

# IF YOU'RE A KID LIKE GAVIN

THE TRUE STORY OF A YOUNG TRANS ACTIVIST

WORDS BY  
**GAVIN GRIMM AND KYLE LUKOFF**

ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
**J YANG**

**EDUCATORS' GUIDE**

# ABOUT THE BOOK



When you're a kid like Gavin Grimm, you know yourself best. And Gavin knew that he was a boy—even if others saw him as a girl. But when his school took away his right to something as simple as using the boy's restroom, Gavin knew he had a big decision to make.

Because there are always more choices than the ones others give you.

Gavin chose to correct others when they got his pronouns wrong. He asked to be respected. He stood up for himself. Gavin proved that his school had violated his constitutional rights and had the Supreme Court uphold his case—bringing about a historic win for trans rights. There are many kids out there, some just like Gavin Grimm, and they might even be you.

*What choices will you make?*

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Gavin Grimm** is a young adult trans activist. His journey began in 2015 when his high school in Gloucester, Virginia banned him from the boy's bathroom because he is trans. Since then, Gavin has been working in the trans community to raise awareness and education for everyone.



Photo is courtesy of Gavin Grimm



Photo is courtesy of Erin Jones-Le

**Kyle Lukoff** is the two time Stonewall-award winning author of *When Aidan Became A Brother* and middle grade novel *Too Bright to See*, which also received a Newbery Honor award, as well as many other books for young readers. A former school librarian, he lives and writes in Philly.

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

**J Yang** is a transmasculine illustrator. He has done work for Amplify Education, HarperCollins (*If You're a Kid Like Gavin*), Abrams Books (*The Good Hair Day*), Little Bee/GLAAD (*Our Rainbow & Spirit Day*), Simon & Schuster (artist assistant on *Craftily Book 6*), Tor, and Valve. The content J aims to put into the world celebrates the existence of queer folks, POC, disabled people, and various others. He is based in New York and has a BFA in Communications Design from Pratt Institute.



Photo is courtesy of J Yang

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# FROM THE CREATORS

When I was a child, before I realized I was transgender, I searched everywhere for a story that felt familiar. No matter where I looked there were no stories about people like me. If I had a diversity of experiences to learn about in my bookshelf I wouldn't have felt so alone or so unheard. Now that I'm an adult I get to share exactly the type of story that would have helped me see myself as a kid. I get to celebrate my transness and as a result, celebrate myself as a whole. When I came out at fourteen, I had no idea what my future held. I never imagined that it would hold a six-year-long court battle against my school, all because I was a kid who wanted to be himself. Despite that unjust roadblock I was empowered to fight back and stand up for what is right by my community, my friends, my mom and the ACLU. Without the support and visibility of other transgender people I would have never known that I could have a full and exciting life filled with love and laughter and support. I would have never seen other people like me living out loud and without apology. The stories we tell and the stories we read shape the world we live in. I can't be more honored to share my story with you. Thank you.

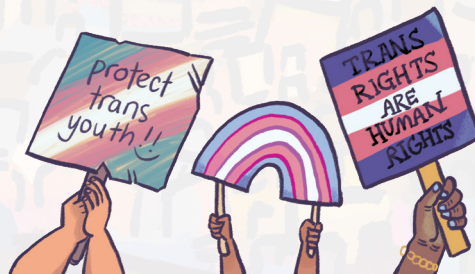
- **Gavin Grimm**

I've spent most of my life becoming ready to help Gavin share this story. When I came out at seventeen, my friends and I started a 'Gay-Straight Alliance' at our high school, making us targets for harassment. For the first time I felt the rush of mingled fear and pride that comes from protecting yourself and your community. In college I worked with my peers to try and create a gender-neutral bathroom in the student center; we lost, and I learned what it's like to fight against an unsupportive administration for something that should be a basic right. I started transitioning the same year I started law school, which is where I met Chase Strangio (I dropped out and Chase graduated; I'm so grateful that we both continued down our respective paths). I became a school librarian, and then a picture book author, and experienced the unique challenges and joys of being an openly trans person trying to succeed in children's publishing. And my students, named in my author's note, inspired me to reach out to Gavin after their successful campaign to make their elementary school more welcoming for trans and nonbinary people. Gavin's story is not mine, but is deeply woven into the threads of my own life, our shared community, and this nation. Thank you for letting his story become part of your life, too.

