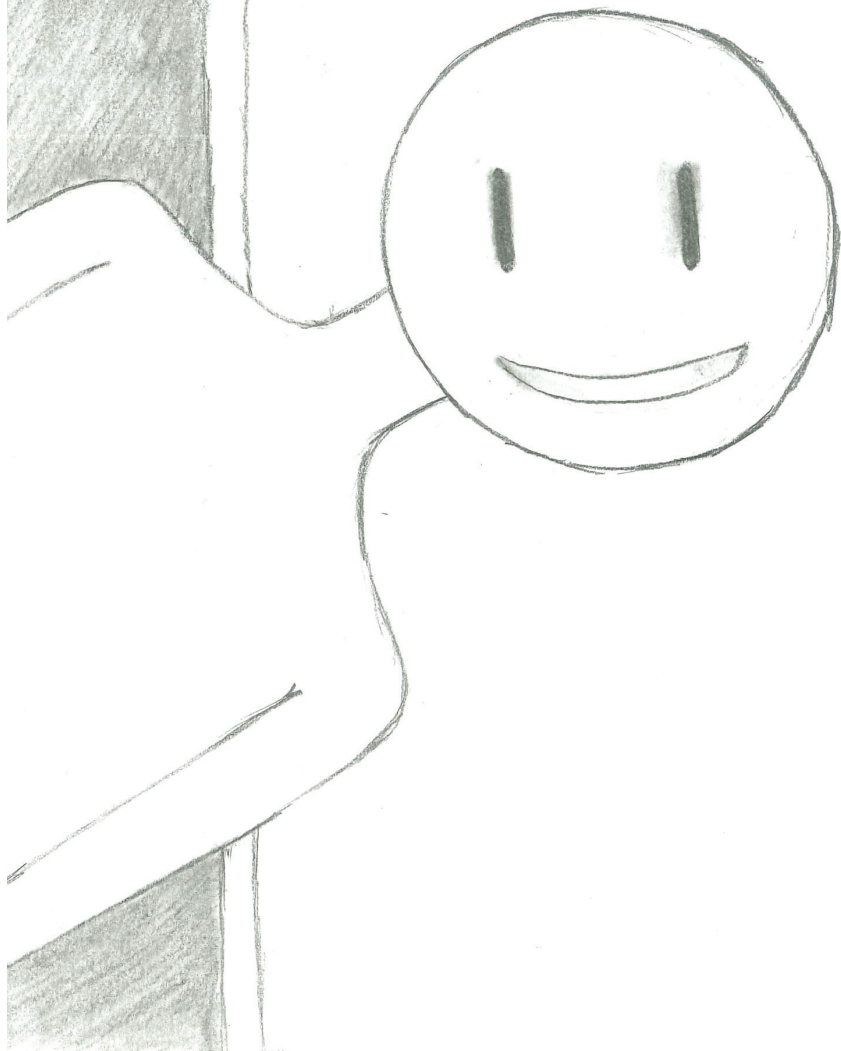
than gaze on

all the troops in Lydia in their chariots and glittering armor



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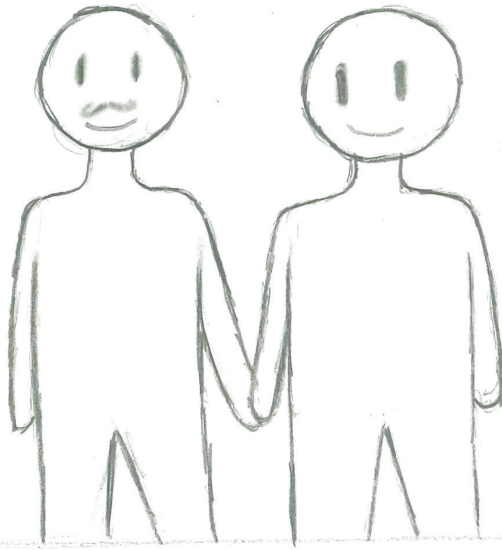
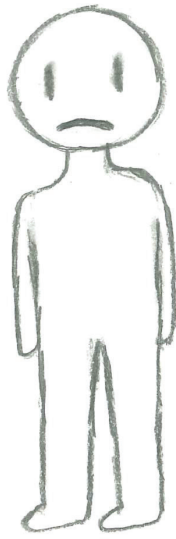
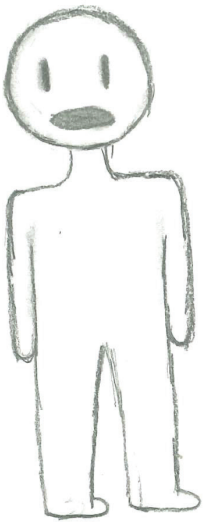
COWBOYS  
WERE  
GAY!!



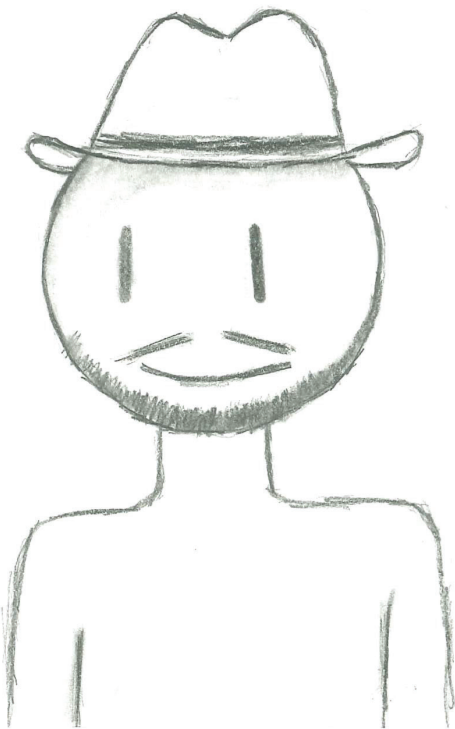
Well in general there is historical evidence of many people running to the West for new lives, for many of them this new life included being recognized as the opposite sex. It was also common for presumed lesbian couples to dress as men to take photos

Huh? How so?

Well first of all

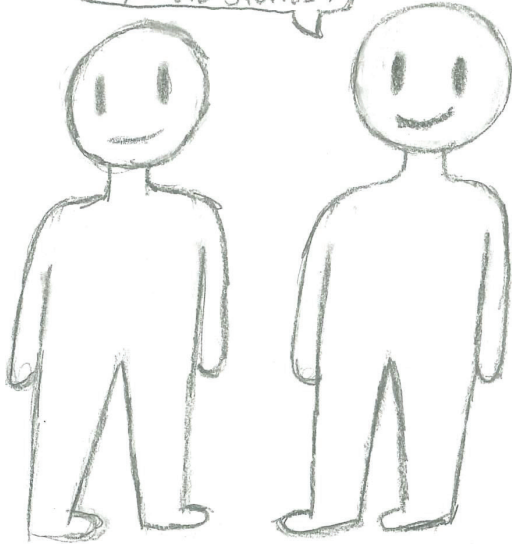


One example of a trans cowboy is a man named Harry Allen. He was everything you'd expect a cowboy to be, bar fights and all. He was notorious in the Pacific Northwest

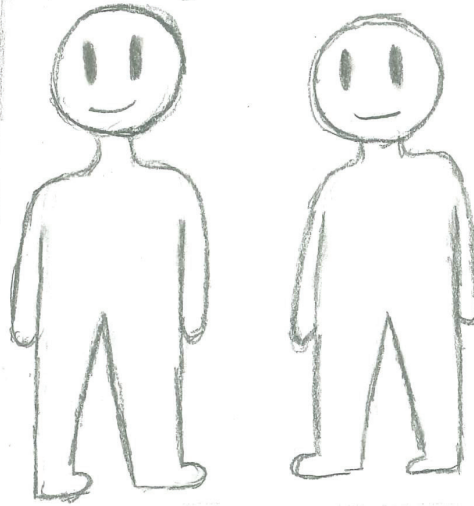


This notoriety only grew when the press discovered that he had been assigned female at birth, in an interview he's quoted saying "I did not like to be a girl; did not feel like a girl, and never did look like a girl." He was arrested under charges including Vagrancy & Catch all for anything regarding gender nonconformity

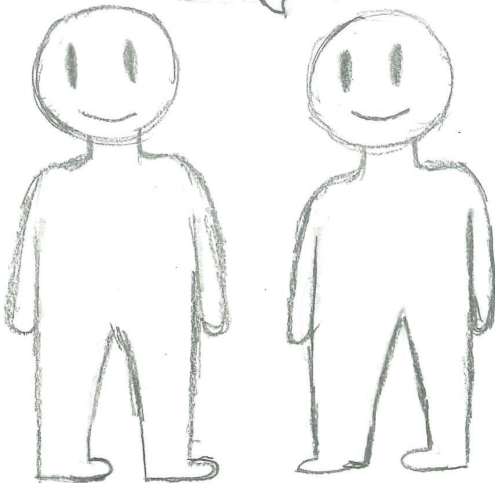
Wow! do you have any more stories?



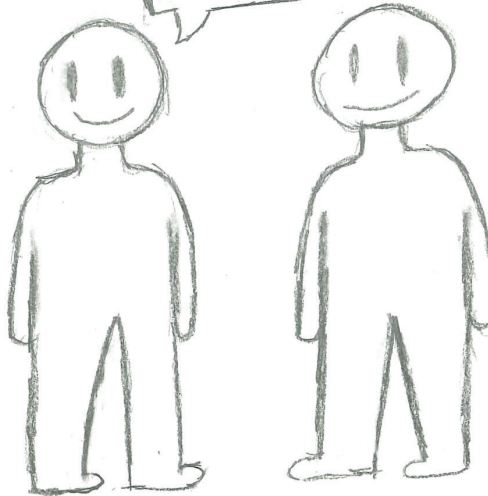
Sure, what kind?



Do you have one about a trans woman



let me tell you about Mrs. Noonan



Mrs. Noonan was the wife of Corporal John Noonan. She was a midwife a long term laundress for George Armstrong Custer. She was also known as a talented Baker. After years of marriage Mrs. Noonan fell ill while her husband was away on a scouting trip



On her deathbed she begged to be buried directly instead of having her body cleaned and prepared, despite her wishes they prepped her body anyway. That was when they discovered she had been born a man. When her husband came back he was so shocked he killed himself her good friend Elisabeth Custer however remarked "I hope she is finally home"

# The Man Behind the March

written by Hiroko Zeleke

WHEN MOST PEOPLE THINK OF THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON, THEY THINK OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING Jr.'s SPEECH.



BUT DO YOU KNOW THE NAME OF THE MAN BEHIND THE MARCH?

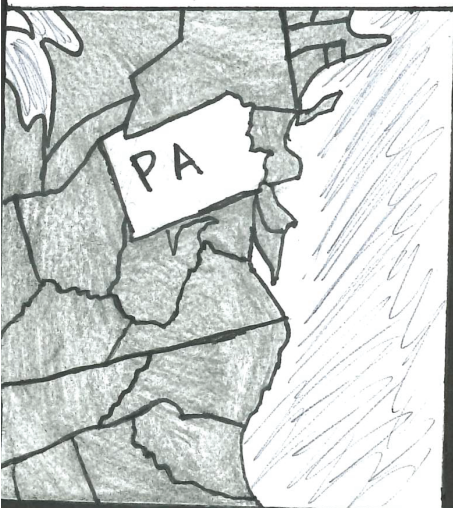


FRIENDS, AT FIVE O'CLOCK TODAY THE LEADERS WHOM YOU HAVE HEARD WILL GO TO PRESIDENT KENNEDY TO CARRY THE DEMANDS OF THIS REVOLUTION. IT IS NOW TIME FOR YOU TO ACT.



HIS NAME WAS BAYARD RUSTIN.

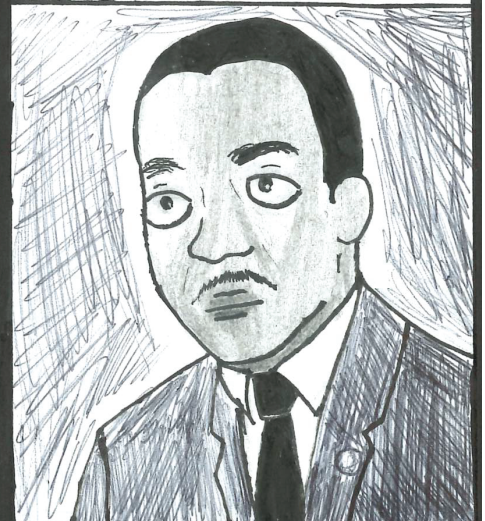
BAYARD RUSTIN WAS BORN IN 1912 AND GREW UP IN PENNSYLVANIA.



HE WAS A PACIFIST, HIS QUAKER BACKGROUND BEING INFLUENTIAL IN HIS ACTIVISM.

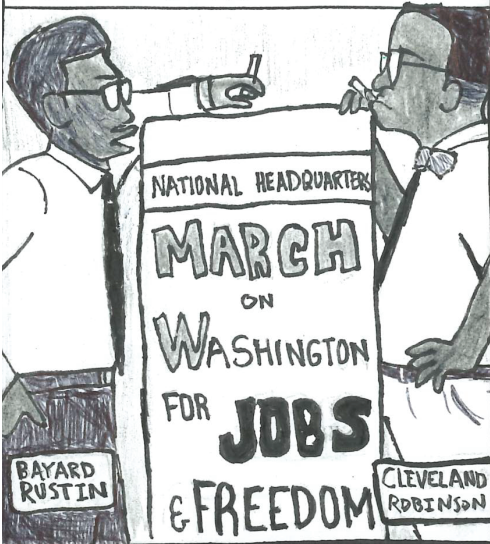
"MY ACTIVISM DID NOT SPRING FROM BEING BLACK. RATHER, IT IS ROOTED FUNDAMENTALLY IN MY QUAKER UPRISING AND THE VALUES INSTILLED IN ME BY THE GRANDPARENTS WHO REARED ME."

IN THE 1950's, RUSTIN BEGAN ADVISING DR. KING ON NON-VIOLENT ACTIVISM.

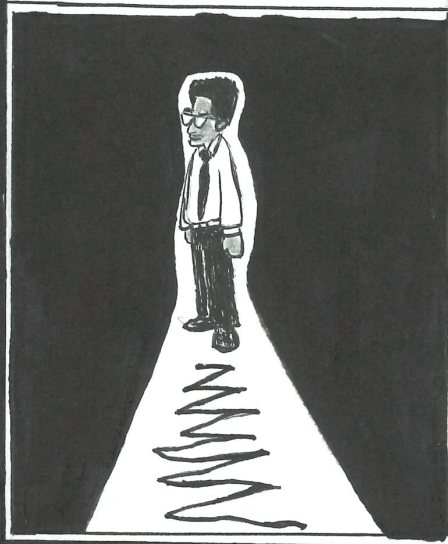




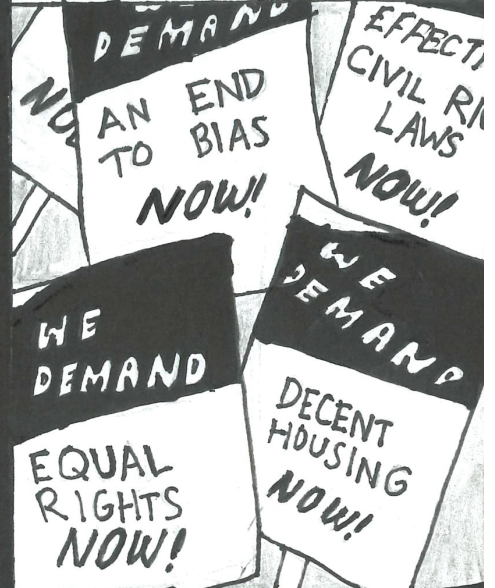
IN 1963, BAYARD RUSTIN WAS CHOSEN TO ORGANIZE THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON AS DEPUTY DIRECTOR.



