

Commissioner's Book Club: Discussion guide

Rick

by Alex Gino

Introduction

B.C.'s Human Rights Commissioner's Book Club offers monthly book selections that use stories to help readers connect with human rights issues and build connection with the characters they encounter. We hope to bring together a province-wide community of readers to deepen their understanding of human rights and those who are most affected by human rights issues. This guide has been prepared to assist parents, teachers, librarians and other trusted adults explore themes of identity and self-discovery, friendship and peer pressure, inclusion, acceptance and the courage to advocate for ourselves and others.

"Rick" is a middle-grade novel about self-discovery, friendship and questioning expectations—especially around identity and belonging. The story follows Rick who has always tried to fit in—especially by going along with his best friend Jeff, who often behaves like a bully. Rick avoids drawing attention to himself and doesn't question much about who he is or what he believes. Things begin to change when Rick joins the Rainbow Spectrum club, a student group focused on LGBTQ2SIA+ awareness and inclusion, where he meets new friends who challenge him to think differently. Rick starts reflecting on his own identity and his friendship with Jeff and whether it aligns with his values. Rick's story emphasizes that figuring out who you are is a journey—and that listening, learning and standing up for others are important steps along the way.

Discussion questions

1. What did you think of the story? Did you learn something new?
2. What does it mean to "speak up" for yourself or others?

3. Have you ever spoken up about something unfair affecting you or people you know?
4. Can you think of a time when someone stood up for you? How did it feel?
5. Why can it be scary to speak up when something is wrong?
6. Growing up and discovering who you are can be fun and exciting. It can also be confusing. Have you ever felt confused about changes to your identity?
7. Describe Rick's friendship with Jeff at the beginning of the story. Which parts of his friendship with Jeff does Rick like and which parts make him uncomfortable?
8. Rick has been best friends with Jeff for many years but has never felt totally comfortable with Jeff. Have you had friendships that are similar to Rick and Jeff's? Rick doesn't tell Jeff that he doesn't like some of Jeff's behaviour, especially when it involves hurting other people. Rick also doesn't tell Jeff about joining the Rainbow Spectrum club and that he is questioning parts of his identity. Why doesn't Rick share these things with Jeff? What do you think he is afraid of?
9. Why is it sometimes hard to stand up to a friend? What would you do if a friend was unkind to others? What advice would you give Rick about how he can stand up to Jeff?
10. Rick feels a lot of pressure to act in certain ways from family members and friends. Can you give some examples of times when Rick feels this pressure? Have you ever felt pressure to act in a certain way to fit in? What happened?
11. How does Rick learn more about himself in the story? Who supports him on that journey? What do those characters do to support Rick?
12. In the story, Rick joins the Rainbow Spectrum club, a student group focused on LGBTQ2SIA+ awareness and inclusivity. How does the Rainbow Spectrum club help students feel included and accepted?
13. Rick joins the Rainbow Spectrum club, a student group focused on LGBTQ2SIA+ awareness and inclusivity, where he meets new friends who challenge him to think differently. Have you ever tried something new that helped you learn something about yourself? Is there something new you would like to try but are nervous to start?
14. Many of the kids in the Rainbow Club seem confident in their identities but Rick doesn't feel that same confidence. Why do you think that is?

15. In the Rainbow Spectrum club, Rick explores new perspectives and begins to question his own identity. In the club, he realizes he may be asexual and/or aromantic. How does Rick describe what these two words mean?
16. Students at the Rainbow Spectrum Club have many different identities. What were some of the identities? Were any of the identities new to you? If so, which ones?
17. Rick's dad, Jeff and other characters in the book assume that Rick is interested in girls, even though he isn't. This often makes Rick feel confused and misunderstood. Has someone ever made assumptions about you that didn't feel very good?
18. Rick dislikes it when his dad and Jeff talk about girls and women in sexual ways. Why does he dislike it? Have you heard boys and men talk about girls and women in this way? How does it make you feel?
19. The lead teacher of the Rainbow Spectrum Club uses the term QUILTBAG+ to represent all the identities at the club. Which identities do each of the letters stand for? What did the students think of this term? Did they prefer another? Why?
20. Students at Jung Middle School come from many different elementary schools. At a Rainbow Spectrum Club meeting, students discuss the difference between those schools when it comes to inclusion and acceptance of LGBTQ2SIA+ kids. What did they think made the schools so different from one another? What do the students say makes a school more inclusive and accepting of LGBTQ2SIA+ students? Do you agree? What can teachers, principals, students and parents do to make a school more inclusive and accepting? What does your school do?

Activities

“Trying Something New” reflection activity

Students write or draw about something new they've tried (like Rick joining a new club) reflecting on the experience, how they felt trying something new and the results of that experience. Share in pairs or small groups.

Welcome poster activity

Create a poster that shares welcoming messages for LGBTQ2SIA+ students at your school. To do this, ask yourself what would help Melissa feel included, accepted and welcome? What about Ronnie, Rick and Green? If you identify as LGBTQ2SIA+ and you feel comfortable talking about it to your peers, feel free to share what makes you feel included or excluded—and for those who don't identify as part of that community or aren't sure yet, ask yourselves what you can do to listen respectfully to your peers.

Your drawing or poster should include:

- a clear title or slogan, for example: "We're glad you are here!"
- pictures, words or symbols that show understanding of LGBTQ2SIA+ communities, safety, inclusion and acceptance
- bright colours and clear words so your message is easy to understand

Identity Tree activity

Students create a personal Identity Tree. On a large sheet of paper, have student draw or paint a tree. Using collage, drawing or painting, add the following elements. Students can also use words or images to represent the elements listed below.

The roots of the tree represent things that have shaped their life so far, such as:

- family and culture
- communities that have shaped their identity (religious, ethnic, cultural, social)
- their personal values like fairness, honesty and respect

The trunk of the tree represents:

- the identities that reflect who they are. Be sure to have students reflect on the identities represented in the book.
- things they like about themselves, for example: I am a good friend, I am artistic, I include others, I am an athlete.

The branches, leaves and flowers represent:

- things they're still figuring out about themselves
- things they hope to be in the future. This can reflect personal values, identities and goals.

Have students write a paragraph explaining the elements of their tree.

B.C. Human Rights Code activity

Everyone has the right to be safe at school.

B.C.'s *Human Rights Code* protects us from discrimination based on certain parts of our identity, like race, disability and religion. Sexual orientation, gender identity and expression are also protected under the Code.

The Code protects us from discrimination in certain areas of daily life. For example, it protects us where we live, where we work and where we go to school.

This means that the Code bans discrimination at school against students (and teachers too!) based on their gender identity or expression and sexual orientation, as well as other parts of their identity.

Using the resources listed below, learn more about the Code with your students.

Have students write or record a brief message to Rick:

- What rights does he have under the Code?
- What does he deserve from others?
- How can he find supportive people?

Human rights resources

[B.C. Human Rights Code](#) (provincial law)

- [B.C.'s Office of the Human Rights Commissioner](#) has many educational resources for learning about the Code. To learn more about how the Code protects you in certain areas of daily life based on parts of your identity: [What is protected | BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner](#)
- Intro to Human Rights video and teacher resources: [What are human rights? | BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner](#)