

Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda tells a story about a young high school student named Simon and his penpal who both share the same secret; they're gay and not ready to tell the world about it. But when a classmate discovers the secret emails and blackmails Simon to do his bidding...things get out of control. It's a love story done right. (Bio by Ashley)

Albertalli, Becky. *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*. Balzer + Bray. 2015.

<https://beckyalbertalli.com/books>

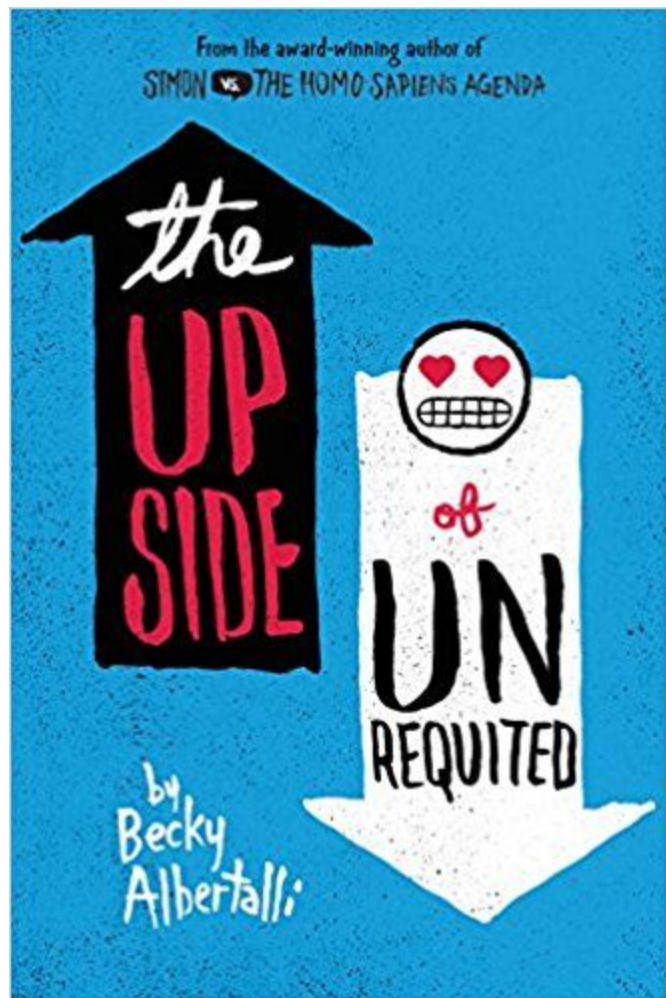
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykHeGtN4m94>

Simon's story of wanting that sickeningly sweet high school romance leads him through a tumultuous year that deals with so many complex situations and relationships. Trying to maintain his composure while being blackmailed into forcing his close friend to date someone else while trying to keep himself closeted for as long as he can sends him on a long emotional journey. He struggles trying to stay true to himself and stay true to his friends, and to not ruin the perfect friendship and blooming romance with the only boy who understands him.