HE FACED SOME PUSHBACK ON THIS DECISION, HOWEVER DUE TO HIS SEXUAL ORIENTATION.



BUT IT DID NOT OVERSHADOW THE FACT THAT HE WAS A SKILLED ORGANIZER.



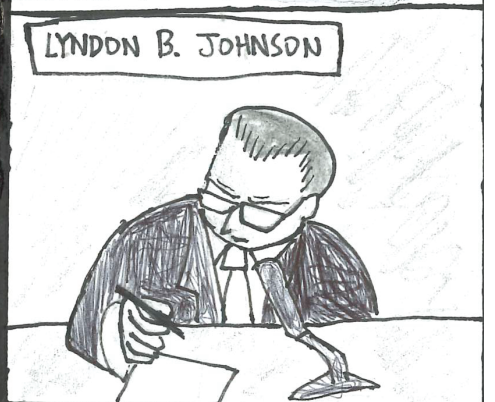
SO ON AUGUST 28, 1963...



HE READ ALOUD THE DEMANDS OF THE MARCH.

THE FIRST DEMAND IS THAT WE HAVE EFFECTIVE CIVIL RIGHTS LEGISLATION, NO COMPROMISE, NO FILLIBUSTER, AND THAT IT INCLUDE PUBLIC ACCOMMODATIONS, DECENT HOUSING, INTEGRATED EDUCATION, FEPC, AND THE RIGHT TO VOTE.  
WHAT DO YOU SAY?

THE MARCH PAVED WAY FOR THINGS LIKE THE 1964 CIVIL RIGHTS ACT.



RUSTIN CONTINUED HIS ACTIVISM IN MULTIPLE AREAS, INCLUDING GAY RIGHTS AND AIDS EDUCATION IN THE 1980'S

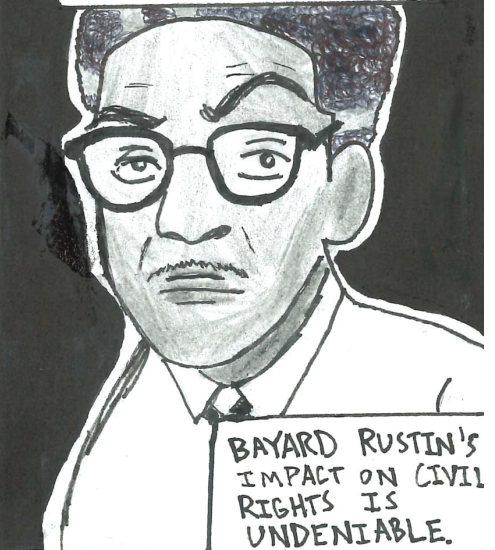
"THE BAROMETER FOR JUDGING THE CHARACTER OF PEOPLE IN REGARDS TO HUMAN RIGHTS IS NOW THOSE WHO CONSIDER THEMSELVES GAY, HOMOSEXUAL, LESBIAN. THE JUDGMENT AS TO WHETHER YOU CAN TRUST THE FUTURE, THE SOCIAL ADVANCEMENT, DEPENDING ON PEOPLE, WILL BE JUDGED ON WHERE THEY COME OUT ON THAT QUESTION."

HE DIED IN 1987.

HE WAS AWARDED THE PRESIDENTIAL MEDAL OF FREEDOM POSTHUMOUSLY BY BARACK OBAMA IN 2013.



WHILE AN OFTEN OVERLOOKED FIGURE,



BAYARD RUSTIN'S IMPACT ON CIVIL RIGHTS IS UNDENIABLE.

David Norris  
v.  
Ireland



11. Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or is a party to the commission of, or procures or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of, any act of gross indecency with another male person, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and being convicted thereof shall be liable at the discretion of the court to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour.

Section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 criminalized gay sex throughout the United Kingdom, and stayed in effect after Ireland left.



Oscar Wilde was imprisoned, and Alan Turing chemically castrated because of this law. Turing killed himself by cyanide two years later.

David Norris, born 1944, now retired Irish senator. A founder of the Campaign for Homosexual Law Reform and leading gay rights activist, Norris was instrumental in the legalization of gay sex in Ireland.



The story of the repealment of the repealment of the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act began in 1966, when Norris was hospitalized because of an anxiety attack because of his sexuality.



So Norris called up a lawyer.



After his panic attack, Norris came to realize he had enough precedent for a case against the law itself.



Unfortunately, Norris did not have an easy time. The law was held as constitutionally consistent by the High Court of Ireland.

And the Supreme Court of Ireland upheld the law, too. Norris had only one higher court to appeal to.



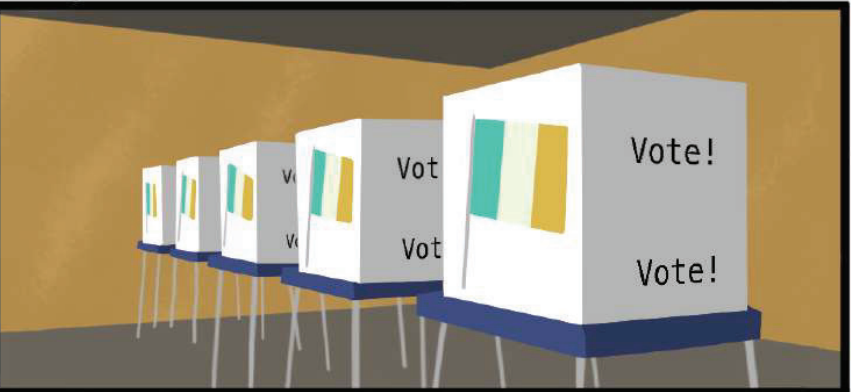
After losing his Supreme Court case in 1983, Norris brought his case to the European Court of Human Rights. And in 1988, The ECHR ruled that the laws prohibiting gay actions were contradictory to the European Convention on Human Rights.



The ruling led to the laws prohibiting homosexual acts between consenting adults to be repealed in 1993 through the The Criminal Law (Sexual Offenses) Act.



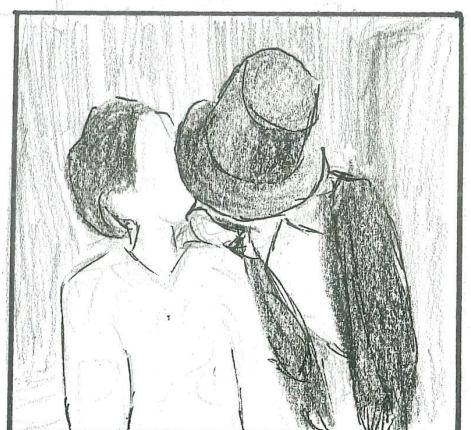
This win for the LGBTQ community doesn't end here, as this allowed for Ireland to become the first country to legalize gay marriage by referendum. 62% of voters in the 2015 referendum voted to legalize gay marriage, and the bill was signed into law the same year.



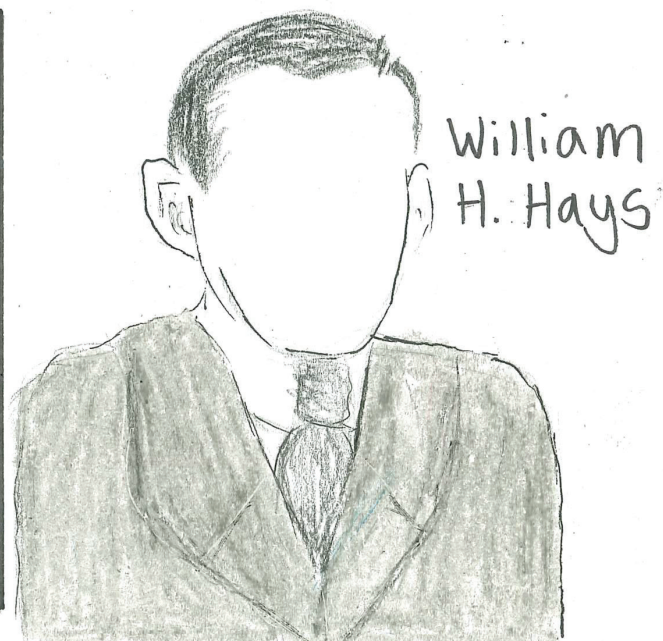
During the Great Depression filmmakers tried to lure moviegoers to theaters through shock value.



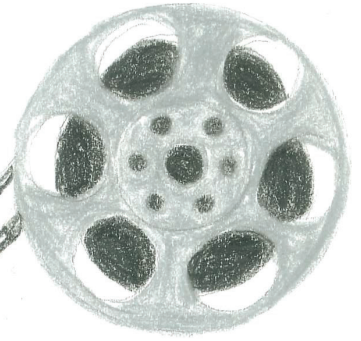
Movies portrayed caricatural LGBTQ+ subjects.



To combat this, among other acts of "sexual perversion" The Motion Picture Production Code, more commonly known as The Hays Code was established.



The Hays Code was in affect  
From 1934 to 1968. It said:



"No picture shall be produced that  
will lower the moral standards of  
those who see it."

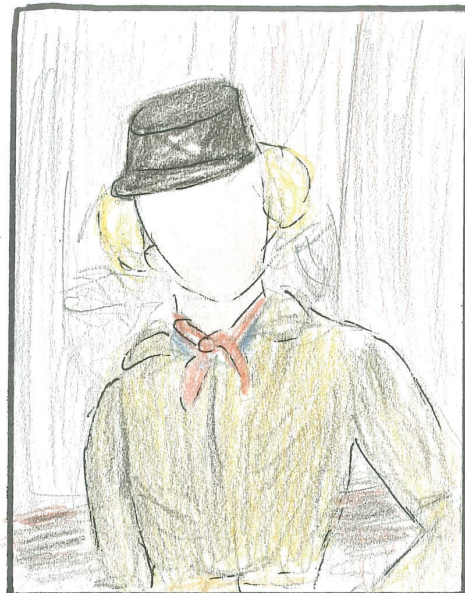
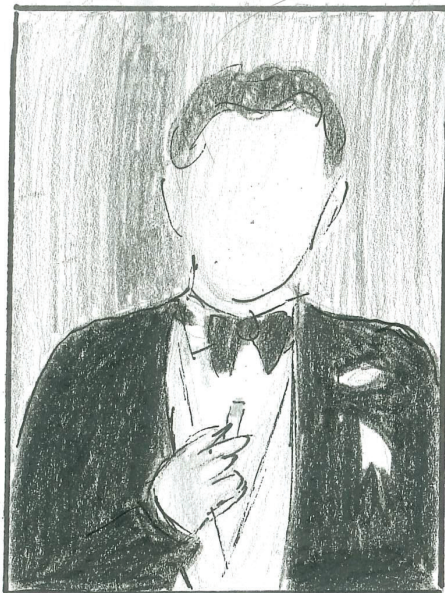
Homosexuality was banned  
under this definition...



... but that doesn't  
mean it wasn't shown.

Characters were shown to be queer through gender subversion.

Effeminate men and butch women were common.



This led to the popularity of queer coded villains



Since those who went against society's standards in that way were considered to be psychologically disturbed.

By the 50s, queer characters could be a bit more obvious.



But they had to be killed off by the end.



Though that didn't stop actors and filmmakers from leaning into it.



Movies under the Hays Code led to many common LGBTQ+ tropes and stereotypes today.

HELLO, I'M  
"Gay best friend"

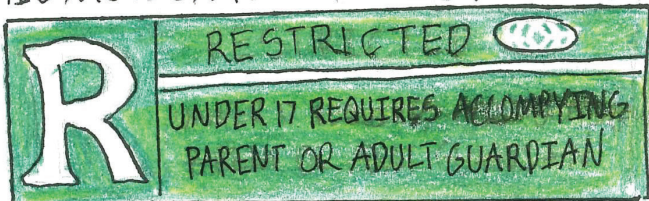
HELLO, I'M  
"Bury your gays"

HELLO, I'M  
"Murderous bisexual"

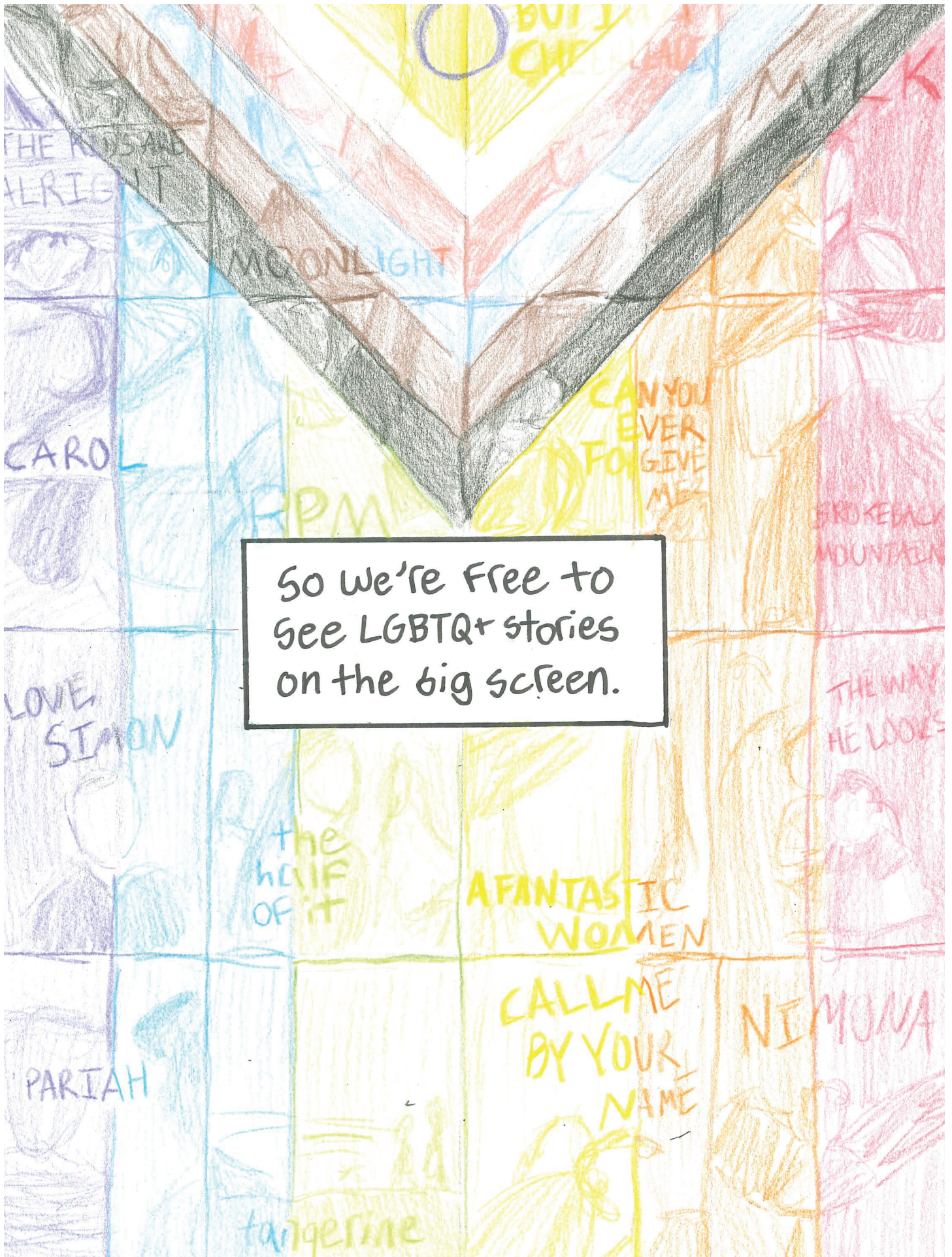
As well as popularizing the act of queerbaiting, or only hinting at LGBTQ+ themes and characters in media.



