

# Melissa Reading Guide



ALEX GINO

## Questions and Ideas for Consideration

**Age Range:** What reading level and age range is this book intended, and what kinds of choices of the writer are purposeful to fit this audience?

**Trans Youth:** How is *George* effective in offering insight into an experience of childhood that is often overlooked in children's literature?

**Mirrors and Windows:** How might *George* be of benefit both to young people facing similar experiences of gender and those who can learn more about experiences of those different from themselves?

**Character Reactions:** How do the different people George tells that she is a girl react, and how might this help readers think about their own reactions to trans individuals? What positive/negative reactions are described?

**Gender and Sexuality:** How is the distinction between being transgender and gay presented in the text, and why is establishing this idea important?

**Names and Pronouns:** Why is naming herself "Melissa" an important of George's experience? Why is it important that Gino uses the pronoun "she" consistently?

**Intertextuality:** Why is a focus on *Charlotte's Web* an effective choice?

## Extension Activities

- Visit Alex Gino's website at <http://www.alexgino.com/> to learn a bit about the author's perspective and reasons for writing the book, as well as their commentary on representations of trans individuals.
- Research other representations of transgender youth in children's and young adult fiction. What sets this book apart?
- Read *Red, A Crayon's Story* by Michael Hall. How does this book tackle similar ideas as Gino's text, but in different ways.
- Alex Gino expresses concern that their book is titled "George," when this is an example of "deadnaming," or referring to a trans individual by a name they have changed—what do you think about the title?
- Develop a character sketch for each individual in the story, writing about what unique characteristics they exhibit, but also how their interactions with George represent certain ideologies surrounding transgender individuals and questions of gender/self.
- Read (or re-read) *Charlotte's Web*. What are some of the overlapping themes of these two stories? Why might Charlotte be so meaningful to George?

## Suggested Critical Reading

"No More Controversial than a Gardening Display?: Provision of LGBT-Related Fiction to Children and Young People in U.K. Public Libraries" by Elizabeth L. Chapman

"Queering the Children's Canon: Contemporary Critics Respond" by Kristen Proehl

*Are the Kids All Right?: The Representation of LGBTQ Characters in Children's and Young Adult Literature* by B. J. Epstein

*Into the Closet: Cross-Dressing and the Gendered Body in Children's Literature and Film* by Victoria Flanagan

## Background and Context

Written by Alex Gino and published in 2005, *George* won the 2016 Stonewall Book Award as well as the 2016 Lambda Literary Award in the category of LGBT Children's/Young Adult and is lauded as one of very few examples of a book featuring a transgender child. When George's class has the opportunity to perform a play version of *Charlotte's Web*, George desperately wants to play Charlotte, believing this might be the chance to tell the world who she really is—for although they see her as a boy, George is a girl. A poignant story of finding ways to share a person's true self with the world, the story offers insight into a unique experience of childhood.