- **Kyle Lukoff**

One of the most significant things that being trans has translated (hah!) to my work as an illustrator is that being trans comes with a default understanding that the initial visual impression of a person—shaped by the expectations and prejudices ingrained from existing in a society—are often inaccurate. Thus, I draw people with the understanding that there are so many layers of depth that the visuals may hint at, but never truly uncover. Truly getting to know people is not only seeing them, but listening to what they have to say. So I called Gavin, and listened, and depicted his experiences as best I could. I hope that this book helps you know Gavin's story a bit better, too.

- **J Yang**



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# QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Would you eat a worm on a dare? Do you think that if someone wants to eat a worm, people need to stop them? If one kid eats a worm, does that mean other kids feel like they need to eat worms? What kinds of goofy, silly, or badly-thought-through choices have you made or seen people make? Do you think people all learn the same things from making these choices?
2. What kinds of choices do adults make for kids at school? Can kids decide when they eat lunch? Can kids choose when to go run around? Can they decide when they need to rest? Do rules get applied equally to everyone? How does it feel to really need to sleep when you also need to do math? Do you always feel okay with school rules?
3. Gavin tells his parents that he is not a girl, and that he needs a new name. He could have chosen not to tell them. Why do you think he needs to speak up about being a boy? How is living as a boy in high school different from living as a girl in high school?
4. In J Yang's illustration, we see many teachers and students talking to each other about Gavin. Why do you think these people care about making Gavin use the girls' room when he's living as a boy? Do you think they are thinking about how Gavin feels, or what they want?
5. Do you think Gavin would have been able to speak at the school meeting if his parents had told him not to? What do you think would be different in Gavin's life if his mom had not been supportive?
6. J Yang draws many people in this book—not just Gavin, but also the kids around Gavin at his school. What choices do you see the people around Gavin making? What do you think they're feeling when they make these choices?
7. Gavin talks to reporters and TV show hosts about the problems at his school. Do you feel nervous speaking to an audience? What do you do to feel calmer? If you don't like speaking to an audience, what are situations where you would feel like you need to anyway?
8. For transgender people, it can be scary to use the bathroom in public—especially if you aren't sure how the people around you will react. What problems do you think this could cause? What would happen if you were scared to ever use a bathroom?
9. It takes a lot of energy to decide to fight a school's decision instead of doing what adults tell you to do. Why do you think Gavin decides to fight? In what situations do you feel you need to stand up for yourself and others?
10. Kyle Lukoff and Gavin Grimm, the authors, worked together to tell Gavin's story to young people, and they talk a lot about choices—to fight rules we think are wrong, to team up with people who want to help us, to continue speaking up instead of accepting decisions we know aren't right. How do you know when you have a choice?

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# EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

**Get Into Character.** J Yang's detailed illustrations show us many different people who play a role in Gavin's life. Go through the book and choose three or four people who show up in the background. Based on what we see of them, write down individual ideas about:

- What this person is feeling in the moments we see them in the book
- Why they chose the outfit they're wearing
- What they're worried about
- What they feel embarrassed about
- What they want most in the world

Do we all have the same ideas about the people in the background? Do we have different emotions about them? Who do we identify with most?

**Rules Rule?** As a group, make a list of the rules kids in your group/class are asked to follow in their day to day lives. Consider school rules regarding recess, friends, bathroom use, classroom behavior, and food. Think also about the rules in place at your homes - about screen time, clothing choices, chores, mealtime, bedtime, etc. Encourage class members to talk about how each of these rules make them feel. Which rules make them feel safe? Which rules annoy them? Does everyone follow the same rules? Talk about why some rules make us feel safe or respected. As a group, agree on a set of rules for your space that ensures everyone feels safe and respected.