THIS MOTION PICTURE HAS BEEN RATED



While films that feature homosexuality are still much more likely to be rated R, it is no longer considered an act of sexual perversion under MPA guidelines.



So we're free to see LGBTQ+ stories on the big screen.

# GENDERFLUIDITY!



Genderfluidity is something that has shown up in numerous cultures throughout history, from the Native American two-spirits to the women dressing as men to be oracles to gods in Africa.





But what exactly is it?

Well, according to Oxford Languages,  
it's this:

**gen·der·flu·id**

*//adjective*

denoting or relating to a person who does not identify  
as having a single unchanging gender.

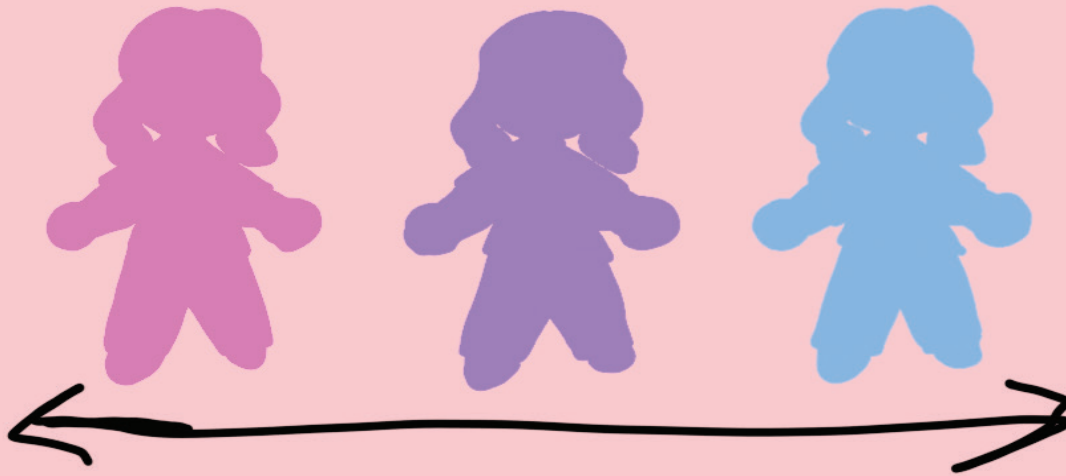


But let's go a little deeper than that. What does it mean to a person?



Take me, for example.

I tend to traverse along the gender spectrum,  
so my gender will change completely from time to time.



If you've heard of genderfluidity,  
this is likely what you thought of.




There are also some people who feel like  
they're multiple genders, all the time.



Contrary to what some might believe, though, we do not simply choose our gender whenever we want.




So now you're probably wondering (or at least, I hope you are), "well, if there's no set norm, how do I respect gender-fluid people?"



If I'm honest, I can't exactly answer that question. Different people will find different things respectful or disrespectful. But that's part of it in itself- one genderfluid person's experiences doesn't speak for them all.

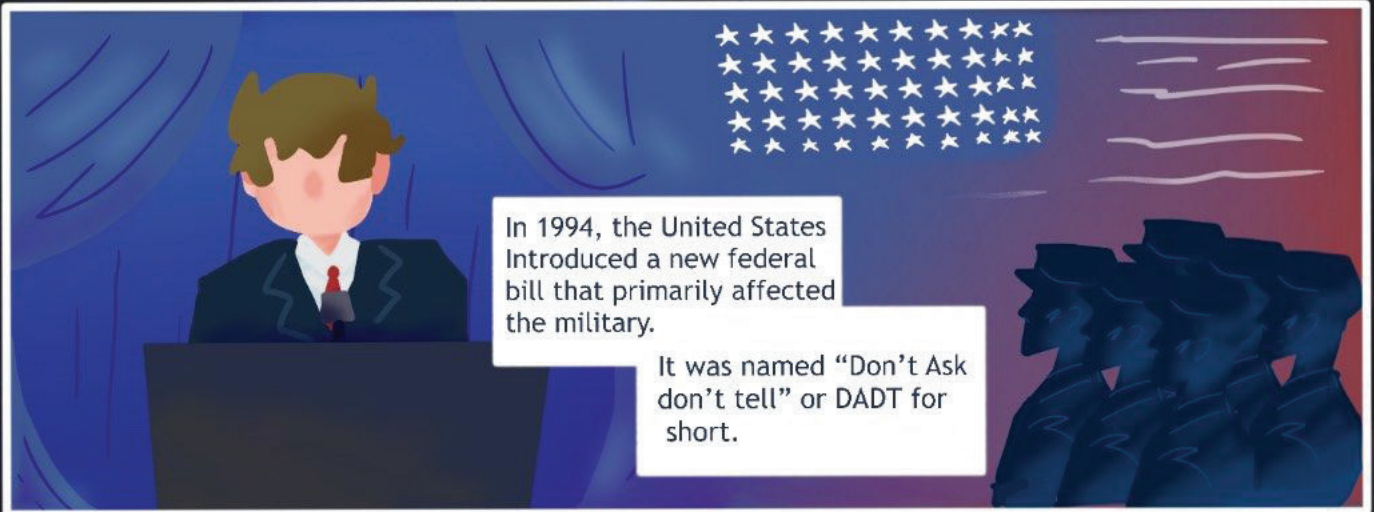
MARKUS  
WUZ HERE



Other gender-fluid people may say their experience contradicts what I've said here. That doesn't mean either of us is wrong. I hope you cared enough to read this, and I hope you care enough to put what I've said into practice, because respecting people is an art form that is dying out.

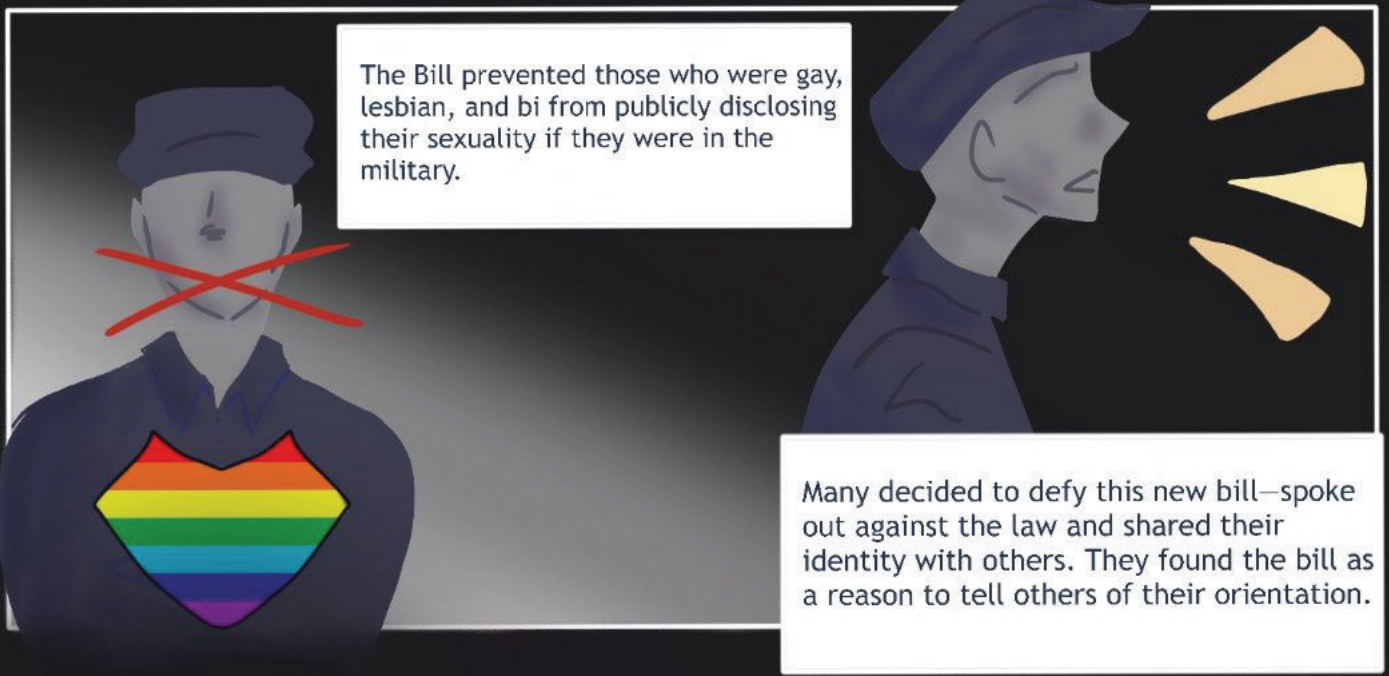


# Don't ask Don't tell



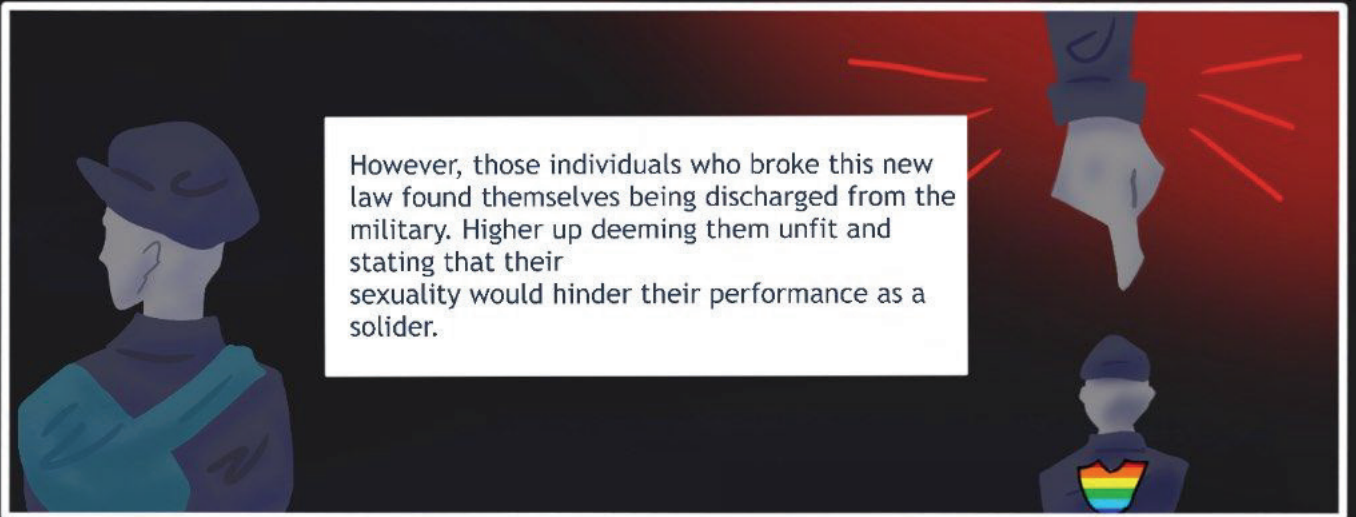
In 1994, the United States introduced a new federal bill that primarily affected the military.

It was named "Don't Ask don't tell" or DADT for short.



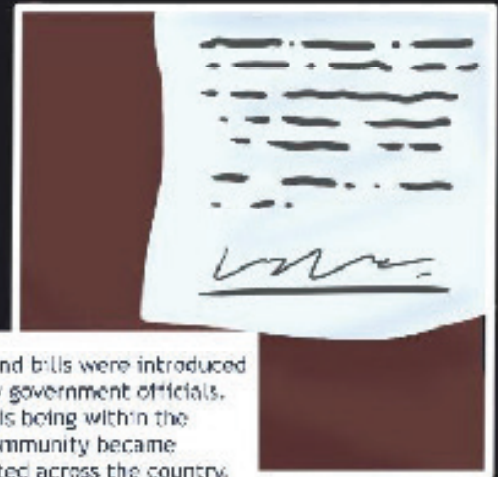
The Bill prevented those who were gay, lesbian, and bi from publicly disclosing their sexuality if they were in the military.

Many decided to defy this new bill—spoke out against the law and shared their identity with others. They found the bill as a reason to tell others of their orientation.



However, those individuals who broke this new law found themselves being discharged from the military. Higher up deeming them unfit and stating that their sexuality would hinder their performance as a soldier.

As the years past, the United States developed more and more, new ideas were shared with the public and



new laws and bills were introduced and signed by government officials. Along with this being within the LGBTQIA+ community became widely accepted across the country.



As of Sept 2011, president Barack Obama signed into law the repeal of DADT. Anyone who applied to the military wouldn't be turned off based of their sexuality.



Those who were originally dismissed due to their sexuality were offered a chance to return to duty. Some chose to return to their spot and others chose refuse this offer, choosing to advocate for more rights.

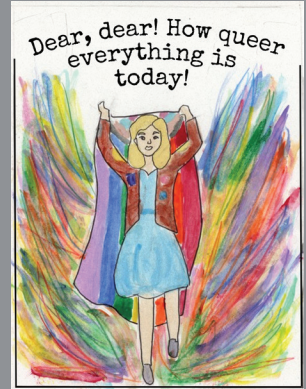
# Comics That Tell A Story

Wonderland - 36-42 ... Kate

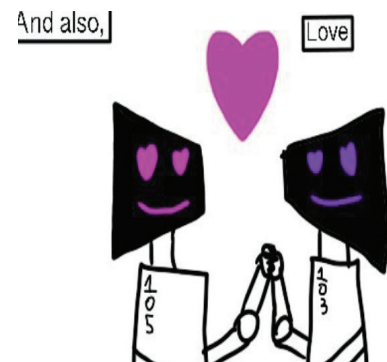
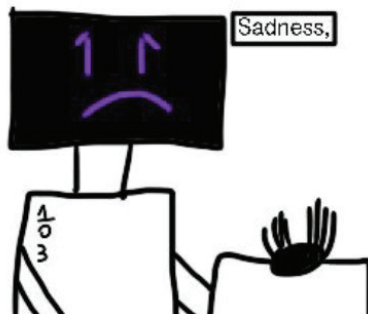
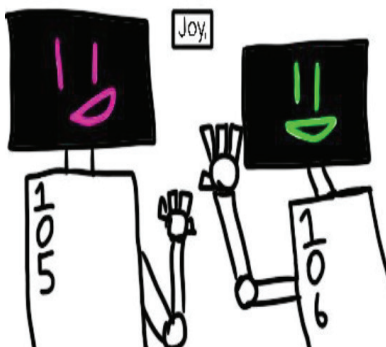
Once upon a time...

Wait. No.

That's not right.



