

Rainbow Boys Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Rainbow Boys is the story of three gay, teenage boys struggling to balance their true identities with the expectations of society around them.

Rainbow Boys is recounted from the revolving perspective of three gay teenagers in various stages of sexual realization. Nelson is out and proud. Everyone around him, including his parents and friends, know that he is gay. Kyle, the star of the school swim team, knows he's gay but hasn't yet come out to his family. Jason has a girlfriend but isn't satisfied. He feels like there's something he's hiding, even from himself. As the novel progresses, Jason realizes that he is gay but is too afraid to admit this even to himself.

The novel focuses mainly on the relationship between these three boys. Nelson and Kyle are best friends, but it is clear that Nelson is in love with Kyle. Kyle is in love with Jason, who hasn't even realized that he's gay. At the opening of the novel, Jason has convinced himself to attend a Rainbow Youth meeting, a meeting for gay teenagers. He hopes that attending this meeting will convince him, once and for all, that he's actually not gay. He's terrified to admit that he has romantic dreams involving other men and that his sex life with his girlfriend has begun to suffer. At the meeting, he is horrified to see two kids from his high school, Nelson and Kyle, and fears that they will oust him.

Kyle is thrilled to see Jason at the meeting - he's had a crush on him forever - but Nelson is annoyed. As the novel progresses, Jason and Kyle start up a friendship when Jason struggles in math, Kyle's best subject, and needs a tutor. After a few of those meetings, when Jason is feeling emotionally vulnerable after a fight with his alcoholic father, he and Kyle kiss. Jason's heart nearly tears open. He realizes that he is gay and that he is falling in love with Kyle. Then fear sets in as he realizes he is going to have to tell his family, and his girlfriend, the truth. Unlike Kyle and Nelson, who have strong, albeit reluctant, support systems, Jason's father is an abusive alcoholic who will surely disown him if he knows the truth.

As Kyle and Jason's relationship progresses, Nelson sinks further and further into depression. He is in love with Kyle, but Kyle sees him only as a friend. Desperate for attention, Nelson loses his virginity to a random older man he meets online. His sadness turns to fear when he realizes that they didn't use a condom and he might have been infected with HIV. The friendship of the three boys grows as they trust each other with their deepest, scariest secrets. Nelson turns to Kyle for support when he decides to have an HIV test, and Kyle turns to Nelson for support when he feels vulnerable about his relationship with Jason. As time passes, as his love for Kyle grows, Jason too begins to rely on his friends for support as he comes out to his family and friends. His trust is so strong that by the end of the novel, Jason attends the first meeting at his high school to promote education about homosexuality. It is a huge step in his personal development and one he never could have taken without the love and support of his friends.



Chapter One (Jason)

Chapter One (Jason) Summary

Jason Carrillo has walked around the block three times trying to convince himself to enter the Rainbow Youth meeting. He's terrified that he might be seen there, but terrified of what will happen to him if he doesn't figure out what's happening inside him. He has a long-term girlfriend whom he's been intimate with, but Jason can't shake the dreams he's been having about naked men. He's the star of the high school basketball team, and he hasn't admitted to anyone, not even himself, that he is gay. He is terrified of how coming-out could affect his life, and his fears have morphed into hatred: hatred for himself, and hatred toward all homosexuals, especially Nelson, a particularly flamboyant gay student at his school. Despite this, Jason feels compelled to attend the meeting, and is shocked when he sees Nelson sitting proudly at the front of the room. Terrified that Nelson will spread gossip about him around the school, Jason tries to leave but is pulled back into the meeting.

Chapter One (Jason) Analysis

This section introduces all three main characters in the novel: Jason, Nelson, and Kyle. Jason's struggle with homosexuality is common for many confused teenagers, particularly teenagers who come from tumultuous homes, like Jason has done. Through his narration, the reader realizes that Jason has hidden his sexuality from everyone, including himself, because he is terrified of how those around him might react if they knew he was gay. His father is an abusive alcoholic. Coming out to him would ensure physical, mental, and emotional abuse for himself, his younger sister, and his mother. Jason knows he cannot be responsible for that. Despite this, Jason is compelled to attend the Rainbow Youth meeting, perhaps because, deep down, he is searching for the strength to tell the truth. While he is terrified to see Nelson at the meeting, Jason is shocked to see Kyle Meeks, a member of the high school swim team, at the meeting. Jason never realized Kyle was gay, and this realization surprises him. Jason expected all gay teens to look and act a certain way - like Nelson - but Kyle proves that a gay man can be athletic and masculine, much like Jason. It is interesting to note that at the meeting, Jason considers asking a beautiful lesbian for her phone number assuming that, because she is so pretty, she must be confused about her sexuality and not gay.



Chapter Two (Kyle)

Chapter Two (Kyle) Summary

Kyle is shocked to see Jason, the man of his dreams, at the Rainbow Youth meeting. He never knew, never even suspected, that Jason was gay. His hopes soar. He is distracted for the rest of the day, dreaming about Jason and the time they first met: Jason had helped Kyle find his way to a classroom on their first day of high school. Ever since then, Kyle had been desperately in love with him, even memorizing his schedule so he could bump into him in between classes. Although Kyle has never doubted that he was gay, he still hasn't come out to his family, fearing that they will reject him. He's heard the gay jokes and snide comments from his fellow classmates and fears that his parents will react in the same derogatory way. After the Rainbow Youth meeting, Kyle also thinks about his friendship with Nelson. Nelson was the first person Kyle came out to, and Nelson seemed to know everything about being gay. He was a strong support system for Kyle, but Kyle failed to realize that it was because Nelson was in love with him. After the meeting, Nelson picks a fight with Kyle because he's jealous about the way Kyle was staring at Jason. At school the next day, Jason nervously stops by Kyle's locker to find out if he's told anyone about seeing him at the Rainbow Youth meeting. Of course, Kyle has protected Jason's secret and told no one.

Chapter Two (Kyle) Analysis

In this chapter, one of the main conflicts of the novel is revealed: the love triangle. Nelson is in love with Kyle who is in love with Jason who hasn't yet admitted that he is gay. The reader begins to see Nelson's negative character traits through the way he treats Kyle. He is jealous of Kyle's crush on Jason, and he threatens to out Jason as a way of ruining his life. If Jason is outed, maybe he'll stay away from Kyle. The main conflict Kyle must face in the novel is balancing affection in his life, particularly when he feels torn between the love for his best friend and the love for his romantic crush. Kyle's character is a middle ground between Nelson's flamboyant, out and proud, mentality, and Jason's closet fears. Even though Kyle is living a gay life, he still hasn't come out to his parents.