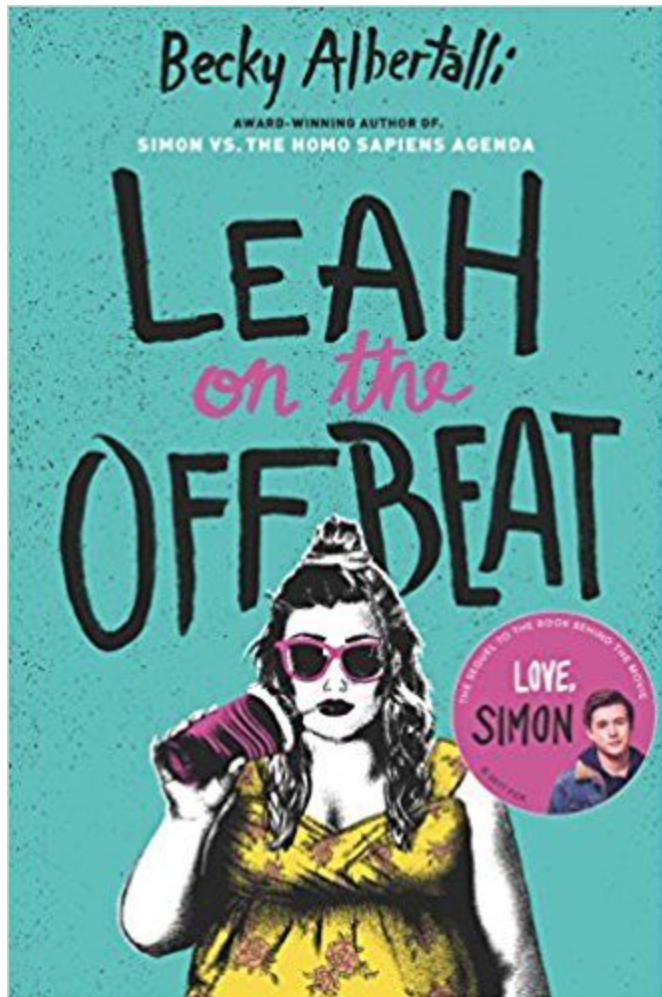
The Upside of Unrequited exists within the same universe as *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* and tells of a young girl named Molly and her many crushes that never evolve into anything greater. But when she's surrounded by her two loving mothers getting married after gay marriage has been legalized, a twin sister with a girlfriend that is more than a one time fling, and two cute boys vying for her attention, it seems closer than Molly thinks. (Bio by Ashley)

<https://beckyalbertalli.com/books>

Albertalli, Becky. *The Upside of Unrequited*. Balzer + Bray. 2017.



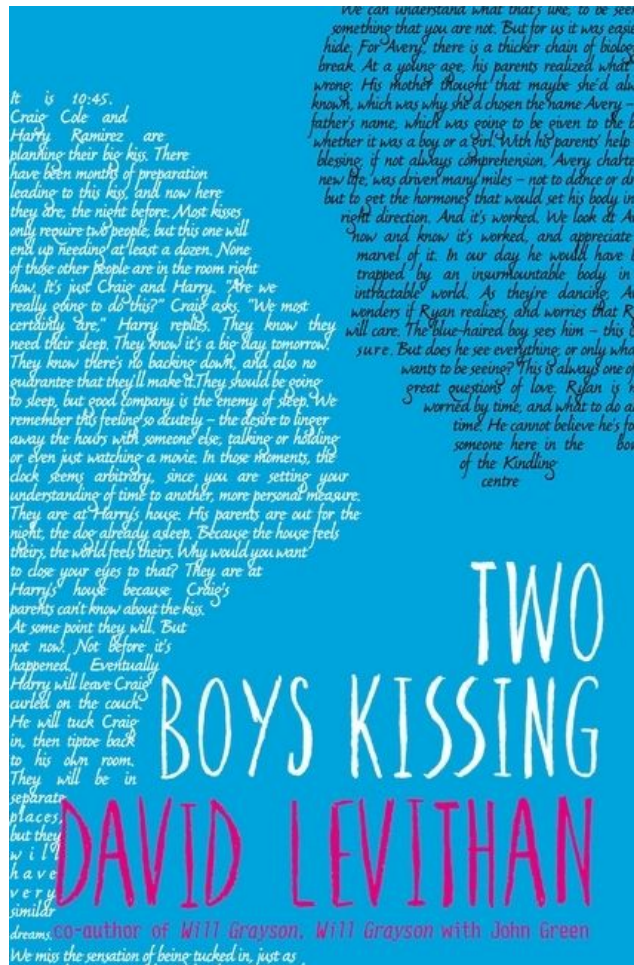
While we don't see much of Simon's friends except for the occasional appearance of Abby Suso, it has the same humorous and loving feel that *Simon vs the Homo Sapiens Agenda* had. Instead of a story of a closeted gay teen surrounded by what Simon calls the "default," of straight people full of prejudices, this story takes a different turn. And while our main protagonist is not LGBT+, her family and friends all give the same accepting feel Simon's book gave. Family and friends nurture their growing relationships as change becomes evident even though the fear of change is almost too much for Molly to bear.