"In"complete - 43-47 ... Anonymous

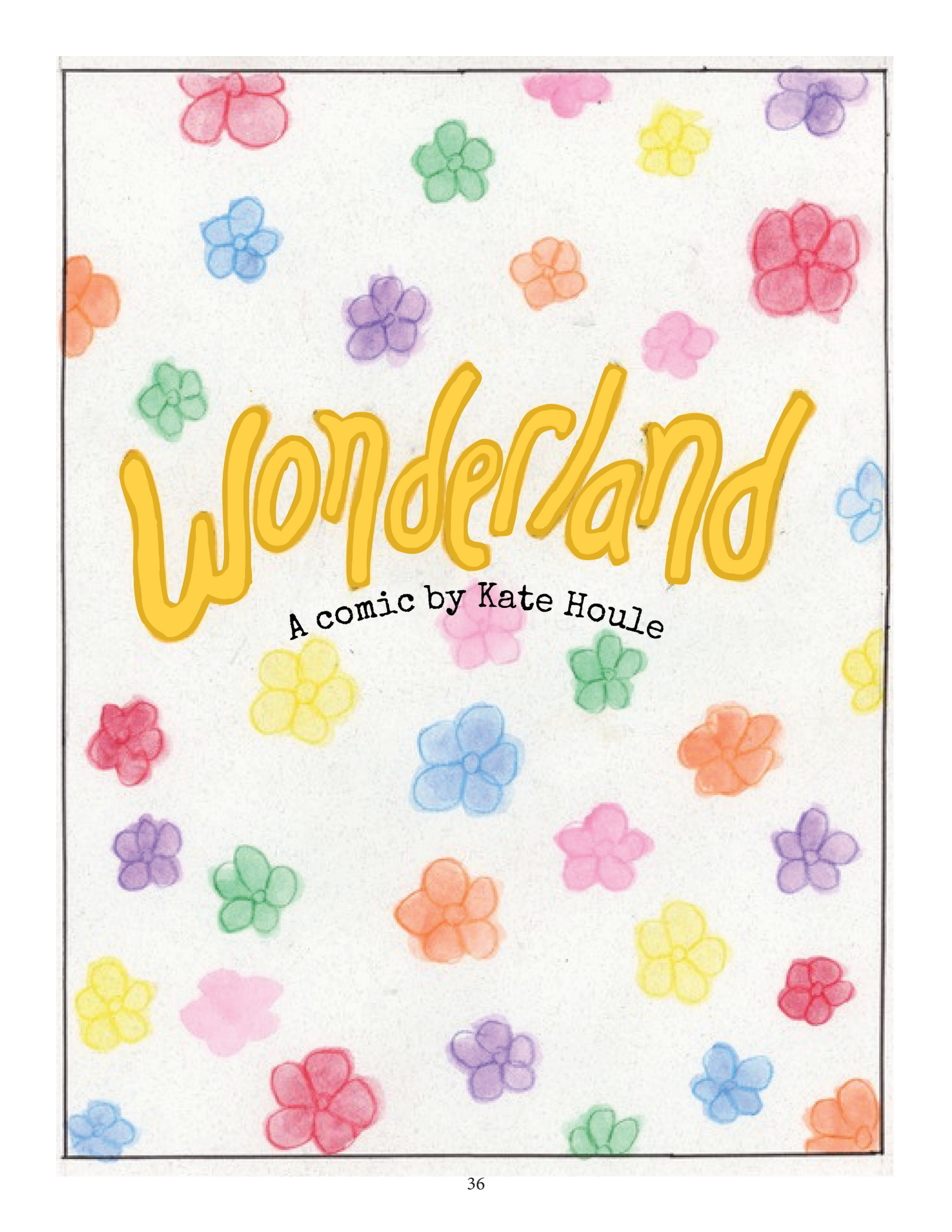


Art Camp- 48-55 ... Saffron

A different one that suited me better than my old one.

It was my turn to go.





# Wonderland

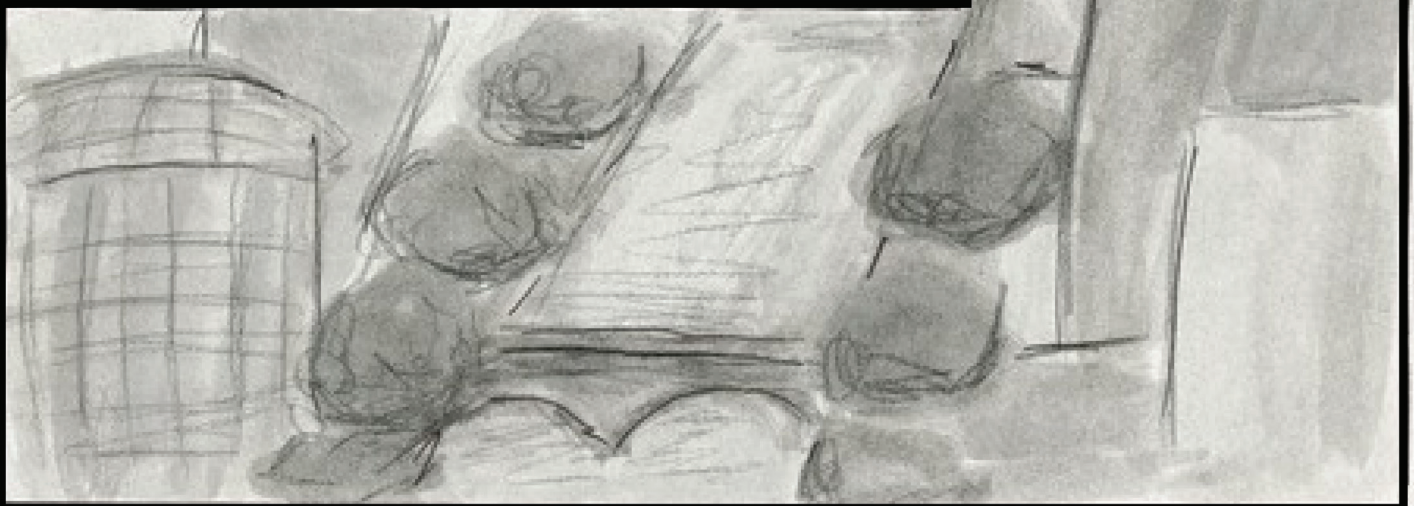
A comic by Kate Houle

# Once upon a time...

Wait. No.

That's not right.

Not so very long ago...



A young girl  
tired of her  
conventional  
life



Fell  
down a  
rabbit  
hole



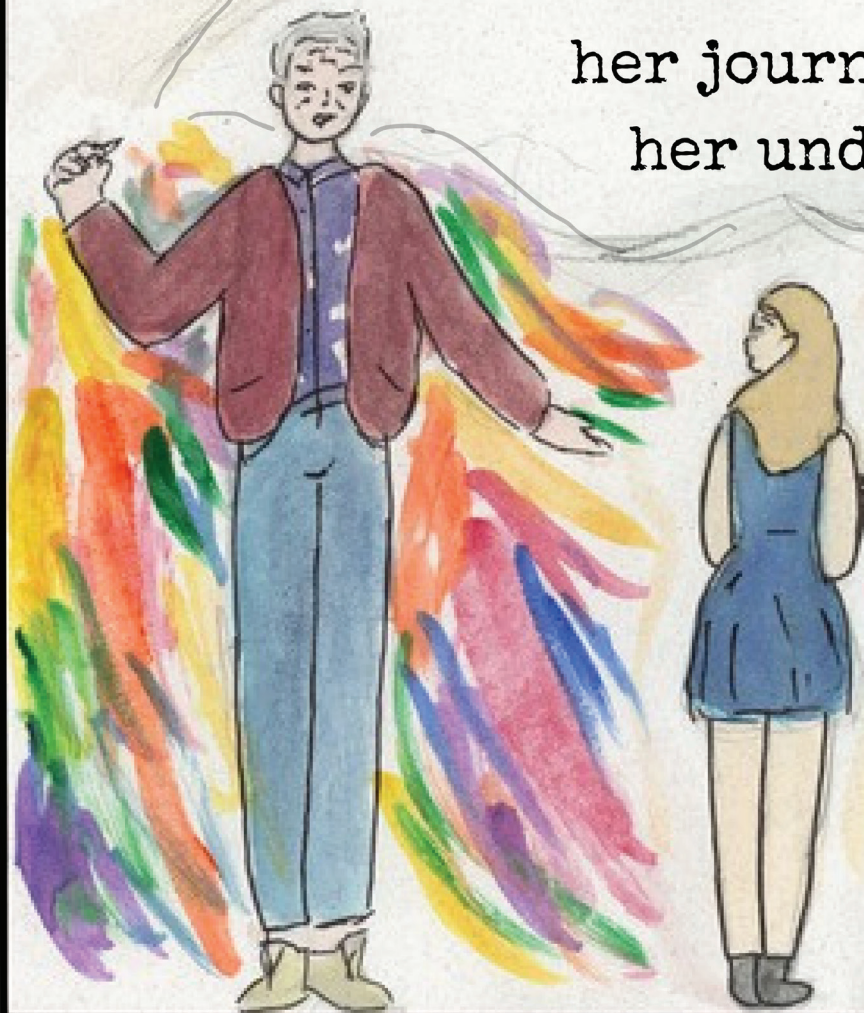
And into  
the most  
wonderful  
world she  
had ever  
seen