Chapter Three (Nelson)

Chapter Three (Nelson) Summary

Nelson storms to his friend Shea's house for a haircut. Whenever he's feeling down, Nelson makes a drastic change to his physical appearance, and his hair is the perfect outlet for that. When he arrives, Nelson is furious with Kyle and clearly jealous of the crush Kyle has on Jason. He dyes his hair florescent green in the hopes that Kyle will notice him.

The next day at school, Jack Ransom, the school bully, calls Nelson a "faggot" and shoves him into a locker. Debra Wyler, Jason's girlfriend, compliments Nelson on his new hairdo, but Jason refuses to make eye contact with him. When Kyle compliments Nelson's hair, his hear soars. That elation doesn't last long when all Kyle wants to talk about is Jason. Nelson feels depressed and agitated. He agonizes why Kyle doesn't Kyle feel the same way about him.

Chapter Three (Nelson) Analysis

Nelson has many negative character traits that come out when he's feeling depressed. In this chapter, the reader begins to see some of these behaviours, from swearing to chain smoking to critiquing his body, Nelson is extremely hard on himself. This is interesting because on the outside, Nelson seems to exude confidence. He is out and proud, flamboyantly gay in the face of constant bullying and peer pressure to conform. On the inside, however, it is clear that many of Nelson's seemingly confident behaviors are cries for attention. He is desperate to be loved for who he is, and would love nothing more than for that love to come from Kyle Meeks. Although it's clear that Kyle is in love with Jason, Nelson keeps his hopes high. He asks Kyle multiple times whether he likes his new hairdo, and relishes each time Kyle smiles and tells him it looks nice. Nelson seems to think that if he tries hard enough, for long enough, Kyle will eventually come around and return his love.



Chapter Four (Jason)

Chapter Four (Jason) Summary

Jason dresses for a trip to the mall a few days after the Rainbow Youth meeting. His girlfriend, Debra, has given him a steel necklace as a gift. When he puts it on, his father barges into the room and tells him to take it off; it makes him look "queer." The abuse continues as Jason's father calls him a plethora of names. When he grabs Jason's arm, Jason drops his drinking glass and it shatters on the floor. His father is irate and demands that Jason clean up the mess.

At the mall, Jason meets up with Debra and their best friends, Corey and Courtney. While standing in line at the food court, the teenagers giggle about a gay couple waiting in line ahead of them, which makes Jason uncomfortable. While they eat, they talk about Nelson and joke about gay couples being allowed to attend prom together. Jason has completely lost his appetite and just wants to go home. Later that night, he tries to have sex with Debra but finds himself unable to sustain an erection. Debra is offended and confused. Trying to make light of the situation, she makes a joke suggesting that Jason is gay. He is horrified and turns to leave. Debra convinces him to stay by performing oral sex on him and as he orgasms, Jason pictures Kyle's face instead of Debra's.

Chapter Four (Jason) Analysis

This chapter functions to show the conflict in Jason's life. His father is an abusive homophobe. He constantly berates Jason for not being "man enough" and uses derogatory, sexist slurs to make his point. To Jason's father, being a man seems to mean drinking a lot of beer and beating-up his family. Jason is athletic, smart, and kind, but in his father's eyes, he's not a man. It is no wonder, then, that Jason is absolutely terrified to explore his homosexual desires. If he told his father the truth, he would go insane, and Jason would be putting his mother and sister's safety in jeopardy. Instead, Jason tries to hide the truth from everyone, including himself. It finds ways of sneaking on him like picturing Kyle performing oral sex on him rather than Debra, which horrifies him.

Jason's outing at the mall with his friends shows how making fun of homosexuality is ingratiated into youth culture. Corey, Debra, and Courtney make many jokes at the expense of homosexuals, but they don't recognize how hurtful their jokes are. On the surface, their mockery is not nearly as devastating as Jack Ransom's, but Sanchez is clearly making a point: humor hurts too. Homosexuals don't deserve to be the brunt of a joke anymore than they deserve having a glass bottle thrown at their head. Both actions are abusive and support homophobia.



Chapter Five (Kyle)

Chapter Five (Kyle) Summary

Nelson and Kyle stay after class one afternoon to discuss the idea of a Gay-Straight Alliance with their art teacher, Ms. MacTrough. Although Ms. MacTrough is supportive of the idea, she fears that the boys aren't prepared for the backlash their student organization will certainly cause. She urges Kyle to come out to his parents before spearheading such a controversial club. Later that afternoon, Kyle and Nelson are jumped by Jack Ransom and his cronies. They beat Nelson up and threaten to punch Kyle, but the principal, Mr. Mueller, intervenes. Rather than stick-up for the victims, Mr. Mueller pulls Kyle and Nelson into his office for a firm talking-to.

Later that night, Kyle considers coming out to his parents. His father struggles to help him with his calculus homework and becomes increasingly frustrated, insisting that the book is wrong. The next morning, Kyle borrows his parents car to drive to his orthodontist appointment. As he's driving to the office, he spots Jason Carrillo and offers to give him a ride. He is shocked when Jason says yes. They pass pleasant conversation until Kyle offers to give Jason a ride to the next Rainbow Youth meeting. Jason averts his eyes and quickly gets out of the car, insisting that he's not gay.

Chapter Five (Kyle) Analysis

The abuse against Kyle and Nelson continues, accelerating with each encounter. The abuse comes not only from the students, but from the teachers as well. Even Mr. Mueller, the principal of the school, seems to believe that Nelson has brought this abuse on himself. He suggests that because Nelson dresses flamboyantly and acts effeminate, he is asking for the abuse; he deserves it. When Nelson first brings up the idea of the Gay-Straight Alliance, Mr. Mueller is adamantly against it. It is only when Kyle threatens to sue the school for encroaching on the Federal Equal Access Act that Mr. Mueller agrees to let the boys apply for the school's approval. It doesn't look promising, but for Nelson and Kyle, this is a huge victory.



Chapter Six (Nelson)

Chapter Six (Nelson) Summary

Nelson is elated to go to school to see Kyle without his braces. He even brings his Polaroid camera to capture the moment. When he sees Kyle, his heart soars: he is more handsome than ever. Nelson's joy is short-lived: all Kyle wants to talk about is Jason. Nelson is irate, and Kyle's bright white smile begins to annoy him. Nelson snaps at Kyle, starting a fight. Later that afternoon, Nelson visits Shea for another haircut. There, he bemoans his body, wishing he were more athletic, like Jason, so Kyle would be attracted to him. He decides to get a perm, but it doesn't turn out as he'd hoped.