When it comes to drumming, Leah Burke is usually on beat—but real life isn't always so rhythmic. An anomaly in her friend group, she's the only child of a young, single mom, and her life is decidedly less privileged. She loves to draw but is too self-conscious to show it. And even though her mom knows she's bisexual, she hasn't mustered the courage to tell her friends—not even her openly gay BFF, Simon.

Albertalli, Becky. *Leah on the Offbeat*. Balzer + Bray. 2018.
<https://www.goodreads.com/>

This book is the newest edition to the original story of *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*. This sequel follows Leah Burke, Simon's best friend, and her own struggles with her sexuality and identity. She deals with the constant peer pressure to diet when Leah actually likes her body the way it is, and the fact that she is bisexual and not quite out. But while she's certainly not blackmailed like Simon is, the relationships around her change over time, and she has to gain courage or lose those foundations she's built with their close knit group of friends forever.



Two Boys Kissing: “While the two increasingly dehydrated and sleep-deprived boys are locking lips, they become a focal point in the lives of other teen boys dealing with languishing long-term relationships, coming out, navigating gender identity, and falling deeper into the digital rabbit hole of gay hookup sites—all while the kissing former couple tries to figure out their own feelings for each other.” (Bio from GoodReads)

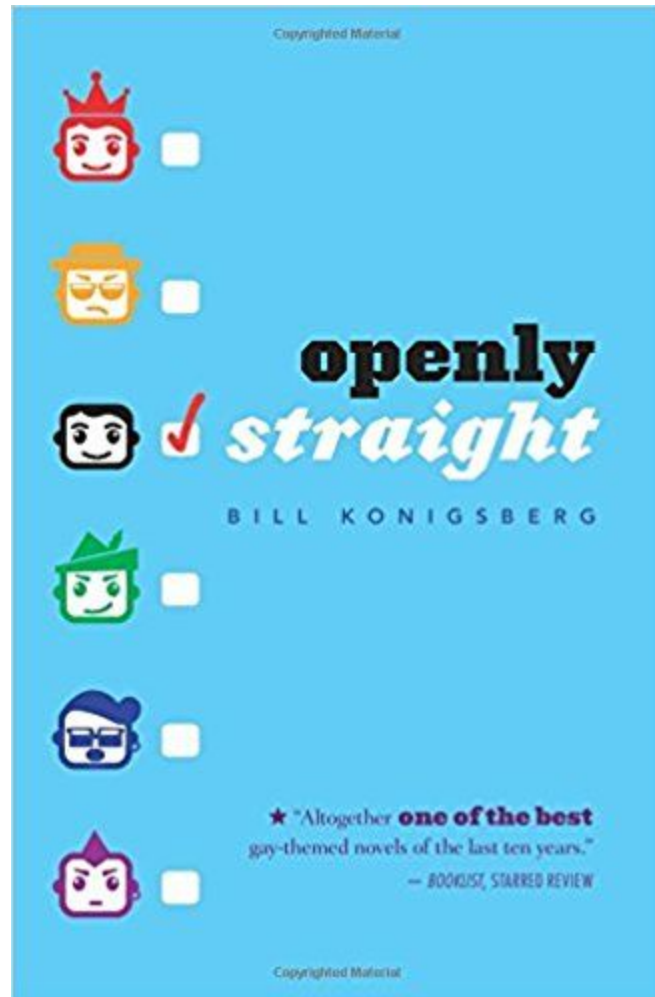
<http://www.davidlevithan.com/>
 Levithan, David. *Two Boys Kissing*. Knopf Books for Young Readers. 2013

This book speaks out of a lot of difficult hurdles LGBTQ youth of this time period must jump over. The characters deal with gender identity, acceptance, rejection, bullying, coming-out, and complex relationships with other people make this a book that really sings for today's youth. Although I haven't dived into the pages quite yet, I know this will be a phenomenal read, especially for youth who are struggling to find their voices.