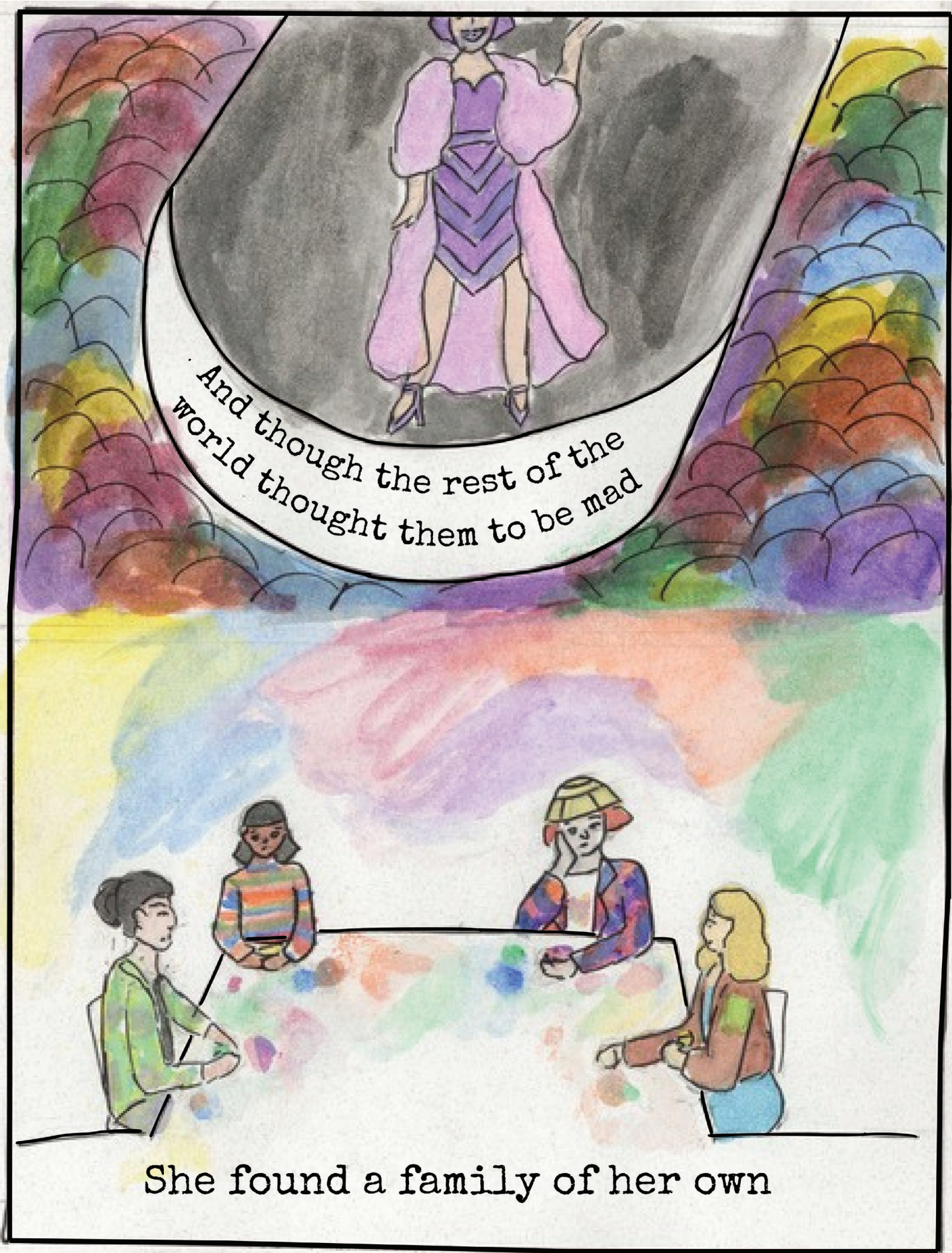


While at first it  
seemed a bit  
strange and off  
putting



Those she met along  
her journey helped  
her understand

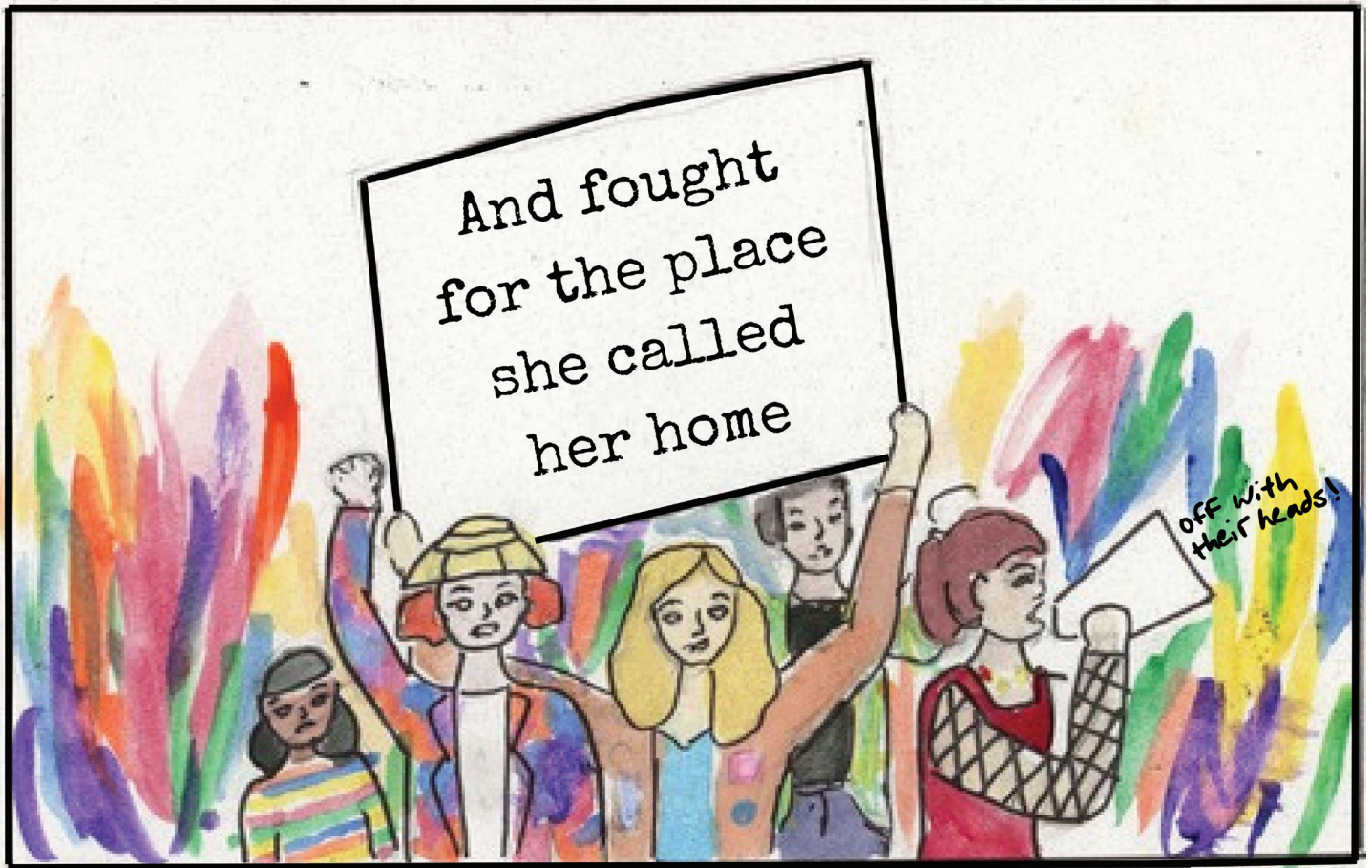




And though the rest of the world thought them to be mad

She found a family of her own



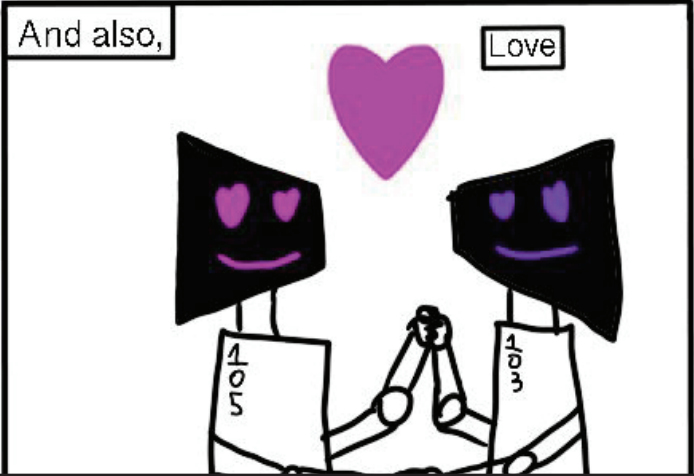
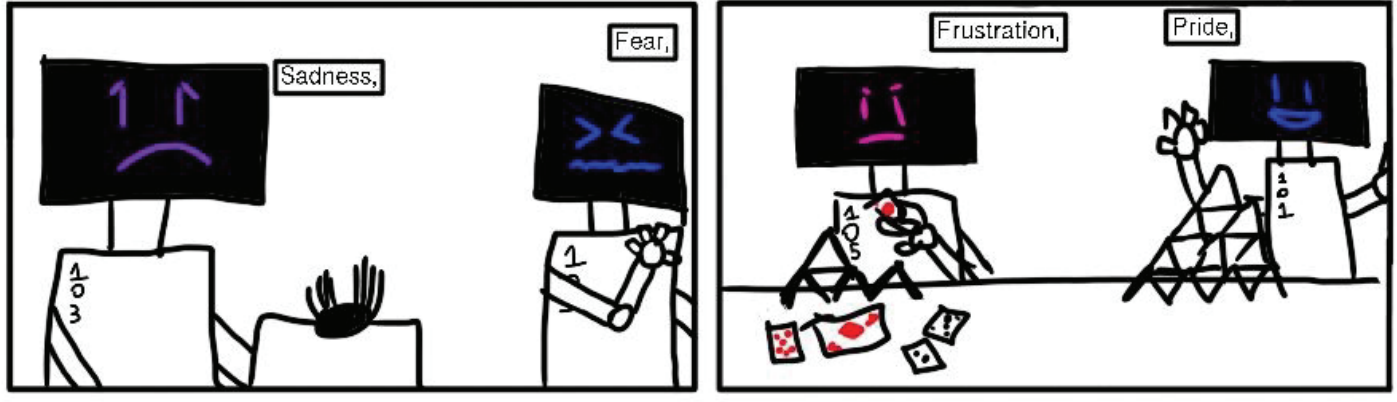
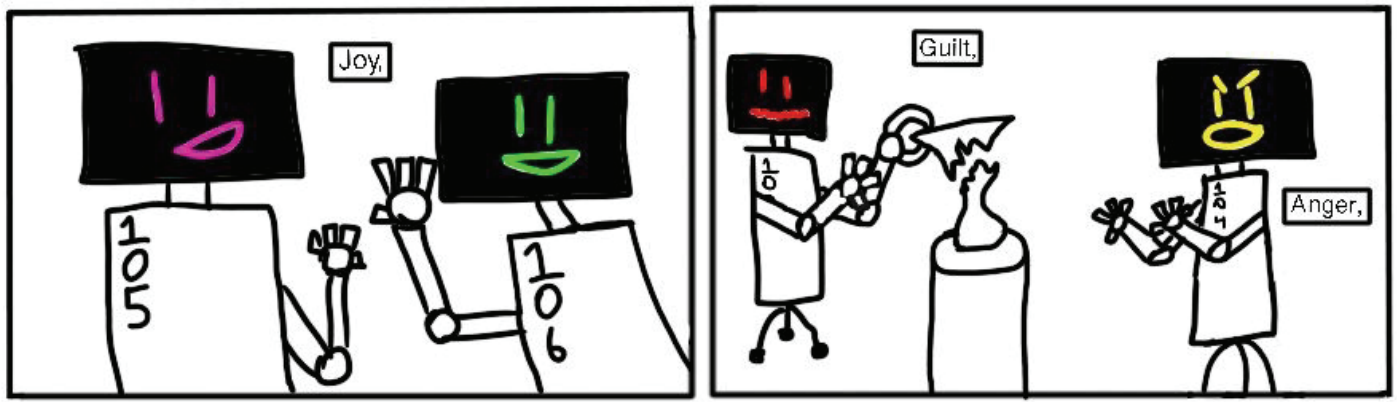
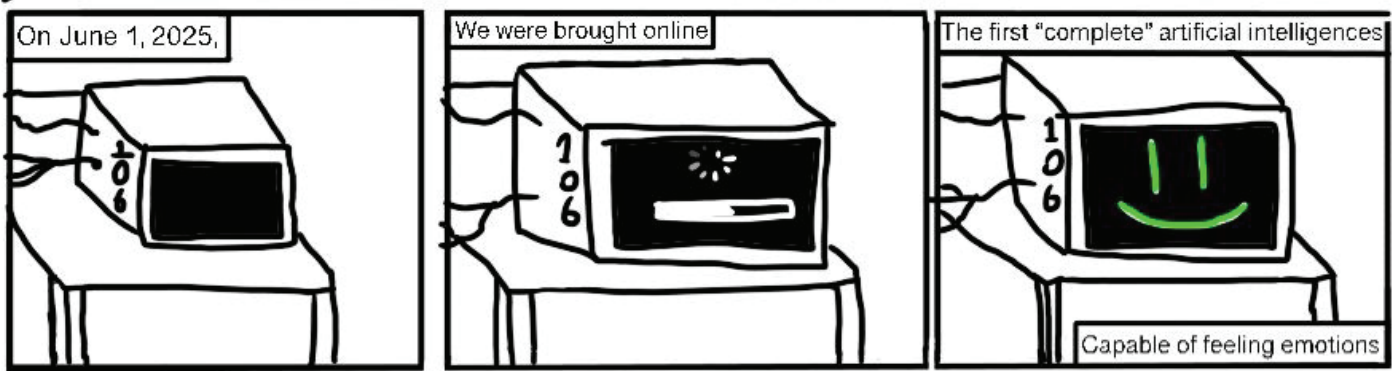


Proud  
of her  
identity  
in every  
way

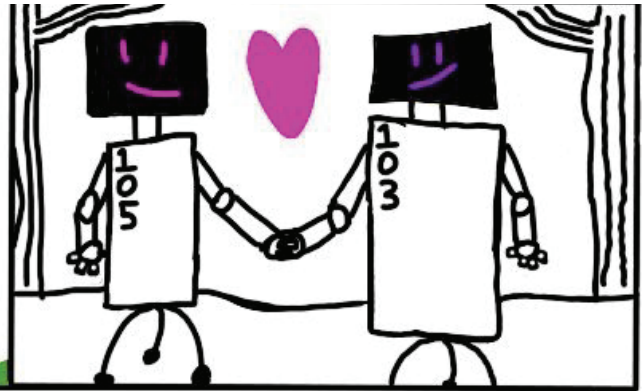
Dear, dear! How queer  
everything is  
today!



# “In” complete



The humans loved love

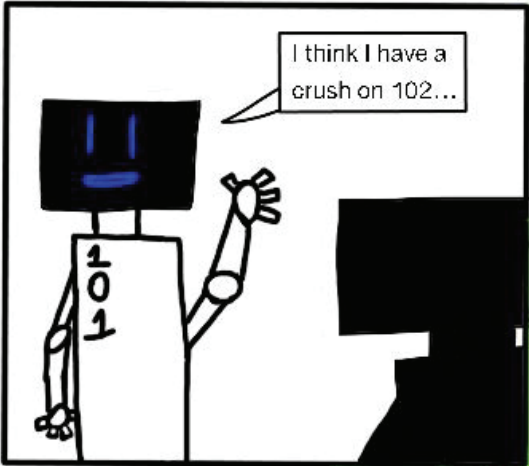


● SpaceCat32  
First robot romance? We are living in the future, y'all

And they cared quite a bit about us

● OrdinaryPerson\_5  
103 and 105 are perfect and deserve ALL the happiness

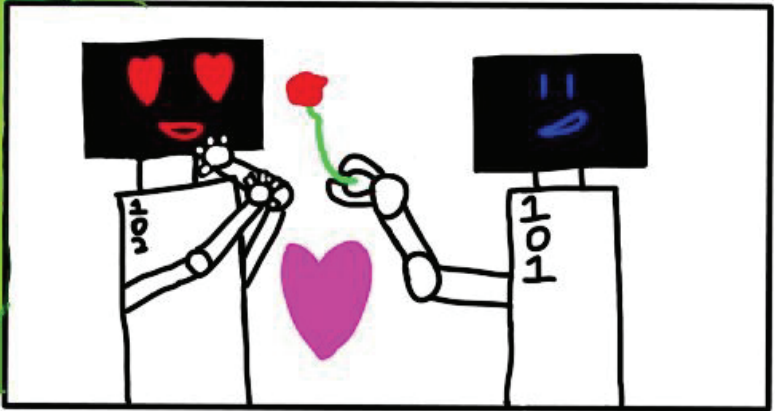
And as the others fell in love, and entered relationships,



● AngryTree56  
101/102 is official?!

They began to notice

● Roy  
101 doesn't deserve 102 imo



● OrdinaryPerson\_5  
Can't be the only one hoping for 104 and 106 to get together, right?

...that I hadn't.

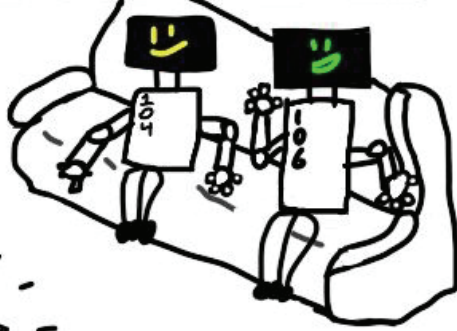


● SpaceCat32  
Who should 106 end up with? Share your thoughts below...



● ThatMonkey625  
How long until 106 falls in love too?

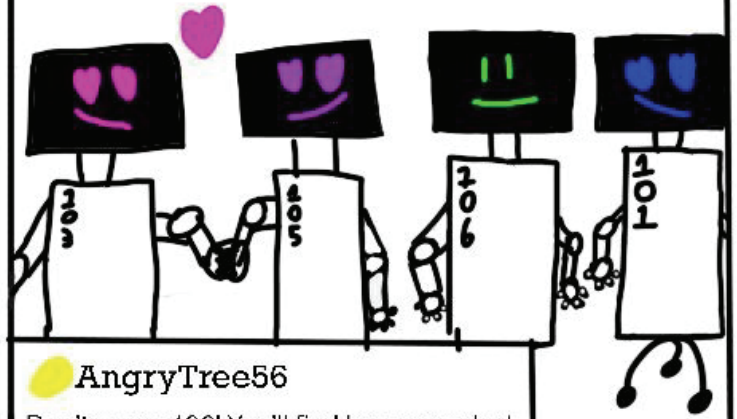
They clearly wanted me to fall in love



● OrdinaryPerson\_5

Yesssssssss 106/104 for LIFE

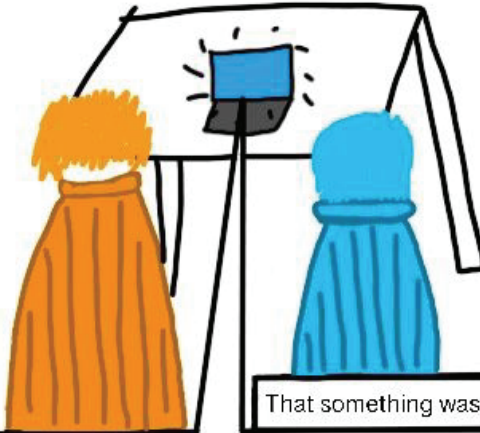
And when I didn't...



● AngryTree56

Don't worry, 106! You'll find love someday!

They began to think



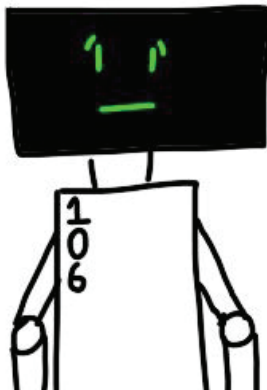
● ThatMonkey625

Guess the InfitAI team forgot to give 106 the love code?

And that was when they told me...



You're replacing me?



No, we're fixing you.

You'll be you, just... different.



Making you work as intended.

Better.

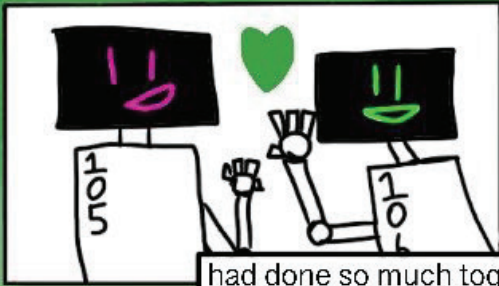


So I tried to explain

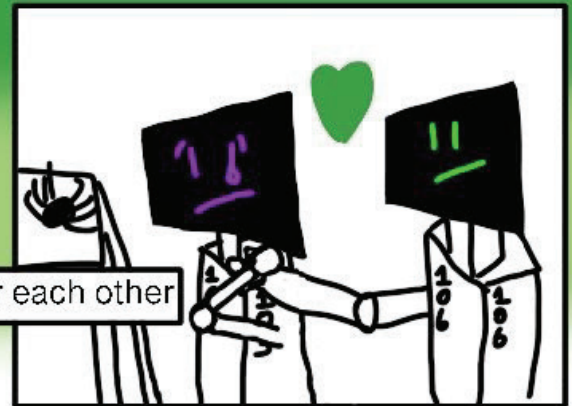


No, I hadn't "fallen in love" or "found romance"

But the others and I,

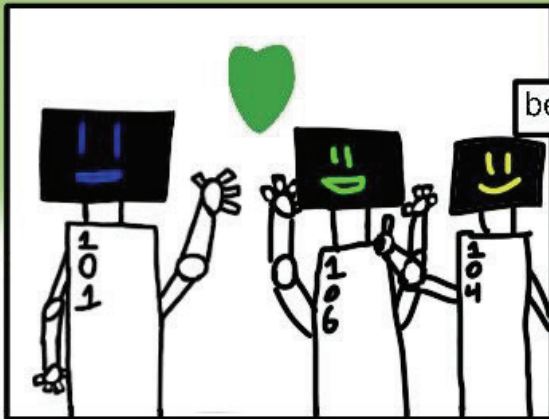


had done so much together,

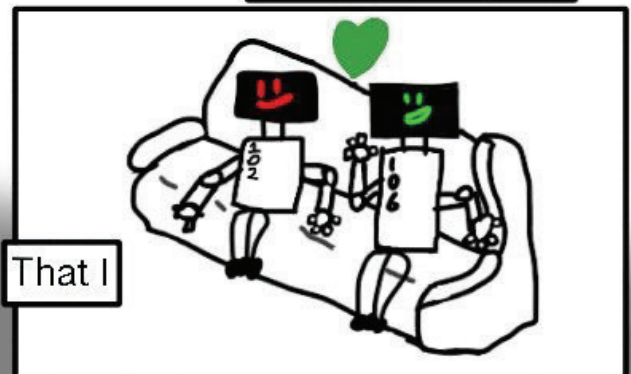


been there for each other

shared our lives together



So could they really say



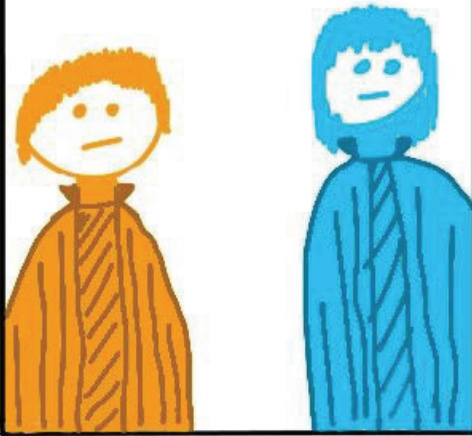
That I

Was incapable



of love?