Later, Nelson meets up with Kyle and suggests that they go to homecoming together. Kyle doesn't understand why; if he was going to make a gay statement at homecoming, he'd want to do it with his real boyfriend, not his best friend. Nelson won't let the topic drop and continues asking Kyle inappropriate questions hoping he'll reveal romantic feelings towards him. He asks Kyle who he thinks about when he masturbates, and if he's ever thought about him. He asks if Kyle is attracted to him, if he has a "good body" and if he'd like to practice sex moves on each other. Kyle is offended and confused, so Nelson finally drops it.

Chapter Six (Nelson) Analysis

In this section, the reader once again sees Nelson's low self-esteem. On the outside, Nelson is out and proud, a flamboyant member of the homosexual community. Many people mistake Nelson's outrageous behavior for self-confidence, but deep down, Nelson is desperate for affection, particularly from Kyle. Even though Nelson knows Kyle is not in love with him, he cannot help but ask inappropriate questions, hoping for a glimmer of hope that their friendship might turn romantic. As expected, Kyle gives Nelson nothing to cling to and is even offended by some of his questions. It is interesting to note that Nelson equates love to beauty. If he is more attractive, he is worthier of being loved. He is on a constant quest to better his appearance, and annoyingly asks everyone their opinion about his body, desperate for compliments. He continually changes his hair style as a way of drumming up attention, and binges and purges when he's feeling low about his body. Nelson's desperate need for attention and affection will lead him to make terrible decisions later in the novel.



Chapter Seven (Jason)

Chapter Seven (Jason) Summary

It's the night of homecoming and Jason pins a beautiful corsage on Debra's evening gown. Despite the fact that Debra looks beautiful and he's surrounded by his closest friends, Jason still can't shake an uncomfortable feeling. The students make jokes about whether Nelson will run for homecoming queen and Jason silently broods. When Debra makes a joke about their sex life, Jason explodes, starting an argument. Not wanting to fight on homecoming, Debra suggests that they spend some "alone time" in the car. She tries to engage Jason sexually, but he clearly isn't interested. He tells Debra that he needs some time to "figure things out."

The next day, Jason receives a failing grade on his math test. His teacher warns that if he doesn't raise his grades, he could lose his basketball scholarship. Jason remembers Kyle's offer for tutoring, but worries that Kyle might get the wrong idea if he calls him. Still, his nervous excitement about seeing Kyle wins over and he makes the call. Kyle comes over the next day and the two pass a pleasant afternoon together. Jason asks him a few questions about what it means to be gay, but for the most part, they focus on their homework. Before Jason realizes it, two hours have gone by. He's had such a good time he couldn't feel the time passing.

Chapter Seven (Jason) Analysis

A parallel is being drawn between Jason's struggle to understand math and his struggle to understand his sexuality. In both situations, Kyle will be the one to guide him through it. Throughout their tutoring session, Jason repeatedly states that he feels stuck, that he doesn't get it, that he needs help. To each exclamation, Kyle calmly responds that he shouldn't worry; they'll go slow. Keen readers will see the romantic relationship developing between these two boys and will see that just as with the math, the romance will go slowly too. Jason clearly needs time to understand what's happening in his life. It's a huge change, but as the reader sees when Jason breaks up with Debra, he is feeling bolder in accepting that change.



Chapter Eight (Kyle)

Chapter Eight (Kyle) Summary

Before Kyle left Nelson's house the other day, he had taken a copy of Honcho magazine, gay pornography. After he returns home from tutoring Jason, he lies in bed and flips through the pages. He longs to tell his parents that he's just spent the afternoon with the boy he loves, but he knows he can tell them nothing. Looking at the magazine, he masturbates and quickly falls asleep. The next morning, he wakes up with his mother standing over his bed. She's holding his copy of Honcho in her hands. She looks absolutely horrified, but stops him from explaining. She wants to talk about this later. Kyle spends the entire day at school obsessing over how he will explain this to his parents. He's terrified that they will reject him, and Nelson, who is supposed to be his best friend, isn't helping. All he wants is for Kyle to come over to his place and avoid the situation altogether, but Kyle knows that won't help anything. That night, he makes dinner for his parents before they return home from work. They eat the meal in silence, bracing themselves for the upcoming conversation. Suddenly, Kyle blurts out that he's gay. His parents are speechless. His mother angrily questions why Kyle hadn't told her sooner, and his father blames Nelson, insinuating that Nelson infected Kyle with homosexuality. He demands that Kyle stop spending time with Nelson, which is so infuriating that Kyle storms out of the room.

Chapter Eight (Kyle) Analysis

Kyle bravely comes out to his parents when he suspects his mother has discovered the truth. Kyle fears that his parents will kick him out of the house or disown him, and he has emotionally braced himself for the worst. His parents are shocked and somewhat devastated by the news, but their reaction isn't as negative as Kyle had expected. Still, emotions are extremely high and Kyle overacts to his father's assumption that Nelson has "infected" him. It seems clear that Kyle will shortly make up with his parents, and that they simply need time to digest the new change. In time, one hopes that Kyle will be able to share his joys and desires with his parents, as he so longs to do.



Chapter Nine (Nelson)

Chapter Nine (Nelson) Summary

Nelson picks Kyle up for their weekly Rainbow Youth meeting. He suggests that Kyle's parents attend a PFLAG meeting to help them cope with the change. Mrs. Meeks seems interested, but Mr. Meeks remains silent. At the meeting, Nelson immediately notices a new guy, Jeremy, and he's very attractive. At Burger King after the meeting, Kyle admits to Shea that he spend the afternoon at Jason's house earlier that week, and Nelson is outraged that Kyle failed to share that information with him. Kyle tries to apologize, but Nelson won't hear it. He's in a terrible mood and nothing can shake him from his sulking. It's clear that Kyle feels badly about Nelson's bad mood, so he keeps making jokes trying to lighten the mood. The two friends watch a movie together and Nelson can't stop thinking about how badly he'd like to kiss Kyle. He fantasizes about Kyle's body and he's so turned on that he boldly asks Kyle if he'd like to practice kissing, to prepare him if he ever has the chance to kiss Jason. Kyle turns him down outright, saying it would be like kissing his sister, which only makes Nelson angrier. He begs Kyle, refusing to drop the topic, and he finally grabs Kyle's shoulders trying to kiss him. Kyle pushes back and punches Nelson in the chin. Embarrassed, he leaves Nelson lying on the floor.