“Love is so painful, how could you ever wish it on anybody? And love is so essential, how could you ever stand in its way?” (Levithan).

Openly Straight: “Rafe is a normal teenager from Boulder, Colorado. He plays soccer. He's won skiing prizes. He likes to write. And, oh yeah, he's gay. He's been out since 8th grade, and he isn't teased, and he goes to other high schools and talks about tolerance and stuff. And while that's important, all Rafe really wants is to just be a regular guy. Not that GAY guy. To have it be a part of who he is, but not the headline, every single time.” (Bio from GoodReads).

Konigsberg, Bill. *Openly Straight*. Arthur A. Levine Books. 2015.
<https://www.goodreads.com/>



This book grapples with self-identity. While Rafe, at his first school, was out and happy about he, he just wanted to be seen as a guy. Not THE gay guy. He wants to scream that there is more to him than just his homosexuality. This deals with the negative connotations of labeling and how it can sometimes do more damage than good. Being true to oneself in the end will in turn make one more free than being tied down by certain stereotypes and labels.

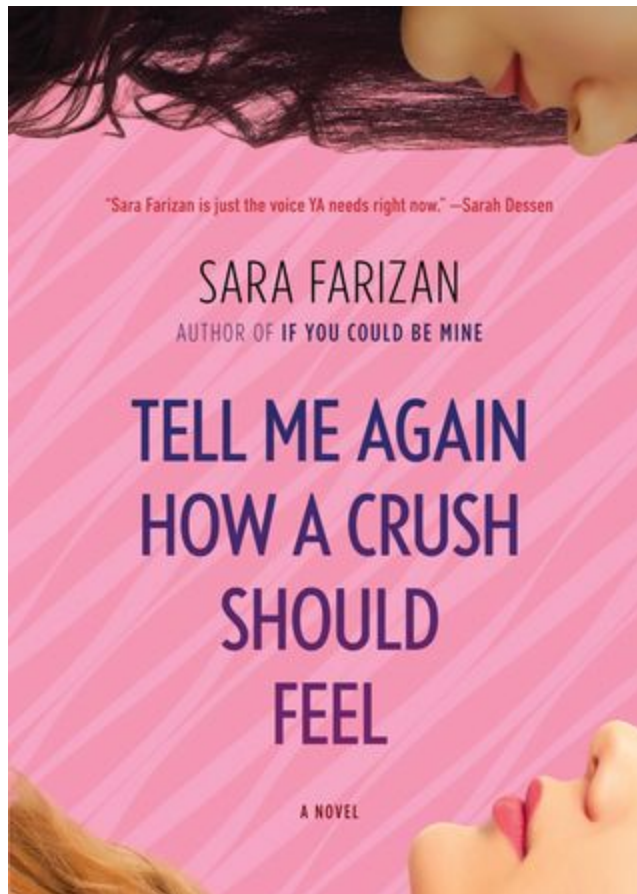
“You can be anything you want, but when you go against who you are inside, it doesn’t feel good” (Konigsberg).



Shimanami Tasogare is an ongoing Japanese comic series that tells the story of a high school boy who nearly commits suicide because he fears he's been outed as gay at school until a stranger named "Anonymous" listens to his stories and leads him to a lounge where all people are welcome to feel safe. It follows the stories of people of different gender identities and how they survive in present-day Japan. (Bio by Ashley)

Kamatani, Yuuki. *Shimanami Tasogare*. Shogakukan. 2015.
<https://www.goodreads.com/>

This story is still an ongoing series, but the messages within it are heartwarming. Most of the story takes place in a lounge created by two women who felt ostracized for loving each other in modern day Japan. We see many different characters, those who seek the lounge in search of a safe space. We see a young child who finds a safe place to crossdress, our young protagonist who feels okay enough to come out as gay to those who are accepting, and friends who have migrated there. We get a wide range of struggles and characters that we're rooting for them all.