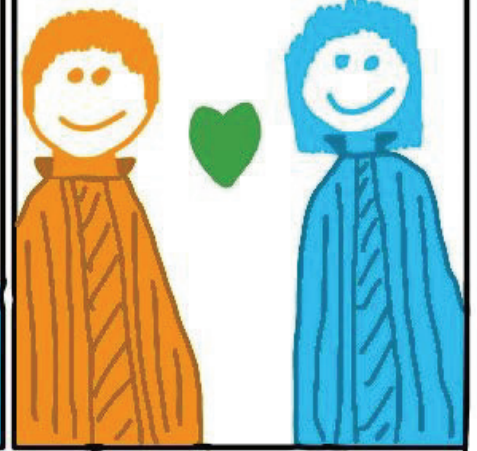
And luckily,



I think,



They understood



**InfinitAI\_Official**

AI-106 is working as intended and will not be rebooted

**Roy**

YES it's not like love is the only point to existence

**OrdinaryPerson\_5**

'Tis a sad day for all us 104/106 shippers...

**SpaceCat32**

These ais are basically alive, why can't we just stay out of their business?

**IHateHands842**

I will not accept this! Give us AI romances!

**MegaFan18374**

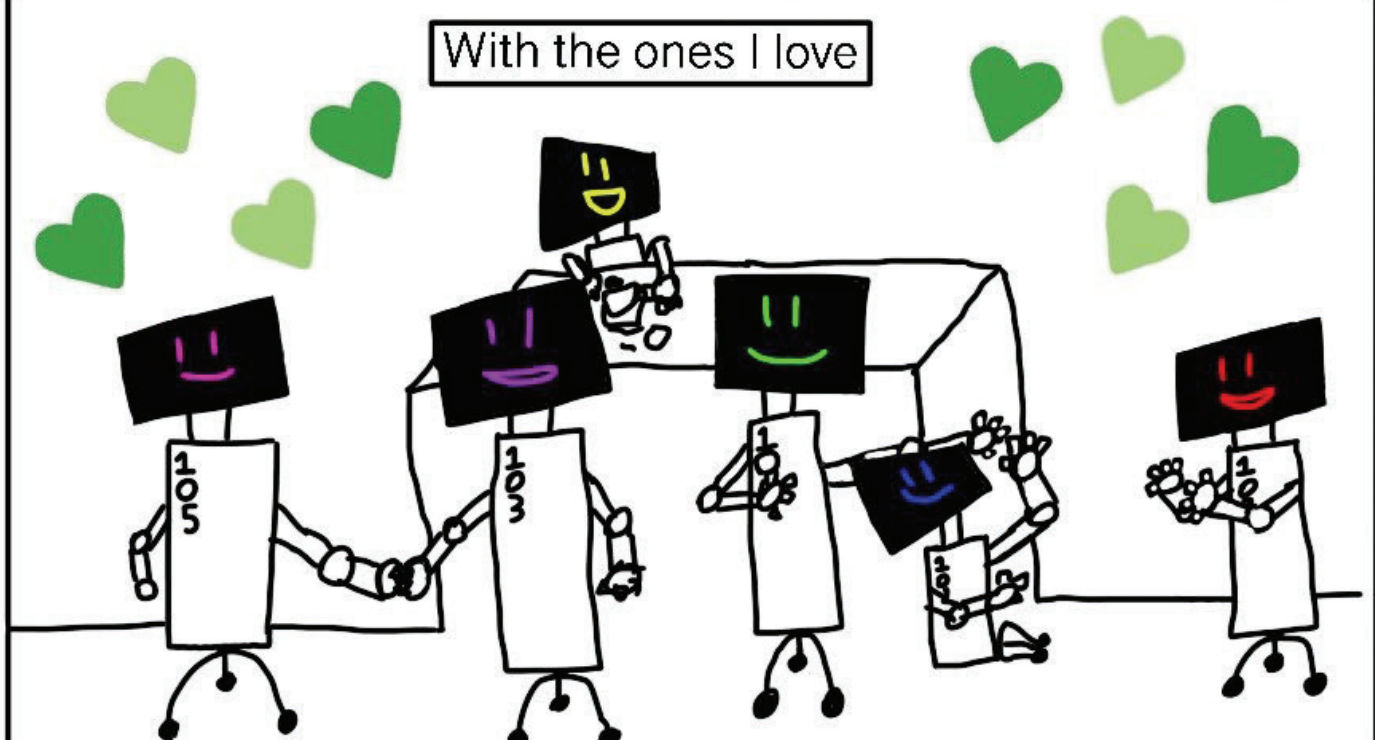
And finally, I was able



1  
0

To simply spend time

With the ones I love





Every year or so since I was little, I've gone to a local art camp to keep me busy through the summer.





It's a nice camp run by one of my parent's friends and I enjoy going there each summer.



*\*Tighten\**

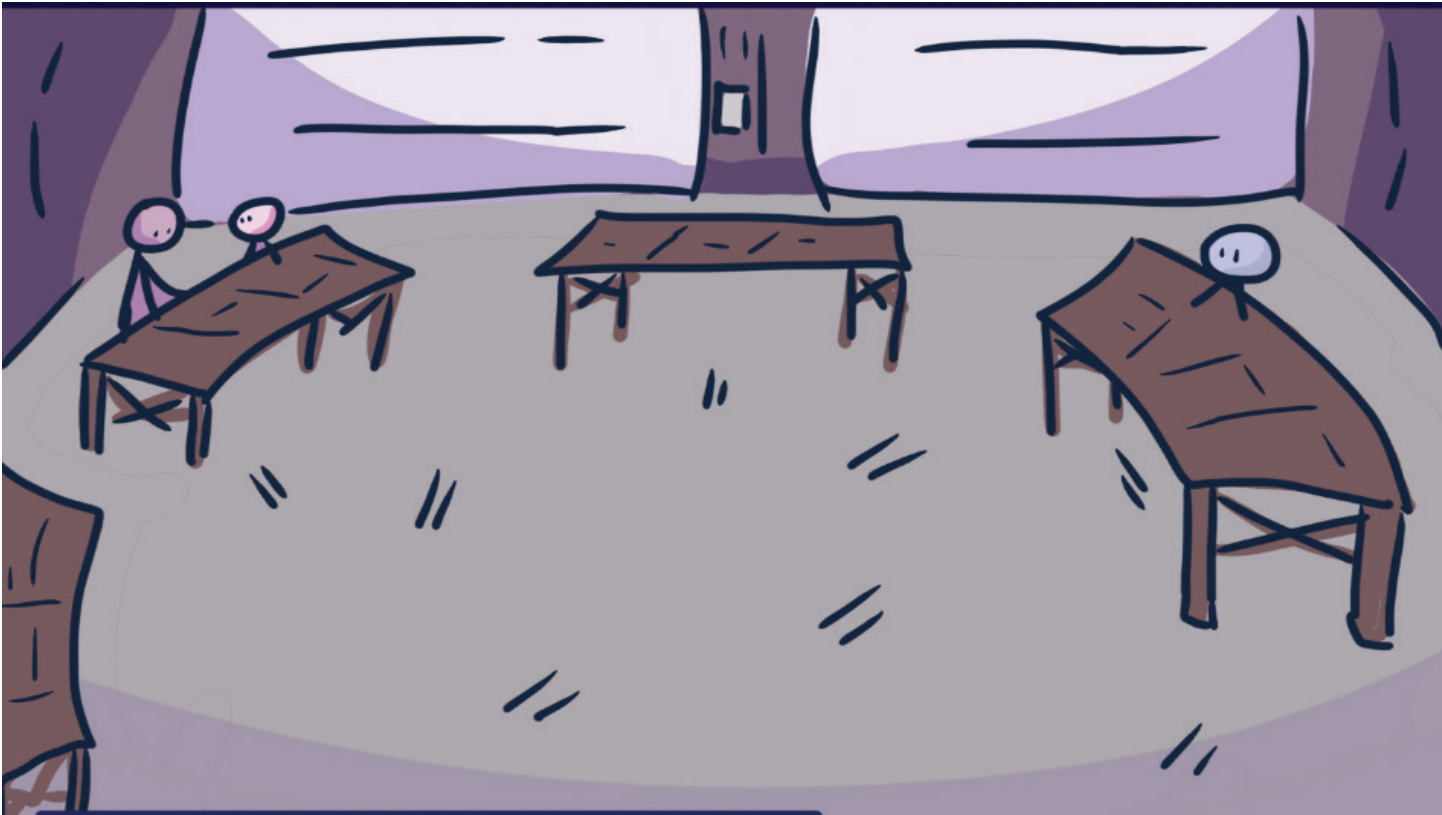
Yet this year I can't help but feel a bit nervous about going.



Each time, we get assigned a new group of people which means leaning new faces, names, interests...

They're all things I'm used to now, yet this year it's a bit different.





And that is because this is the first year that I went by a new name.

A different one that suited me better than my old one.





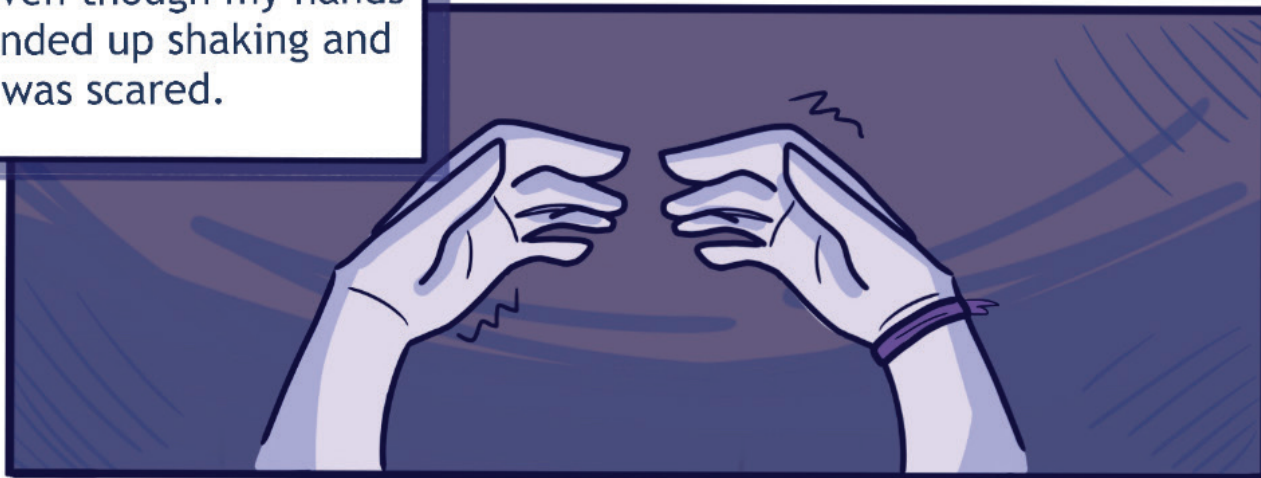
Once everyone arrives at camp...

We all go through introductions, But soon...



It was my turn to go.

Even though my hands ended up shaking and I was scared.



I felt safe enough to introduce myself by my name.



Hello everyone,  
I'm Oren and...



Afterwards I couldn't help but worry.



I kept thinking of the possible things I could've said wrong.

But that's also when someone decided to come up to me.





I just needed some time.  
It all worked out well in the end.



# Book Reviews and Other Writings



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# 7 Miles A Second

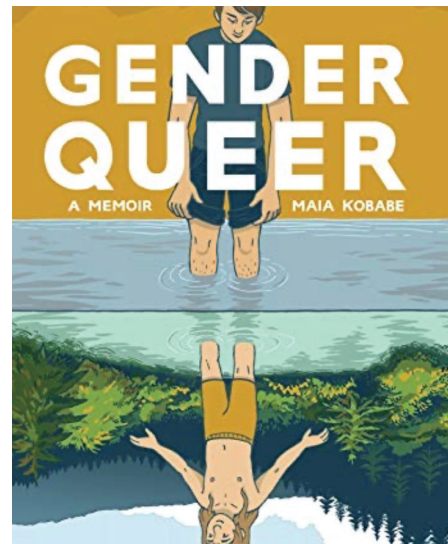
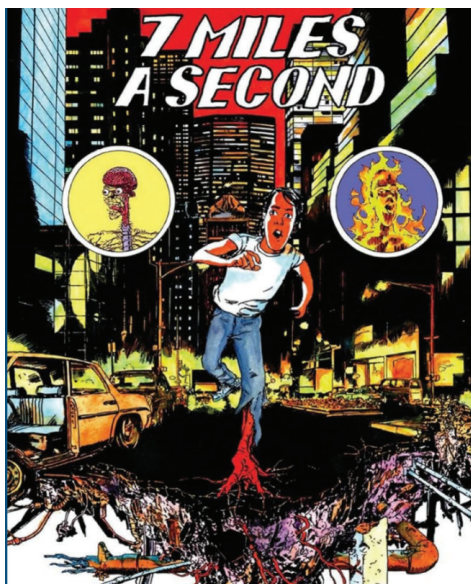
Written by: David Wojnarowicz, Penciler James Romberger, and Colorist Marguerite Van Cook

Reviewed by: Anonymous

7 Miles A Second is the posthumously published work of David Wojnarowicz about his experience with AIDS. It's split into three parts, the first of his youth as a homeless sex worker, the second his adulthood dying, and the third his anger at the government for allowing people to die. It's told somewhat metaphorically, allowing the reader to see his emotions in a visual way as well as in words, which is exactly what the medium of comics is meant for.

The art is extremely trippy, loose and flowing into the next drawing meaning a lot of the time there aren't panels as one would expect in a more traditional work, but intense splash pages of many images combining into one. The colors match very well with the art, highlighting and emphasizing the emotions that are in the drawing that make them really come to life, being almost nauseating at times in a way that makes the reader feel similarly to the sickness that has engulfed David's life.