Chapter Nine (Nelson) Analysis

The conflict between Nelson and Kyle reaches its boiling point when Nelson tries to kiss Kyle. Nelson can no longer deny that he is desperately in love with Kyle and fiercely jealous of Kyle's relationship with Jason. Nelson is jealous not only that Kyle has a crush on someone other than him, but that Kyle might lose his virginity before Nelson does. Because Nelson has been out since puberty, he feels entitled to the gay lifestyle, meaning that since he came out before Kyle did, he should have his first kiss before Kyle does, or lose his virginity before Kyle does. Nelson is protective of Kyle because he guided him through the emotional aspect of realizing his sexuality, and now he wants to guide him through the physical part. Unfortunately, Kyle is not interested in Nelson sexually, which is more than Nelson can take. He is heartbroken and devastated on many different levels, and the reader can expect an emotional backlash of bad decisions as Nelson struggles with his low self-esteem.



Chapter Ten (Jason)

Chapter Ten (Jason) Summary

Jason receives an 88 on his algebra test, the highest grade he's ever received in math. Jason is elated and rushes to Kyle at his locker to invite him over for more studying this weekend. Kyle breaks into a wide smile, but their joy is interrupted when Jason's basketball teammates pull him into practice. Corey, Jason's best friend, tells Jason he should stay away from Kyle or people will start to think that he's gay, too. When Jason gets home from school that day, he hears his parents arguing about the way his father treats him. He's always talking down to Jason and calling him names. His mother wants it to stop, but as usual, his father is too drunk to listen.

Later that night, Kyle comes over to help Jason with his math homework. Once again, the evening flies by. Jason's mother invites Kyle to stay for dinner, and with an encouraging nod from Jason, Kyle accepts. After dinner, Jason invites Kyle to a movie. When Kyle accepts, Jason is excited and confused. He can't decide if he's asked Kyle on a date, or if they're just going to the movie as friends. He's not sure what he would prefer. At the movies, the boys share a bucket of popcorn and Jason feels a zap of electricity running through him whenever Kyle's hand brushes against his. When their hands linger near each other's on the armrest, Jason boldly lays his hand on top of Kyle's, breathing hard with excitement. Jason wants desperately to kiss Kyle, but he's too scared. He is afraid if someone might see them. A man stands up three rows ahead of them and starts walking toward the bathroom. Jason snatches his hand away from Kyle's and stares blankly at the screen. They drive back to Kyle's house in silence. Despite Jason's nervousness, Kyle is smiling, making it clear that he had a great time.

Chapter Ten (Jason) Analysis

Love is blooming for Kyle and Jason. The only problem is that Jason still hasn't come to grips with his sexuality and is terrified of what will happen to him if people find out that he's gay. One of his biggest concerns is that he might lose his basketball scholarship, or that colleges won't recruit him to play for their team if they find out the truth. Jason is also dealing with an alcoholic, abusive father. There is a very real possibility that his father would physically attack him if Jason were to admit that he is gay. Despite this, Jason cannot resist his attraction to Kyle, and the fact that Kyle accepts him for who he truly is. Kyle is invested in bettering Jason's life (by helping him in math), and seems willing to give Jason as much time and space as he needs to understand his sexuality.



Chapter Eleven (Kyle)

Chapter Eleven (Kyle) Summary

It's Thanksgiving Break and Kyle desperately misses Jason. Ever since they held hands in the movie theatre, he can't stop thinking about him. He even went two days without washing his hands because he didn't want to wash away the imaginary scent of Jason that still lingered on his skin. At Thanksgiving dinner, many of Kyle's relatives ask why he doesn't have a girlfriend, and he manages to escape the questions. Kyle's father arranges for the two of them to go to a Redskins' football game together and Kyle reluctantly agrees. When they are accidentally separated at the end of the game, Kyle waits for his father at the car. His father, however, waited for Kyle in the stands, and when they are finally reunited, his father is livid. Kyle shouts that he hates football and wishes his dad would stop trying to change who he is. Kyle's father lowers his eyes, saddened. He tries to talk to Kyle that night, apologizing for his behavior, but Kyle isn't interested. At school the next day, he makes up with Nelson. It's been over a week since Kyle punched him, and he misses his best friend. Even though he's afraid it might upset Nelson again, Kyle tells him about his date with Jason and Nelson seems pleased for them.

Chapter Eleven (Kyle) Analysis

Many of the questions readers might have about homosexuality and how it affects the lives of gay individuals are asked by characters in the novel, particularly the parents. Through Mrs. Meeks' questions, the reader learns that not every gay man has AIDS, and that it's possible for gay couples to adopt children. Most readers will already know these things, but Sanchez is making a concerted effort to educate readers about homosexuality no matter how "stupid" their questions might be. If Sanchez educates readers about the struggles of gay individuals, and couples, hopefully homophobia will become a fear of the past. Through the experiences of these three characters, readers are exposed to the pain and struggle of hiding one's true self from their family. Hiding the truth affects every minute of every day, and it is no wonder that homosexual teenagers have the highest suicide rate: the fear of revealing the truth is more than some teenagers can take. It's important that they have a strong network of support - friends and family alike - to let them know that it's okay to be who they are.



Chapter Twelve (Nelson)

Chapter Twelve (Nelson) Summary

Even though he pretended to be supportive of Kyle's date with Jason, he is extremely jealous. He fumes about Kyle while Shea cuts his hair, but tries to sound excited about an older guy he's been instant messaging on the computer. Shea accuses Nelson of trying to hook up with older men just to make Kyle jealous. At a party later that night, Nelson starts talking to Blake, a hot guy from Rainbow Youth. Blake has just broken up with his long-term boyfriend and seems depressed. When he suggests that Nelson join him in his car for a drink, Nelson can hardly believe his luck. The two drink shots of rum and kiss. Nelson is shocked that his first kiss is with Blake - the gorgeous guy all the gays at Rainbow Youth drool over - but he is shaking with nerves. Blake doesn't seem into kissing Nelson, but unzips his pants so Nelson can perform oral sex on him. Nelson is literally trembling. He thinks about all the AIDS statistics hammered into his head at each meeting, but fears that asking Blake to put on a condom will ruin the mood. Sensing Nelson's hesitation, Blake asks Nelson if he's a virgin. Nelson lies, saying that he isn't, because he doesn't want to seem immature. Blake can see right through the lie, and he zips his pants back up. He puts a brotherly arm on Nelson's shoulder and tells him to wait. Everyone deserves for their first time to be with someone special. Nelson tries to disagree: he is desperate to lose his virginity before Kyle, but Blake has already started making his way back to the party.