Tell Me Again How a Crush Should Feel is a slice-of-life for teen Leila as she tries to power through high school without having a crush; she already gets labelled as different with her Persian background, so having a crush on a girl wouldn't help her either. But of course the universe has other plans when a new girl transfers and they discover their attraction is mutual. (Bio by Ashley)

Farizan, Sara. *Tell Me Again How A Crush Should Feel*. Algonquin Young Readers. 2015.
<https://www.workman.com/authors/sara-farizan>

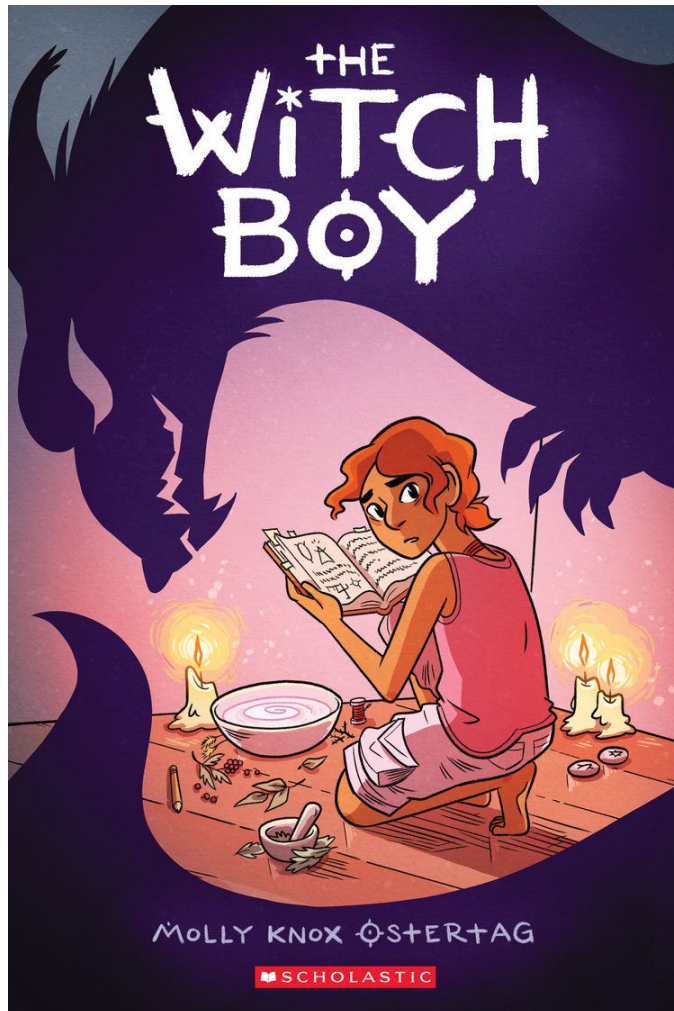
The story line has a very similar storyline to *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*. Leila fears change, fears the wall she's built around herself to keep her secret safe will crumble. It deals with complex relationships between friends losing contact and growing back together again, with friendships that threaten to be something a bit more and some that dissipate quite easily. Leila's voice in the book really echoes across that fear of "coming-out," and knowing that liking girls is not something like getting a haircut or wearing an outlandish outfit. It's not something that will be ignored, and she'll be labelled as different no matter what. It's a heartfelt story.

Princess Princess Ever After tells of a classic fairy tale of a prince saving a princess from her locked tower...except it's not a prince that saves her, but another princess. Through their journey, they bring out different strengths within one another, bond in different ways they'd never expect, and also find love in unexpected places. They use these new bonds to defeat a dangerous foe, a jealous sorceress who vows to end the princess's life. The art style is sweet and fresh, bringing the tale of two princesses to life. (Bio by Ashley)



O'Neill, Kate. *Princess Princess Ever After*. Oni Press. 2016.
<http://strangelykatie.com/>