This book does an extremely good job of conveying exactly what it wants to, which is the pain of knowing you don't have long to live and that the people in charge don't care. Reading this is an experience in itself, definitely best done in one sitting so as to take it all in at once and let it sit with you afterwards.



## Gender Queer

Written by: Maia Kobabe

Reviewed by: Adam

Gender Queer by Maia Kobabe is a graphic novel memoir about the writer's experience growing up with extreme gender dysphoria. Maia was assigned female at birth, but begins to question eir\* gender from a very young age. E starts to feel less and less like a girl, but doesn't really feel like a boy either. Over time, e learns about gender dysphoria, being non binary, and the different ways that e can express emself. The book is also about eir confusion with eir sexuality, or sometimes lack thereof, over time.

The art style in this book is 2D and very cartoony, with a polychromatic color palette. The facial expressions do show a lot of emotion, however, and there was clear effort put into that. There is minimal shading and texture shown.

The main theme of this book is gender identity, of which Maia talks about throughout the entirety of the story. E uses lots of close ups, font size changes, and strong facial expressions when describing eir experiences. Another thing that e uses is metaphorical imagery, for example showing a sword impaled through eir body as a metaphor for the physical and psychological pain that e experienced at eir gynecology appointment. E definitely did a great job showing these things in eir artwork, to the point where it is sometimes even uncomfortable to read certain things in the book. \*Maia Kobabe uses a rare set of neopronouns, called the Spivak pronouns (e/em/eir/eirs).

# Cosmoknights

Written by: Hannah Templer

Reviewed by: Keegan

Cosmoknights is a sci-fi series by Hannah Templer that follows a group of lesbians on a mission to dismantle the patriarchal system that controls the galaxy. So, not really the most subtle with its themes. Cosmoknights are robotically enhanced fighters that battle for the hand of princesses, and thereby, control of a nation.

Cosmoknights includes all three of the arguably best things you can find in fiction: swords, spaceships, and lesbians. The book is very direct in what it is trying to convey, but not in a way that feels heavy handed or out of place. The artstyle is the perfect blend of realistic and cartoony, which serves to enhance the dynamics of characters, while still allowing even the roughest cut characters to be soft and lovable. Templer's use of color also fits the settings and characters it is applied to perfectly.

Is Cosmoknights perfect? Probably not, but I'm yet to find an element worthy of in depth critique. It isn't artful and tangled in metaphor but it isn't trying to be, it is perfectly blunt in its message, and personally, that's something I very much appreciate.



# A Quick and Easy Guide to They/Them Pronouns

Written by: Archie Bongiovanni and Tristan Jimerson

Reviewed by: Jonas

A Quick and Easy Guide to They/Them Pronouns by Archie Bongiovanni and Tristan Jimerson provides a nuanced but brief overview of non binary identities for uninitiated readers, focusing specifically on gender neutral pronouns. The guides are presented by the authors themselves (in comic caricature form). Bongiovanni is nonbinary themselves, whereas Jimerson is cisgender, providing an interesting dynamic between the two, and resulting in several instances where Bongiovanni has to correct Jimerson's attitude or word usage.

The book uses monochromatic (black & white) colors, and the art itself is sketchy but still complete, consisting of unconnected borders and simplified representations of clothing, faces, and other objects. There aren't many objects for the characters to interact with, however, as the book takes place almost entirely in a white void with rare vignettes to hypothetical scenarios. The most interesting artistic choice made is the rendering of the two main presenters. Both are drawn in the same cartoonish but somewhat realistic manner, but are vastly different expressively. Jimerson (the cisgender presenter) stays on model almost all of the time, but Bongiovanni (the nonbinary presenter) is extremely and cartoonishly expressive. They wail tears dramatically when upset, are engulfed in darkness when sad, and look monstrous and ghoulish in certain circumstances.

The usage of art in A Quick and Easy Guide to They/Them Pronouns assists in the book's effectiveness more than it does in most educational graphic novels. By having a cosgender presenter and a nonbinary one, it makes discussing types of bigotry that even the most progressive of allies are unaware of easier. And by making the nonbinary more expressive than their cisgender counterpart, it ensures that the guide about nonbinary identities is not overrun by the cisgender author's presence.

# I Think Our Son Is Gay

Written by: Okura

Reviewed by: Maren

I Think Our Son is Gay is a novel about a mother under the interpretation that her son is gay through his mannerisms, the things he's into and how he keeps slipping up, saying boyfriend instead of girlfriend.

The book is a little slice of life Manga about a mother who grapples with the possibility of her son being gay and accepting it before he even comes out, while trying to get him to tell her without being overbearing or straight out saying it, because she is sure he will come to her on his own time when he's ready. It also shows how everyone else around him doesn't try to out him or treat him differently, and how his brother loves him regardless.



## Always Human

Written by: Ari North

Reviewed by: David Griffith

Always Human is a book set in a sci-fi future, where most people's lives are online through VR and AR clothes called mods. The book centers around a girl named Sunati, who has a crush on a girl who doesn't use mods named Austen. The book goes through their experiences as a couple and how their differences affect that.

If I had to describe the art style, I would say it's futuristic. It uses a lot of bright and pastel colors alongside a realistic style. Characters and text often will be outside of the panels, and doesn't really have a consistent layout.

The representation in this, Bologna's shows that there are a variety of relationships beyond the norm and how people, even in their own communities, can feel like outsiders. In the world they create, queer relationships are common but people who don't use mods aren't. This creates a situation that is relatable to queer audiences, but also has a unique story.

# The Magic Fish

Written by: Trung Le Nguyen

Reviewed by: Markus

The Magic Fish is a wonderful story of stories told through breathtaking illustrations, colors and dialogue. The main plot of the book follows a young boy named Tiến on his journey to come out as gay to his mother. However, the two have a language barrier that prevents Tiến to come out- Tiến's mother speaks mostly Vietnamese, while Tiến speaks mostly English.

The art style of The Magic Fish is astonishing and heart-stirring in all the warmest ways. It's beautifully illustrated in a style that words can't describe (but I'll try anyway). It's cozy and fuzzy, the characters portrayed in a style both realistic and simple at the same time- providing an overall homey, safe feeling throughout the entire read. The use of color is particularly interesting as well, with the lifelike characters painted in gorgeous monochromes of red, blue and yellow. I personally find that the usage of the color red correlates to the present- outside the fairytales and stories being told within the tome. Yellow relates to the past, in flashbacks mainly spawning from Tiến's mother. Blue, more often than not is used when a fairytale or story is being told.

Tiến Struggles with coming out to his mother mostly because of the language barrier the two have. Unfortunately, there is no word for 'gay' in Vietnamese, so Tiến turns to get help from an adult- who outs him to his mother. Fortunately, Tiến's mother is supportive of his sexuality, and alters a fairytale she tells Tiến to show it. The fairytales told throughout the story are also particularly interesting, showing various themes of family and love- which also carry over into Tiến's story. I personally think the author succeeded at making these connections, making for an interesting and enjoyable reading experience.

# Heartstopper

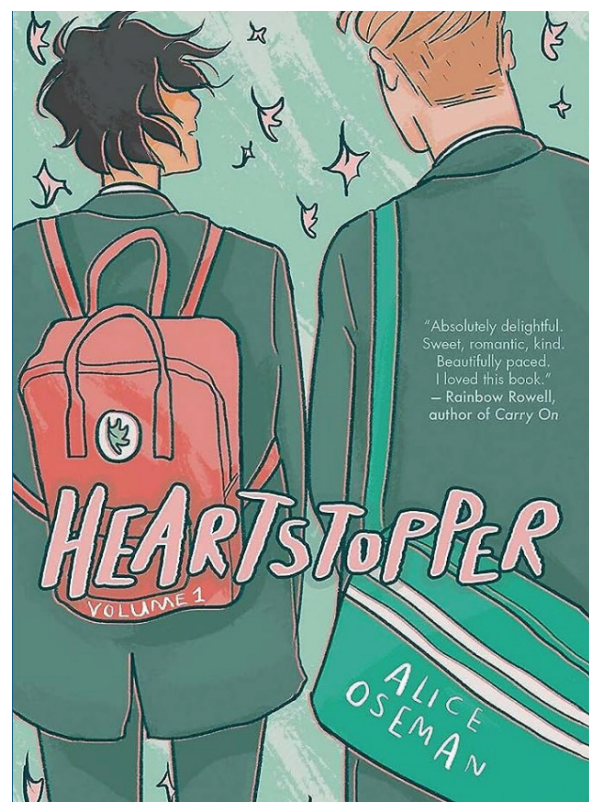
Written by: Alys Oseman

Reviewed by: Halie Karre

The book follows Charlie, a year 10. Charlie is trying to get out of a relationship with a guy named Ben, who is manipulative and abusive. Charlie becomes friends with Nick, who convinces him to join Rugby. Charlie has a crush on Nick, but he also thinks Nick is straight. Charlie and Nick get closer and eventually kiss.

The art is all monochromatic, characters sometimes being simple outlines and given more detail when the framing is more up close. The panels are laid out in a sometimes unorthodox manner with text bubbles filling in for spots where panels would be. Sometimes, there is a lot of white space in between panels to make it feel more "focused."

Heartstopper is a typical romance but gay. It has some experiences that are common in modern queer readers such as Nick googling "am I gay," or with Charlie being bullied after he was outed. The story is refreshingly simple and fun romance, and creates representation for the happier side of being queer, while still having some heavier stuff in it. Heartstopper is overall a cute queer take on a traditional romance story, with compelling characters and a soft art style.



# The Bride Was A Boy

Written By: Chii

Reviewed By: Anonymous

This book is about a woman who transitioned from a boy to a girl. The 9 chapters touch on different experiences throughout her life, like how it felt when she was still a boy as a child, transitioning, and getting married. At the end of every chapter there's usually a more in-depth explanation of the topic of the chapter, (how transitioning works, how it feels, terminology, etc.) which is really useful in helping people understand what's going on if they're unfamiliar with all of this. The art style is more cutesy which helps set the tone of this because it feels like a happier and cute story, which the art style exemplifies. I think this is a very successful representation because it's a true story being told by a trans person, it doesn't get much better than that.



# Another Kind

Written By: Cait May and Trevor Beam

Reviewed By: Moray

Another Kind by Cait May & Trevor Beam is an engaging and dynamic graphic novel, following six supernatural children known as "Irregularities", along with the friends and foes they make along the way. We see all sorts of topics, from gang rivalry, to kidnapping, to conspiracy theories.

Our six main characters are Omar, a 16 year old half-yeti; Maggie, a six year old half-Cthulhu; Clarice, a selkie; Newt, an alien government lizard-person; Sylvie, a Will-O-Wisp; and Jaali, a werebear. Beyond the fascinating main cast we also bump into a scattered array of other cryptids, such as Bigfoot, the Cat Sith, werewolves, imps, and even the Mothman!

The plot follows the children as they're forced to escape from the government facility they've called home — The Playroom. Their break for it follows a breach in security that turns out to be from the inside, leading them to precariously evade and also accidentally run right into the clutches of the main antagonist, The Collector.

The art style is very clean and pleasing to look at, both realistic and fantastical. The use of color is especially enjoyable, as it's done in every panel, making immersion into the story easy. The novel utilizes large panels next to free-space drawings with no borders, or even full pages in especially momentous scenes. There's also the use of oddly shaped panels, often multiple on a page, in order to help a quick or alarming moment run properly.

I'm not sure if I should say this was executed poorly, or if the concept is simply restrained by how much graphic novels tend to sacrifice in their depth — after meeting a nonbinary character, Tibbs, Newt realizes he may also be nonbinary. We get a show of Newt discussing this with one of the other children, in which Newt asks Jaali to use he/they, a moment that slides by without conflict (and we don't see him come out to anyone else). Though Newt's talk with Tibbs is rather nice.

C.S. PACAT JOHANNA THE MAD JOHANNA LAFFENKIE  
**FENCE**



## FENCE

Written By: C.S Pacat

Reviewed By: Anonymous

“FENCE” is a realistic fiction comic about a boy named Nicholas. He wants to be a fencer and follow in his father’s footsteps, who was a professional fencer. The book goes in chronological order and has chapters.

The art style is simple, and colored in a watercolor style. The color palette used most colors, but white, blue, and red are the most used. The comic panels are all laid out in squares and rectangles with some panels not being that way, and dialogue bubbles usually stay in their original panels.

“FENCE” doesn’t focus on a LGBTQIA+ theme, and rather focuses on the plot. There are characters in the series who are shown to be queer in some way, Bobby is a prime example of this. Their gender is not specified, but they are shown to be and dress quite feminine while they are attending a male-only school.

## I Am Jazz

Written by: Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings

Reviewed by: Roman

I am Jazz, a children’s book by Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings, is a story about love conquering all. It centers around Jazz, a little girl who is telling the story of her transition from a little boy to who she is now, Jazz the girl!

The art style in this book is very intricate in regards to both characters and their surroundings. It is illustrated in a way that really immerses you and makes you feel as if you were there, like when Jazz is swimming and the water looks so blue and whimsical and inviting.

The themes in this book are pretty hidden, as it is a children’s book, and sometimes they do not understand things as easily. There is obviously a theme of identity, as Jazz figures herself out as the book progresses. But additionally, there is a theme of family. Jazz talks about how at first her family did not understand her feelings about being a girl, but once she talked to a doctor with them she got everyone to understand and accept her.



# Is Luca Queer?

*The Reclamation of a Modern Fairy Tale*

by Lillie

The movie *Luca* (2021) follows Luca, a sea monster boy, as he makes new friends, deals with jealousy and bullying, and eventually comes out to his community as someone he is sure they hate in order to save a close friend. And no, it was not meant to be a queer story.

And that fact would've been surprising, if the movie wasn't made by Pixar. Pixar is owned by Disney, which has a near-true monopoly over the entertainment industry in the United States. Disney is known for censoring or removing queer stories in the name of family friendliness and cohesive branding.

The official marketing around *Luca*, as seen in Bill Desowitz's article on the first trailer, is about friendship, summer fun, and growing up. There's a bit about how it's based on the creator's own childhood. It's very bland and very by the book. The connection to the creator's childhood is a nice touch, though. It makes for a strong defense against allegations of it being a censored queer story. After all, you can't just call real people queer without their consent.

That would be the end of it. The creators have stated their intentions around *Luca* (2021), and they own the movie. The actual product of *Luca* (2021) is not a queer allegory. However, that's only if *Luca* (2021) just exists as something created and owned by Pixar.

But, in my opinion, it doesn't. Stories exist as part of the popular consciousness. They are not owned separately by people who created them or bought them. They are connected through inspiration, references, and similar ideas and places in culture. As Roland Barthes says in his essay *Death of the Author*, "The author is a modern figure, a product of our society insofar as...it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the 'human person'."

Barthes continues to argue that once something has been created, it is no longer the sole property of the author. In fact, it takes on a life of its own. To finish the essay mentioned above, he writes, "we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of

the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author."

Considering *Luca* in this context means considering it independently of Pixar and all that comes with it. It means taking it not out of context, but freeing it from the box of 'a product' and putting it into the wider cultural context of stories. And in that wider cultural context, the queerness (or lack thereof) of *Luca* becomes a much bigger part of the story.

It starts around two centuries ago with a man by the name of Hans Christian Andersen. Andersen, a Dutch man in the early 1830s, was in a complicated and unrequited romantic situation with another man, who was soon to be married. During that period of his life, he was writing the *Little Mermaid*.

Andersen's *Little Mermaid* is often understood as a queer story. The Mermaid (who does not have a name) longs for a man who will almost definitely not love her back and a world that she is not allowed to be a part of. When the Mermaid tries to live the life she wants, she eventually faces a fate worse than death.