Chapter Twelve (Nelson) Analysis

When she catches Nelson instant messaging a much older man online (seventeen-year-old Nelson is flirting with a twenty-nine-year-old man) she accuses him of trying to make Kyle jealous. When Nelson has his encounter with Blake at the party, it becomes clear that jealousy does play a part in Nelson's behaviours. When he is kissing Blake, all he can think about is how jealous Kyle, and all the other guys at Rainbow Youth, are going to feel. Blake is a very attractive guy that most of the Rainbow Youth members have a crush on. In Nelson's mind, if he can bed Blake, it will affirm that he's worthy of something. Blake doesn't feel comfortable taking Nelson's virginity, but Nelson's desperation to lose his virginity before Kyle does, and the mentality that he "felt like a baby - shamefully immature, and the one the hated most in his crappy life was to think he was immature" (p. 118), will lead to more reckless behavior in the future.



Chapter Thirteen (Jason)

Chapter Thirteen (Jason) Summary

Debra calls Jason's house looking for him. When he doesn't call her back, she stops by his locker at school. It's been two months since homecoming, and Jason hasn't called her once. The two start talking and Jason feels a strong urge to come out to her. They've been through so much together and despite the fact that he broke up with her, Debra is his best friend. Bravely, Jason tells Debra that he's been so distant because he's trying to figure something out: he thinks he might be gay. Debra is shell-shocked. When she hears this, Debra starts screaming and punching Jason in the chest. She shouts that she hates him and threatens to ruin his life. Later that night, Jason's father bursts into his bedroom and demands that Jason turn down his music. When Jason refuses, his father hurls the stereo down the stairs, breaking it. The next day, Jason receives a "D" on his math test. Since holding hands with Kyle at the movies, he hasn't called him and hasn't been studying.

Chapter Thirteen (Jason) Analysis

Jason's life is falling apart. The fights with his father are escalating as his alcoholism makes his behavior more and more unpredictable. Telling Debra that he's gay has disastrous results as Debra promises to ruin Jason's life. The reader can safely assume that Debra will start spreading rumors about Jason's sexuality to get back at him for "tricking" her into having sex with him. Although Jason shows bravery by coming out to Debra, he is more confused and frightened than ever.



Chapter Fourteen (Kyle)

Chapter Fourteen (Kyle) Summary

Kyle arrives to school after Thanksgiving Break to find that Jack Ransom has spray painted "Queer" on his locker. Principal Mueller ignores the obvious intimidation. Later that afternoon, Jason, who has been avoiding Kyle in the hallways, shows up at his house asking for tutoring help. Kyle is elated. When Kyle's father is introduced to Jason for the first time, he is excited to learn that Kyle has befriended an athlete. The two teens once again pass an easy afternoon, in which they discover that they have much in common, including a love for Star Trek. Jason confesses that he came out to Debra and that he fears she is spreading rumors about his at school. He also tells Kyle about his most recent fight with his father. Kyle is an excellent listener and it's clear that Jason trusts him. Jason takes a deep breath and confesses why his father is so homophobic: when Jason was ten-years-old, he had a male friend spend the night and his father caught them touching each other. He told Jason that if he ever caught him like that again, he'd kill him.

The two lean in so close as they are sharing secrets that they can feel each other's breath on their lips. Kyle longs to kiss Jason but doesn't want to rush him. When he finally musters the courage to lean in that last half-inch, a thousand nerves explode as their lips touch. They kiss passionately and Kyle whispers, "I love you, Jason" (p. 137). Jason flinches and bolts from the room.

Chapter Fourteen (Kyle) Analysis

When Kyle returns from Thanksgiving Break, he finds himself the victim of Jack Ransom's homophobic bullying. When Mr. Mueller ignores the spray painted slur on Kyle's locker, Kyle realizes how alone Nelson must have felt when he was the only kid in school being picked on for his sexuality. Although Kyle had always tried to be a good friend to Nelson, he never truly understood the bashing Nelson endured, and it warms his heart to know that Nelson is no longer alone.

The kissing scene between Kyle and Jason is carefully constructed. Jason has just opened up to Kyle about many tragedies he endured in his life, and the argument could be made that Kyle took advantage of Jason's emotional vulnerability. However, Jason arrived at Kyle's house with the movie poster from the film where they first held hands. This shows a romantic premeditated action in coming over to Kyle's house. Clearly he isn't here just for tutoring. Also, Jason divulges the story of his first homosexual encounter. Because it happened when Jason was so young, pre-puberty, there can be no argument that Jason has "chosen" to be gay, or that Kyle is the only male he has ever been attracted to. Through sharing this story, Jason is telling Kyle that he is gay, that he's always been gay, and that the feelings he has for him are not a fluke.



Chapter Fifteen (Nelson)

Chapter Fifteen (Nelson) Summary

Nelson is feeling depressed about his relationship with his father. As usual, his father has failed to show up when he promised to spend time with Nelson, and his Christmas card has just arrived: "no personal greeting, no fond closing, only the perfunctory signature, and a check for a hundred dollars" (p. 139). Although he had been expecting it, Nelson is still disappointed. He visits Kyle and is devastated to hear that Kyle and Jason have kissed, even though he pretends to be excited for his best friend. Nelson continues his online flirting with the older guy, named HotLove69, and asks Shea to take photos of him to send to his online crush.

That evening, Nelson's father is supposed to pick him up for Christmas dinner at 8:00. Nelson's mother leaves for a PFLAG meeting, and Nelson waits eagerly, staring out the kitchen window. He's taken extra time to prepare his appearance, hoping his father will be proud of the way he looks. The time clicks by and there is no sign of Nelson's father. A crank phone call threatens Nelson. Depressed, Nelson calls Kyle, who can't come over because he's at his grandmother's, and eats an entire box of Oreos. Finally, Nelson turns to his computer and sends a flirty message to HotLove69. To his surprise, HotLove69 replies, asking if Nelson would like to hook up. Nelson agrees. They arrange to meet at Starbucks and Nelson nervously waits, scanning the room. A handsome, muscled man pulls up on a motorcycle and whisks Nelson back to his apartment. Trying to appear older than seventeen, Nelson pounds a beer and almost throws up. The guy, Brick, doesn't seem to care. He doesn't waste any time leading Nelson to his bedroom. He tears off Nelson's clothes, flips him over, and enters him, without a condom. Nelson can barely breathe. He knows he should stop Brick and ask him to put on a condom, but he's too afraid Brick will reject him. The sex is over as quickly as it began, and Brick is clearly eager to get Nelson out of his house. When Nelson asks for his phone number, Brick averts his eyes and tells Nelson that he already has a boyfriend. Nelson is so traumatized that he collects his clothes and walks out of the apartment.