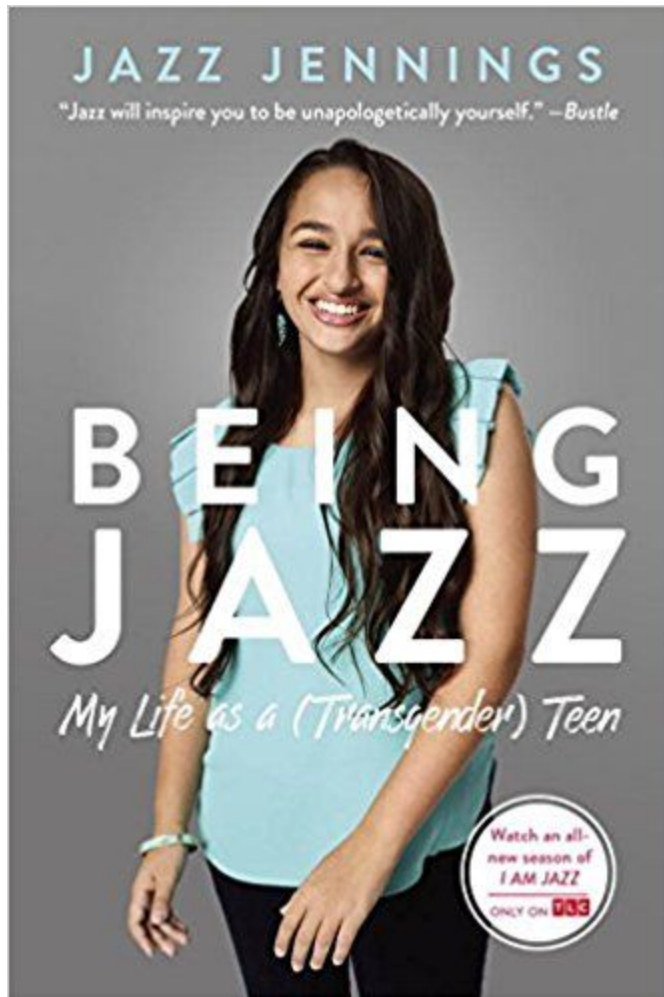
Nearly all of the classic fairy tales that persist into today have a similar premise; the prince saves the princess from peril, love blossoms, and they live happily ever after. So this is a wonderful take that introduces a homoromantic twist to the heteronormative tale. The two princesses bring the best out of each other through different hurdles they must jump over hurdles in order to protect each other.



For Aster and his family, girls become witches and boys become shapeshifters. But Aster is drawn to witchcraft despite this. Though he is constantly reminded that crossing that line would mean exile. But at age thirteen, the boys in the family start to disappear...and Aster knows the only way to save them is through witchcraft.

Ostertag, Molly Knox. *The Witch Boy*. Graphix. 2017.
<http://www.mollyostertag.com/>

The symbolism of crossing boundaries of gender are what makes this comic special. This serves as a metaphor for transgender teens and the struggles of transgender teens whose family isn't accepting of this change, and the solo journey to discovering identity. But the ending serves as hope, and LGBT teens who read this can find the courage that Aster has with accepting oneself.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BF5D2lsPfsU>

I am Jazz: "From the time she was two years old, Jazz knew that she had a girl's brain in a boy's body. She loved pink and dressing up as a mermaid and didn't feel like herself in boys' clothing. This confused her family, until they took her to a doctor who said that Jazz was transgender and that she was born that way. Jazz's story is based on her real-life experience and she tells it in a simple, clear way that will be appreciated by picture book readers, their parents, and teachers." (Bio by GoodReads)

The story of Jazz Jennings has three different media options; her TLC reality TV show, her children's book, and her own autobiography. Her story is so touching and can attract people



Herthel, Jessica, and Jazz Jennings. *I Am Jazz*. Illustrated by Shelagh McNicholas. Dial Books. 2014.

<http://www.jessicaherthel.com/>

Jennings, Jazz. *Being Jazz*. Ember. 2017.

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com>

of all different ages. Young children can simply understand her illustrated book and some children may even find that they feel the same way Jazz does. Her book is written by her, and we get a more personal experience with her thoughts as growing up transgender and how she takes in the support system she's built up around her. Jennings's TV show can introduce her story on a more widespread level and we can see the daily struggles and joys of her life as a transgender teen.