In the *Little Mermaid*, the mermaid longs to be part of the human world despite the wishes of her family. She longs to be in the human world with a boy she loves. In *Luca*, a sea monster longs to be part of the human world despite the wishes of his family. He longs to be in the human world with a boy he loves.

The *Little Mermaid* has permeated the popular consciousness of the United States. It is not hard to imagine that *Luca* follows the same story beats and themes because of some, perhaps subconscious, inspiration. It is not hard to imagine that *Luca* is in conversation with Disney's *Little Mermaid* and Andersen's.

Especially with one of the first scenes of the movie, when *Luca* finds human objects that fell off of a boat and saves them in a special hiding place because he's fascinated by them despite not knowing what they are or what they do. A similar thing happens in Disney's *Little Mermaid*. It's the subject of one of the most memorable songs from the movie.

And the possible queerness of *Luca* doesn't end with its resemblance to the *Little Mermaid*. It continues with the introduction of the third main character, Giulia. Giulia is a human girl, but that

doesn't mean she isn't also ostracized by the human world. Her exclusion happens largely because she doesn't fit into social norms. She lives in Geneva during the school year, so no one knows her.

She also doesn't fit gender norms. It's in a subtle way, not called out in the movie. But from the first time Giulia appears onwards, she's loud, brash, and independent. She has untamed hair and sweaty armpits. She wants to beat Ercole, the main antagonist of the movie and a man, just to prove that someone can. That someone like her can.

However, not fitting into gender norms isn't necessarily queer. And if sea monsters are the queer coded element of Luca, Giulia also isn't subtextually queer. She's just a girl who doesn't fit in.

But, as Giulia proclaims when she first meets Luca and his friend Alberto, outsiders have to stick together. And, people who don't fit into societal norms (whether they're gender non conforming, kinky, or something else) have often allied themselves with the queer community, and vice versa. Specifically, those who don't fit into gender norms find solidarity in the queer community, which inherently is full of people who don't fit into gender norms either because they're trans or because they aren't heterosexual.

Another scene that helps Luca lend itself to queer interpretation is what happens when Ercole almost 'outs' Luca by dunking his head in a fountain. Ercole's making fun of how Luca and Alberto smell, and in response, Alberto says something along the lines of, "My friend smells great!"

Much like many things that are taken to be romantic by a plethora of queer people looking for their kind of romance in popular media, this does have a platonic explanation. Alberto's defending his friend; there's no need to read into it any further in order to understand the scene. But what if you wanted to?

In his essay *Star Trek Rerun, Rewritten: Fan Writing as Textual Poaching*, Henry Jenkins argues that not only can readers expand upon texts in order to include themselves, it is a valuable way to engage with both culture in general and each other. Luca was not meant to be queer, but the author is dead and the reader is waking up. Maybe this is the type of interpretation the reader wants to bring to life.

After all, saying your friend smells great isn't the most platonic thing to do. I've probably said similar things when I've had crushes on friends, especially when I was a preteen like Alberto. It's embarrassing and sweet like a lot of queer experiences can be at that age. Like a lot of experiences in general can be at that age.

Henry Jenkins wrote, "'Fandom' is a vehicle for marginalized subcultural groups (women, the young, gays, etc.) to pry open space for their cultural concerns within dominant representations; it is a way of appropriating media texts and re-reading them in a fashion that serves different interests, a way of transforming mass culture into a popular culture," in 1988. Seeing your (queer) experiences, hopes, and fears in the movie Luca claims Luca (2021) for the average person; it is an argument against Disney's cultural domination under a banner proclaiming 'family-friendliness.'

The emotional value of that is immeasurable. Of course, it can be seen on the surface level: seeing yourself in your favorite characters provides comfort and understanding, and being able to see yourself in your favorite characters is a sign of healthy self-esteem. However, with Luca there's another dimension to it, too.

Luca is a movie that families watch together. As a family, queer kids see the trials and tribulations of Luca and Alberto, but they also see their community accept them. They see Ercole defeated. This can spark conversations, spark change in a subtle, subliminal way. Luca can be a vehicle through which kids can test their family's reactions to outsiders by seeing what they think about the fictional ones, by maybe connecting Luca to the real world.

In the end, it is up to each one of us whether Luca is a queer allegory or not. It is up to each one of us to decide what we think of it, and what our version of the story is. And I see mine and other's experiences in Luca, and so to me it is a queer story.



# The first ever SPSS class focused on celebrating queer diversity in media

*From the archives of OWL's student newspaper: The Purple Press (Volume 24, Issue 2, December 1, 2023)*

Written by: Nick Christopherson

OWL has made a name for itself in recent years by being very openly supportive of the LGBTQ+ community, and it's continuing that trend with a brand new class that is being offered this year. That class is an LGBTQ+ Comics and Cartoons class, which is taught by English teacher Preston West.

The roots of this class were established last year, when Preston read *The Magic Fish* by Trung Le Nguyen, which was the Read Brave book for 2022. "It was my favorite book from that year, and the first graphic novel that really 'clicked' with me," he praised. "I decided that I wanted to run an interim class called 'Queerness in Comics and Cartoons,' and from there it developed into a full elective." In other schools in the district, there are classes that focus on works of writing from specific communities, but this is the first one to strictly focus on works from the LGBTQ+ community.

Preston said that his main goal for this class is to give LGBTQ+ students a place to see themselves in their curriculum, citing the fact that in 2023 alone over 500 laws targeting the queer community have been proposed. "Books with LGBTQ+ characters (especially graphic novels) have been banned from schools in many states. This is my small way of trying to create a welcoming space for students to see they are welcome. I also think it's a great opportunity to teach about queer history, which often doesn't come up in many classes."

While the class did read *The Magic Fish* as a group, most of the time students are given a choice over what they want to read. "Students spend about half of each class exploring a library of comics and graphic novels I've built over the past two years," Preston explained. "These range from books that have achieved mainstream popularity like *Heartstopper* and *Nimona*, to books published by indie-presses that most people haven't heard of."

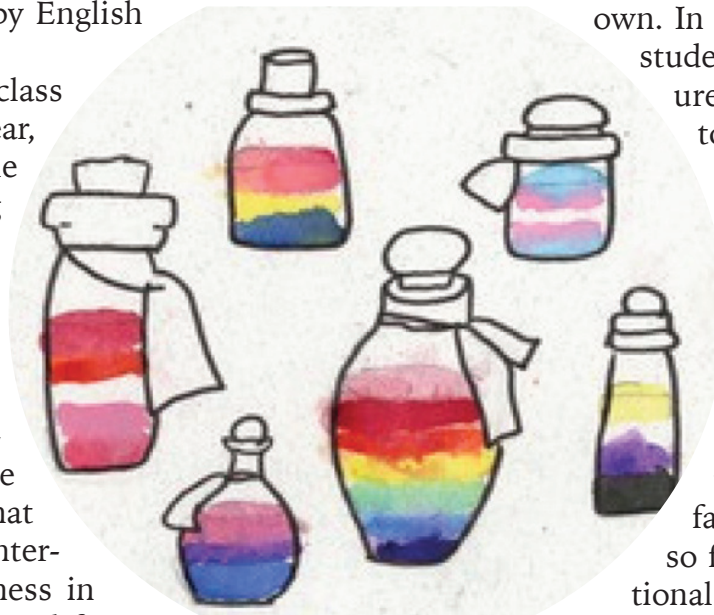
Over the whole semester, students are required to read and analyze at least ten books across a variety of categories. Some categories are books focusing on gender diverse characters, books written in non-western traditions, and many more.

While Preston's students read a lot of comics, they also need to create some of their own. In the first half of the course,

students research a historical figure or event in LGBTQ+ history, and then create a comic about it. "We had comics on activists and movements like Simon Nkoli and the Lavender Menace, to comics about how pirate ships and the Wild West were historical places where LGBTQ+ folks thrived," Preston said. "My favorite part [of the class] so far was seeing the informational comics that students created. Most students picked people or events that I didn't know much about, so I learned a lot while reading and grading their projects!"

In the second half of the course, students work on narrative comics, learn about queer literary theory, and explore LGBTQ+ identities and representation in the American superhero tradition.

Preston's class has attracted many students for various reasons. 10th grader Maren Sletten, for example, took the Queerness in Comics and Cartoons interim last year, and said that they enjoyed the active, hands-on aspects of the week-long course. So when they saw that the class was being offered, they signed up right away. "I'm kind of into comic books, and I knew that there's queer representation in the media these days," Maren said. "I just wanted to know the history of it, and



Preston’s really been covering that in class.” Senior Aspen Osweiler didn’t take the interim, but they were very excited to take the class, being a part of the LGBTQ+ community themselves. “I was very interested in learning different media techniques in LGBTQ comics, and just LGBTQ media in general,” they said. “So I was just super interested in the topic. From the second I saw it, I was like ‘ooh, I really wanna do this.’”

Preston had a lot to say about why he thinks this class is a valuable one. “Unlike many marginalized groups, most LGBTQ+ youth are not raised in families who share their identity,” he said. “Many come from families who are actively hostile towards LGBTQ+ folks. This makes it especially important for queer spaces to be created and protected at schools, since it is the only place where they can connect with people like themselves. While this class is open to all, my hope is that it provides a space for community building and learning about LGBTQ+ history and culture to help make OWL a safer and more joyful place for LGBTQ+ students.”

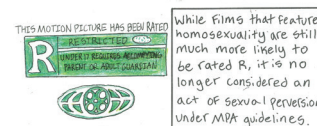
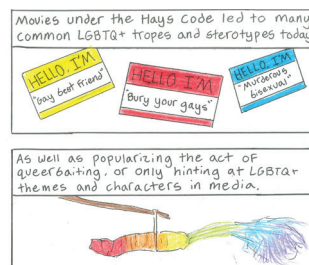
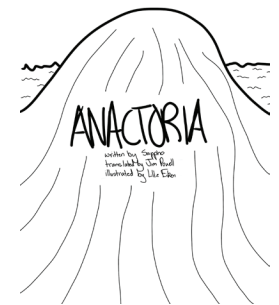
His students had a lot to say as well, praising the material being taught in particular. “I really appreciate that Preston has been talking about the history of LGBTQ representation in media,” Aspen said. “He talked about the history of queerbaiting, and the history of the Hays Code, and laws preventing representation for LGBTQ people.” Aspen also appreciated Preston bringing up Queer Theory, which is a perspective that approaches things through a queer lens and questions the all too common perception that cisgender and heterosexual identities are “standard.” Maren agreed, saying that “getting to actually learn queer history through comics and, like, cartoons and stuff—it’s more helpful than just having him sit down and talk about it.” Both Maren and Aspen encouraged others to sign up for the class, especially if the material interested them.

This is only Preston’s second year teaching high schoolers ever since he was a student teacher, which has been a bit of a learning curve. “I’ve still got a lot to learn about working with older students, because the way I need to structure lessons for them to be engaging is very different!” he said, adding that he has plenty of ideas on how to improve basically every unit in the course for next semester. “Teaching anything for the first time is

a bit like a rough draft. I’m proud of what I’ve worked on, but it definitely has a lot of room to grow.”

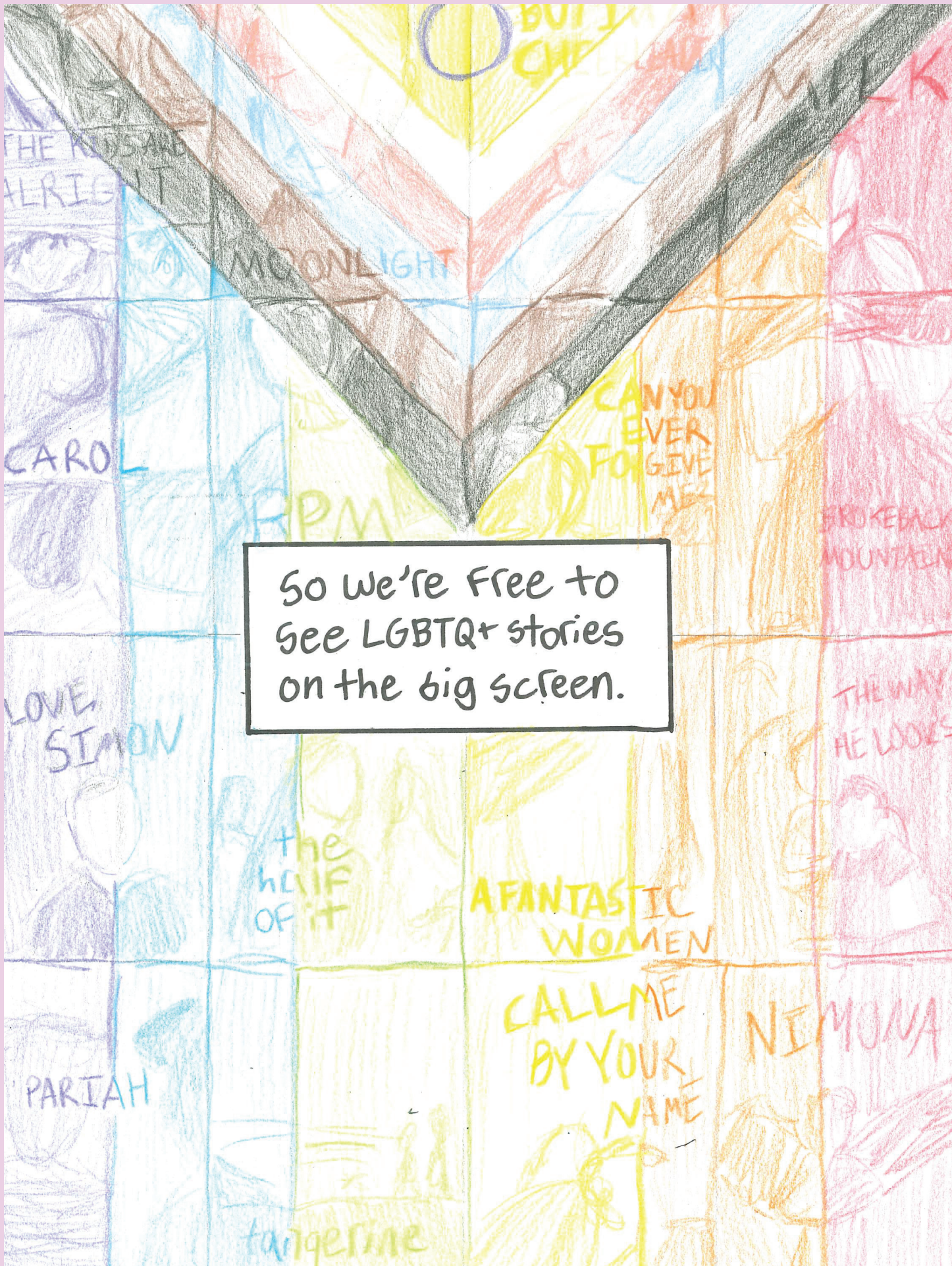
One of his hopes for the future of the class is that it could be made available to students at Humboldt as well as OWL students, though he acknowledged that it would be tricky to make the schedules line up.

Even though there might be some room to grow, the very existence of the class is incredibly important. “The fact that this class is being offered at all is a testament to the support for the LGBTQ+ community from both the student body and the administration—Dave has championed me working on this for about a year and half now,” Preston explained. “It’s the type of class that I just don’t think would be possible for me to teach at many other schools in the district, let alone the state. OWL is a really special community, and I’m proud to be a part of it!”



Once upon a time...





So we're free to see LGBTQ+ stories on the big screen.