Chapter Fifteen (Nelson) Analysis

This is an important chapter in Nelson's character development. Not only does the reader see the disastrous effect Nelson's low self-esteem has had on his life, they also get a glimpse into the cause of Nelson's self-loathing. Nelson has a strained relationship with his father. Although the text doesn't make it clear, it appears that Nelson's father rejected him when he learned that Nelson was gay. Unable to cope with Nelson's sexuality, his father finds it impossible to interact with his son. Because of this, Nelson has a constant fear of being rejected. The reader first saw this fear during Nelson's interaction with Blake, and now again, with higher stakes, during his encounter with Brick. Even though Nelson knows that unprotected sex is extremely dangerous - particularly unprotected homosexual sex - he doesn't have the courage to ask Brick to



put on a condom, fearing that Brick won't want to have sex with him anymore. Nelson's need to feel love overrides his need to be safe. He puts his entire self-worth on other's opinions of him rather than his opinions of himself.

Nelson's naivety is seen not only through his act of unsafe sex, but through his entire encounter with Brick. Much of Nelson's naivety is understandable due to his age, but his low self-esteem is also a huge factor. On some level, Nelson thought that if Brick wanted to have sex with him, it meant that he loved him. He couldn't imagine that someone as handsome and rich as Brick could be a sexual predator, or that he would only be interested in a one-night stand. These are devastating lessons for Nelson to learn and lessons that could have long-lasting effects on his life.



Chapter Sixteen (Jason)

Chapter Sixteen (Jason) Summary

Jason cannot believe that he and Kyle just kissed. At first, he blames Kyle for taking advantage of him, but soon he realizes that he was just as eager to kiss Kyle as Kyle was to kiss him. When school resumes after the holiday break, Corey pulls Jason aside and demands to know whether or not he's gay: Debra's been spreading rumors around the school. Jason panics but nods his head. Corey is shocked, but seems to support Jason's admission, saying, "Look man...I don't care who you do it with. But you're up for your scholarship letter. You want to mess that up?" (p.155). He urges Jason to stay away from Kyle so no one else in the school finds out the truth. Later that day, Kyle approaches the basketball table in the cafeteria and asks if he can join them. It breaks Jason's heart, but he refuses to look Kyle in the eye. He shakes his head, no. Kyle's smile falters and he runs into the hallway, broken hearted. Jason chases after him trying to apologize, but Kyle won't listen to him.

Chapter Sixteen (Jason) Analysis

On the surface, Corey appears to be a supportive friend to Jason: he doesn't run away when Jason admits that he is gay. He doesn't beat him up and he doesn't spread rumors about him. But Corey is not a supportive friend. He urges Jason to hide his sexuality from the public, and he warns Jason to stay away from Kyle. When Kyle approaches them in the cafeteria, Corey makes it very clear that Kyle would not be welcome at their table, despite the hurt he sees in Jason's eyes. As the reader will see later in the novel, true friendship is not simply acknowledging an individual's sexuality (or religion, gender, age, etc), it is embracing it and standing up for that friend when they are being attacked. Presently, Corey seems incapable of such friendship.

Also in this chapter, the conflict surrounding Jason's father and his alcoholism is rising. Over Christmas, Jason's father got very drunk and started a fistfight with his brother. Also, Jason's mother has begun attending Al-Anon, a support group for family members of alcoholics, which infuriates Jason's father.



Chapter Seventeen (Kyle)

Chapter Seventeen (Kyle) Summary

Kyle is devastated by Jason's reaction to him in the cafeteria. On top of everything, Nelson hasn't been in school for three days. Depressed, Kyle walks over to Nelson's house and demands that Nelson let him in. Nelson is a wreck. He clearly hasn't showered in days and he looks terrible. When Kyle tells him about his fight with Jason, Nelson surprises him. Rather than tell Kyle that Jason's not worth his time, Nelson demands that Kyle forgive him: "You can't just dump him like garbage" (Page 165). Nelson also admits that he lost his virginity to a stranger and that they didn't use a condom. Kyle is flabbergasted. He shouts at Nelson, unnerved that his best friend would do such a stupid thing, but Nelson looks so terrified, Kyle wraps him in his arm and holds him while they both cry.

When he leaves Nelson's house, Kyle feels terrible: Nelson might be infected with HIV, Jason has ignored him at school, Jack Ransom continues threatening him. For the first time in his life, Kyle feels suicidal. He feels as if he can't deal with the stress of being gay anymore. At dinner that night, a threatening crank call comes through. Rather than tell him he brought this on himself, Kyle's parents report the call to Principal Mueller and promise to alert the police to the threats. His parents have stood up for him, and Kyle feels as if they are turning over a new leaf. The next morning, he walks boldly to his locker where Jack has spray-painted the word "Queer." He pulls a spray can from his backpack and adds the words, "And Proud!"

Chapter Seventeen (Kyle) Analysis

Deep down, Kyle knows how stupid it was to approach Jason in the cafeteria. In doing so, he was rushing Jason, practically forcing him to come out to his entire basketball team. He knows it isn't fair, but Kyle is heart-broken that he can't embrace his new life like a straight couple would do. If Jason was a girl, there wouldn't be any problem with them cozying up in the cafeteria, sneaking kisses between classes. Kyle isn't sure what he expected. It certainly was not for Jason to let him sit down, but he hoped that Jason would have at least acknowledged him. When he confesses this to Nelson, however, he's shocked when his best friend encourages him to give Jason a second chance. Kyle doesn't understand Nelson's sudden change of heart, but the reader recognizes Nelson's realization that they are all in this together: Jason is just as deserving of being loved as he is. After Brick unceremoniously dumped him, Nelson is sensitive to the pain and struggle of his friends, and he urges Kyle not to break Jason's heart the way his own heart has just been broken. This sensitivity shows a positive change and maturity in Nelson's character.