**There Must Be More Than That!** The people who didn't want to let Gavin use the bathroom told him that he only had certain choices: use the girls' bathroom, use a bathroom in a closet, or go to another school. Gavin decided there was another choice: fight their decision. Think about a time in your life when you discovered there were other options than the ones you were originally given. What did you do? Draw a picture of or write about this moment.

**Oral History Dive.** Visit the New York City Trans Oral History Project page (as a group or individually): <https://nyctransoralhistory.org/interviews> . This is a project that collects interviews with transgender people who were kids like Gavin. The people interviewed are of a variety of ages and walks of life. Here are some ways you can engage with their stories:

- Read the first page and a half of Ceyenne Doroshow's interview or listen to the first 3:23 of her interview: <https://nyctransoralhistory.org/interview/ceyenne-doroshow/> . Discuss what she says about New York City, the fire she remembers, politics, and her feelings about clothing. Ceyenne didn't know she was a girl when she was a kid, but describes feeling "gender different". What do you think it was like to be a trans kid in the 1960s?
- Look at some of the photos and descriptions of trans people and their lives as a group (parents or educators: spend some time on the site and potentially select specific interviews ahead of time to highlight). What do you think people like Gavin experience that makes them similar to each other as a group? What kinds of ways do you think transgender people's lives could be different from each other?

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# EXTENSION ACTIVITIES (CONTINUED)

**Bathroom Benchmarks.** Transgender people aren't the only people who worry about being able to use the bathroom. Many people with physical disabilities or injuries also have trouble using the bathroom. People can also have illnesses or other conditions that mean they need the bathroom more than other people. Ensuring our bathrooms can easily be used by someone with a disability helps make sure everyone can be safe and healthy.

Working in pairs or groups, visit all the bathrooms in your school or public library. Answer these questions:

- How many total bathrooms are there?
- Are all the bathrooms available all the time, or are some closed sometimes?
- Are there any bathrooms that you need to go upstairs to get into? How many?
- Are there any sinks low enough for someone to reach while sitting in a wheelchair?
- Are paper towel dispensers or hand dryers low enough for someone to reach while sitting in a wheelchair?
- How heavy are the doors to the bathrooms?
- Can wheelchair (25-36 inches wide) fit through any of the stall doors? If so, how many?
- Are there any stalls or bathrooms with bars next to the toilet to grab onto if someone needs support?
- Are these bathrooms usually crowded? How long do people need to wait to use the bathroom?



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# TIPS FOR PARENTS AND EDUCATORS READING THIS BOOK WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

- **Think about what information you'd like readers to know about their own rights.**
- **Consider your own early encounters with the idea of gender-nonconforming people.** What do you wish you had gotten a chance to discuss?
- **If reading other things about current events or activism, consider what parallels you can draw between Gavin Grimm and other young activists,** depending on reader interest.
- Picture books are more engaging with discussion! Ask questions about what children see on each page. This will also give you an opportunity to gauge comprehension and understand what they're thinking.
- **While children may or may not identify with Gavin, this story is relevant to all readers:** emphasize that every child makes choices and has power to understand their position in the world and make changes.
- **Affirm observations and questions children make about Gavin, his choices, or other things in their lives** that they feel are connected to the material. Give children a safe place to articulate poorly-formed or awkward questions. At the same time, emphasize respectful language and good faith in your responses.
- Ask children to practice empathizing both with Gavin and with the people around him. Point out that many people who are bullies don't know they are bullies; often, they're following what other people do. How can we know if we are being bullies?
- **Think about what the children you work with already know about gender.** For example, they know how they dress and how other children dress, and they likely have awareness about expectations regarding interests, toys, and behavior. Ask questions that prompt consideration about why people expect certain things of boys and girls.
- **It is possible that children will protest that transgender people cannot or should not exist,** because they have not encountered evidence of them yet or because someone in their life has told them they should not. Meet this statement with the affirmation that while not everyone speaks about transgender people, transgender people do exist, and most feel better when they live as the gender they identify with.
- **Understand resources you can refer parents or other educators to.** The National Center for Transgender Equality has extensive resources for schools. Their site provides information and resources, as well as opinions from pediatricians, school counselors and psychologists on the utility of accepting trans students : <https://transequality.org/school-action-center>