

GLBT Youth Lit

WWLW 2008 Quilt Project

Am I Blue: Coming Out from the Silence

edited by Marion Dane Bauer

Quilt square by Marge Loch-Wouters

This square represents a wonderful book of short stories for teens called *Am I Blue: Coming Out from the Silence*, edited by Marion Dane Bauer. The sixteen original stories in this first ever anthology of YA fiction devoted to gay and lesbian themes published in 1994 explore aspects of growing up gay or lesbian or with gay or lesbian friends or parents. Bauer explains that "she conceived the idea and gathered the authors for this collection out of a conviction that those who write for young people have a responsibility, whenever possible, to speak out on subjects such as homosexuality that society attempts to shroud in silence." The stellar list of YA authors include Bauer, Carole Adler, Francesca Lia Block, Bruce Coville, Nancy Garden, James Cross Giblin, Ellen Howard, Marijane Meaker, Jonathon London, Lois Lowry, Gregory Maguire, Leslea Newman, Christina Salat, William Sleator Jacqueline Woodson and Jane Yolen. The square design reflects the concept of breaking out with a red triangle emerging from a silent blue background.

Heather Has Two Mommies,

by Lesléa Newman, illustrated by Diana Souza

Quilt square by Nancy McClements

The controversial "Heather Has Two Mommies" was written in 1989 to answer young children's questions about same sex parents. It is often named on banned book lists, with its subversive message that "The most important thing about a family is that all the people in it love each other." Newman has written books for both adolescents and adults on female body image and self esteem. She is an author, poet, and teacher of creative writing, as well as the Poet Laureate of Northampton, Massachusetts. The square uses a transfer from the book's tenth anniversary edition, and is embellished by traditional pieced patchwork.

Annie on My Mind

by Nancy Garden

Quilt square by Kathy Rohde

This groundbreaking book, first published in 1982, is the story of two teenage girls whose friendship blossoms into love and who, despite pressures from family and school that threaten their relationship, promise to be true to each other and their feelings. I contacted the author via her website, www.nancygarden.com, and she responded with a story about the legal case surrounding the censorship of this book:

In 1993, 11 years after it was published, ANNIE and a book by Frank Mosca called ALL AMERICAN BOYS were donated (unbeknownst to me) to 42 schools in and around Kansas City, Kansas and Missouri, by a gay organization called Project 21 which seeks to encourage schools to include accurate information about homosexuality in their libraries and curricula. The donation sparked a certain amount of coverage in the press, and a fundamentalist minister burned a copy of ANNIE on the steps of the building housing the Kansas City School Board, which also sparked a certain amount of coverage. At that point, I learned about what was going on and was, naturally, stunned! Some schools returned the donations, which they of course had the right to do; some kept them -- and others, upon discovering they'd had copies of ANNIE on their shelves for years, decided to remove them. That, rightly, led to cries of censorship. There were letters to the editor on both sides, discussions on radio talk shows, and angry school board meetings. Librarians and kids protested the removal vehemently.

The whole business came to a head in Olathe, Kansas, where the librarians and kids were especially upset, persistent, and courageous. When the school board kept refusing to restore the book to the district's school libraries, the kids decided to sue -- and sue they did, in Federal District Court, for violation of their First and Fourteenth Amendment rights. The American Civil Liberties Union supported the suit, as did the American Library Association. The case finally went to trial in 1995, and the judge ultimately ruled that ANNIE had been

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"unconstitutionally removed" from the libraries, and ordered it returned. (My partner and I made three trips to Kansas City during the whole affair, and met many wonderful, brave people who were dedicated to the First Amendment. I made speeches, was on talk shows and a panel, and testified at the trial that finally ensued.)

The school board didn't appeal, and the book was returned to the libraries, but the school board demanded a change in the district's libraries' selection policies, and unfortunately since then, has turned down purchases of other gay books for kids, despite continued objections from at least one of the librarians involved in the case.

Weetzie Bat

by *Francesca Lia Block*

Quilt square by Christine Jenkins

Francesca Lia Block's *Weetzie Bat* (HarperCollins, 1989) is a punk fairy tale set in the kaleidoscopic wonderland of Los Angeles, from Marilyn Monroe's cement-immortalized hand and footprints to plastic palm tree wallets at Farmer's Market to drive-in waitresses in roller skates. Weetzie's best friend Dirk is gay. Together they encounter a wish granting genie and end up in a Hollywood cottage with roses and lemon trees, his boyfriend Duck, her boyfriend My Secret Agent Lover Man, and babies Cherokee Bat and Witch Baby. *Weetzie Bat* is a breakthrough young adult novel in its appealing—and non-tragic—portrayal of punked-out Dirk and surfer dude Duck, two nice guys who fall in love, and then stay in love. *Weetzie Bat* is also the first in Block's five-book *Dangerous Angels* series that includes *Witch Baby*, *Cherokee Bat* and the *Goat Guys*, *Missing Angel Juan*, and *Baby Bebop*. Read them! For my square I chose ribbons, sparkles, and bright pinks and blues, plus two quotes from the book and some pink plastic sunglasses to reflect the visually lush world of *Weetzie Bat*.

And Tango Makes Three

by *Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell*, illustrated by *Henry Cole*

Quilt square by Sue Searing

In this engaging picture book, two male chinstrap penguins in the Central Park Zoo display all the usual signs of penguin mating behavior. Roy and Silo bow to each other, walk together, swim together, and entwine their necks. Like the other penguin pairs, they build a nest, and Roy brings home an egg-sized rock. They take turns sitting on the rock for many days, and they're puzzled and sad when it doesn't hatch. Then the zookeeper slips an abandoned egg into the nest, and eventually fuzzy little Tango is born. It's a true story of parental love, told in delightfully simple prose that begs to be read aloud. You can't help smiling at the expressions on the penguins' faces in the charming illustrations. (The quilt square is based on the book's cover.) And yet, according to the American Library Association, *And Tango Makes Three* topped the list of books that censors tried to ban from libraries in 2007.

Stitches

by *Glen Huser*

Quilt square by Rita and Maureen Welch

This dramatic novel (Grade 7-10) deals with being different, bullying, disabilities, and death. Travis lives in a trailer park outside a small Canadian prairie town with his aunt, uncle, and a pack of cousins. Travis doesn't mind being poor, but he knows he's different from his junior high classmates in other ways, too. He loves to sew and play with puppets and he would like to become a professional puppeteer. These interests make Travis a target for three school bullies. What begins with taunts of "girlie," "fruit fly," and "fag face" escalates to violence. Travis finds some balance through designing puppets and performing as a puppeteer, his encouraging teachers, genuine friendships, and the support of his aunt with whom he lives. The dominant theme is people who are different are made to pay for it in awful ways, but sometimes, the differences can be a pay-off, if you are lucky. Readers of this book will be grateful that Travis is one of the lucky ones.