Chapter Eighteen (Nelson)

Chapter Eighteen (Nelson) Summary

Nelson stays home from school one more day, trying to get in touch with Brick. He is shocked when every message he sends to Brick bounces back: Brick has blocked Nelson from his contacts. Nelson tries to call Shea, but she's mad at him. During the time he's been away from school, she's been desperately trying to get a hold of him but Nelson never called her back. Now, Shea reveals that Courtney has left her and she just wanted a friend to talk to. She accuses Nelson of being selfish and self-centered, and she ends their friendship. Nelson's mother has had enough of his negative behavior and she demands to know what's going on. Feeling like he has nothing left to hide, Nelson tells his mother everything. She is outraged. His mother's disappointment is so severe that Nelson considers killing himself. Just then, Kyle calls and asks if he can come over. With Kyle's help, Nelson catches up on his missed schoolwork and raises his sprits high enough to return to school.

Later that week, the GSA school board meeting is scheduled. All the parents that oppose and support the Gay-Straight Alliance are encouraged to attend, speak their opinions, and wait for the school board to vote on the organization's approval. To the teenagers' delight, the organization is passed. Later that week, Nelson attends a Rainbow Youth meeting about HIV. He is shocked to learn that Jeremy, the handsome new guy he has been crushing on, is HIV positive. He agrees to meet Nelson for coffee and Nelson tells him about his encounter with Brick. Jeremy is very supportive and even gives Nelson his phone number in case he'd like to talk more.

Chapter Eighteen (Nelson) Analysis

Many people speak at the GSA meeting, including Nelson, Mr. Ransom, and other parents that vehemently oppose the organization. The speech that makes the most impact, however, is the speech Nelson's mother gives. She passes around a photo of six-year-old Nelson on his first day of school. That day, Nelson had been so excited to start school but he came home weeping: some of the other kids had bullied him for being to "girly." She had promised Nelson that school would get better for him, but now, as Nelson finished up his final year of high school, she realized she had lied. Her son was the constant target of threats, bullying, and violence simply because of his sexuality. She hopes this organization will provide a safe-haven for students like Nelson, and create a strong network of education to prevent homophobia from infecting the hallways any longer. Nelson's mother's message to the school board is also Sanchez's message to his reading audience: it is within every individual's power to lessen the impact of homophobia, if you are brave enough to accept the challenge.



Chapter Nineteen (Jason)

Chapter Nineteen (Jason) Summary

Jason regrets the way he treated Kyle in the cafeteria. Ever since, he can't stop thinking about Kyle, wishing that the two could go public with their romance. Weeks pass as Kyle ignores him in the hallway, but when Jason receives word that he's been given a full scholarship to Tech, he can barely contain his excitement. His drunken father sneers that Jason could have made a Division One school if he had any brains, but Jason feels invincible. As he rides his bike home from school, all Jason wants to do is run to Kyle. In the distance, he sees Jack Ransom's pickup, and the bully himself pummeling Nelson and Kyle. Without thinking, Jason jumps off his bike and punches Jack in the face. Jack accuses Jason of being a "fag lover" but promptly leaves the scene. Nelson and Kyle are covered in blood, so Jason takes them back to his house to get cleaned up. As the three boys are talking in the kitchen, Jason's father comes home. Jason fears what his father will say when he sees Nelson, but he feels emboldened by the fight. After Nelson and Kyle leave, Jason's father confronts him: "Don't bring them here again...I don' wan' any faggots in my house" (p. 198). Bracing himself, Jason takes a deep breath and shouts, "Well...you've got one." His father's face contorts and punches Jason in the chest. The pummeling continues until Jason finally takes a swing at his father. His fist connects and his father staggers backward. Jason has finally stood up to his fears.

Chapter Nineteen (Jason) Analysis

This chapter is a major turning point in Jason's character development. Seeing Nelson and Kyle beaten by Jack Ransom unleashes a protective fury in him. For the first time, Jason feels more closely connected with the gay kids than he does the popular kids. Although some critics may argue that Jason is emboldened only after he learns that his homosexuality will not affect his scholarship applications, he no longer cares how people's opinions of him will affect his life. Without thinking, he attacks Jack Ransom with all the fury he's been holding inside. Once that anger is released, he is free to feel love once again: love for Kyle. His self-worth is so high that he even feels brave enough to come out to his father, the biggest bully of them all: "All the events of the past few months connected for Jason...Jason had feared where the experience would lead him, not sure he'd survive. But now the culminating moment had arrived and miraculously, he was still standing" (p. 199).



Chapter Twenty (Kyle)

Chapter Twenty (Kyle) Summary

As Kyle rides back to his parents' house after the fight, he is terrified of what his father will say. He's sure that his father will launch into the familiar "you brought this on yourself" argument, and is shocked when his father seems proud that he's been in a fight. His father tells him that he's proud of him, and that he's been thinking about joining PFLAG. The father-son bonding continues when Kyle invites his father to one of Jason's basketball games, and he happily agrees. Kyle and Jason begin spending more time together since the fight, even at school, so when Jason invites Kyle to the movies, he eagerly accepts. One the night of their date, however, all the lights are turned off at Jason's house when Kyle approaches. Feeling like something is wrong, Kyle pushes open the front door and walks inside. He finds Jason cowering in his bedroom, crying. His father has left for good, and gave everyone a good beating before he left. When he sees Kyle, Jason rushes to him and urgently kisses him. He reaches for Kyle's belt buckle, but Kyle gently pushes him away. He doesn't want Jason to make a decision he'll regret, but Jason is insistent. The two make out and eventually have sex.

Chapter Twenty (Kyle) Analysis

Two major turning points in Kyle's maturity occur in this chapter. First, his relationship with his father reaches a new level of understanding. It becomes clear that Kyle's father never hated him, he just didn't understand how homosexuality would change the son he knew and loved. After the fight, Kyle's father realizes that Kyle is the same person he always was, and that there is much to be proud of, especially the fact that his son can defend himself in a fight. Mr. Meeks had always tried to bond with Kyle over sports, but Kyle was never interested, at least not until his boyfriend began to play. At Jason's basketball games, Kyle will be able to spend time bonding with his father while watching his relationship with Jason flourish.

Also in this chapter, Kyle and Jason sleep together. This encounter may elicit strong critique in conversation. Throughout the novel, it appears that Jason is only interested in homosexual romance after a great trauma in his life: most notably, after fights with his father. While Kyle is clearly not a sexual predator (as Brick was), in these moments, Jason is emotionally vulnerable and may not be thinking clearly. Just as Nelson reached out to Brick to feel wanted after his father abandons him, so too might Jason be reaching out for male affection after his father rejects him. Even though Jason claims to love Kyle, he pushes Kyle out of the house when his mother comes home so they will not be discovered together. This shows the reader that Jason still has residual fears about his homosexuality that he needs to come to terms with if he wants his relationship with Kyle to succeed.



Chapter Twenty-One (Nelson)

Chapter Twenty-One (Nelson) Summary

Nelson walks his dog to Kyle's house to talk about his sexual encounter with Jason. Even though Nelson still has feelings for Kyle, he is pleased to see his best friend happy. Nelson has good news of his own: Jeremy called and asked him out for a date. A few days later, Nelson's father called demanding to know about the fight. Unlike Kyle's parents, Nelson's father is not impressed. He warns Nelson to stay out of trouble and blames Nelson for everything bad in his life: "Why can't you just be normal, so your mom doesn't phone me all the time, worrying about you" (p. 221). Later that week, Nelson goes on his date with Jeremy. They have a wonderful time and Jeremy clearly respects Nelson. He refuses to give him beer and asks if they can go slow romantically.

Chapter Twenty-One (Nelson) Analysis

After his encounters with both Blake and Brick, Nelson has no idea how to act on a proper date. He assumes that he has to get drunk and have sex right away or Jeremy won't want anything to do with him. Perhaps because of his HIV status, Jeremy is extremely mature for his age. He doesn't condone wild behavior (like drinking or promiscuous sex) and says that he wants to be in love with the next person he has sex with. Nelson can hardly believe his luck. Jeremy is handsome, smart, and actually wants to get to know him. It's clear that Jeremy is going to have a positive impact on Nelson's life, and show him what it means to be loved.

The novel is very clear that even if Nelson has not been infected with HIV from Brick, he can still engage in a sexual relationship with Jeremy. When HIV is properly medicated, and sexual partners use appropriate precautions, HIV-positive people can continue to have a normal, healthy sex life, even with non-infected partners.



Chapter Twenty-Two (Jason)

Chapter Twenty-Two (Jason) Summary

The morning after he has sex with Kyle, Jason awakes with a feeling of dread: what has he done? As he recounts the night, however, that dread melts away and he is filled with a new feeling: he feels free. Still, Jason doesn't want everyone at school to know that Kyle is now his boyfriend, and he hopes they can keep the relationship secret. At school, it's the first Gay-Straight Alliance meeting during lunch period, and Jason has no intention of attending. As Nelson makes his way toward the meeting, however, students stand up shouting slurs at him, throwing food and crumpled paper at him as he walks toward the meeting room. Jason feels as if they're harassing him as well. He stands up to protect Nelson from the blows and walks with him toward the classroom. He sees Kyle inside, and ignoring the shouts from behind him, boldly walks through the door.

Chapter Twenty-Two (Jason) Analysis

Jason has finally accepted his sexuality enough to stand-up for his beliefs in school. Although he still has fears, and even defends his decision to attend the Gay-Straight Alliance meeting by suggesting that he's attending as a straight friend, it is clear that he is making big steps toward living a life of freedom.



Characters

Jason Carrillo

Jason Carrillo is the star of the high school basketball team and a closet homosexual. At the opening of the novel, Jason attends his first Rainbow Youth meeting to assure himself that he is not gay and simply confused. As the novel progresses, however, Jason can no longer deny the truth: he is gay, and he is falling in love with Kyle Meeks. For Jason, these realizations present many problems. First, he is terrified that coming out as gay will lose him his basketball scholarship. Second, he knows he must break up with his long-term girlfriend, whom he loves as a friend, and break her heart. The biggest problem is that Jason must tell his parents the truth, including his abusive, alcoholic father. Jason's father is violently homophobic, and Jason knows that if he comes out to him, his father will certainly disown him. All these fears have turned Jason into an anxious, frustrated teenager who loathes his own homosexuality and takes that hatred out on those closest to him. As the novel progresses, Jason comes to terms with his identity and even finds the strength to come out to his parents. None of this would have been possible without the love and support of his two new best friends: Kyle Meeks and Nelson, who teach Jason to embrace his truth to live a life of freedom.

Nelson Glassman

Nelson Glassman is an opinionated homosexual teenager who is publicly homosexual and proud of his sexuality. Although he appears to be confident and fearless, he is actually riddled with self-doubt and self-loathing. He needs a constant stream of affection and praise to feel worthy, and when he doesn't have this, he easily slides into depression. One of the main things that sets off Nelson's depressive moods is his relationship with Kyle Meeks. Nelson is desperately in love with Kyle, but unfortunately, that love is unrequited. The two boys are best friends but Nelson constantly pushes for more. Whenever Kyle turns him down, Nelson questions whether he's deserving of love. He is abusively critical of himself and often has suicidal thoughts. Nelson seems to base his entire self worth on whether he is loved, and when he feels neglected, he has many bad habits: bingeing and purging, verbal abuse toward others, chain smoking, isolating himself, making drastic changes to his physical appearance, and having promiscuous sex. Each of these acts are a cry for help as Nelson begs the world to acknowledge his existence. As the novel progresses, Nelson learns what it means to be a true friend to Kyle, even if that means putting aside his feelings for him. He supports Kyle's budding relationship with Jason, even though it breaks his heart, and begins to search for love elsewhere.



Kyle Meeks

Kyle Meeks is the star of the high school swim team. He is best friends with Nelson Glassman, who is also the first person that Kyle comes out to, and is desperately in love with Jason Carrillo. As the novel progresses, Kyle's relationship with Jason blooms and he finds the strength to tell his parents the truth that he is gay.

Debra Wyler

Debra Wyler is Jason Carrillo's girlfriend at the opening of the novel. The two teenagers have been dating for years and even lost their virginities together. Debra is desperately in love with Jason and is devastated when she hears that he is gay. Rather than ruin his life, as she threatened to do, Debra embraces Jason and accepts him for who he truly is.

Jack Ransom

Jack Ransom is the school bully. He picks on lots of students, but reserves his true rage and violence for the gay students, particularly Nelson. Throughout the novel, there are many instances of Jack abusing Nelson, from throwing glass bottles at his head, to shoving his face in the toilet, to beating him up outside the school. Jack is a symbol for homophobia and the hatred that it breeds.

Corey

Corey is Jason Carrillo's best friend and fellow basketball player. At the opening of the novel, Corey and Jason are extremely similar: both are gifted athletes, popular at school, and have beautiful girlfriends on their arms. When Jason begins to question his sexuality, he longs to tell Corey the truth but fears that doing so would cost him his friendship. When Corey finds out the truth, he is somewhat understanding, but warns that Jason should keep this secret to himself.

Ms. MacTrough

Ms. MacTrough is the art teacher at the high school Jason, Kyle, and Nelson attend. It is unclear whether she is gay, but all the students suspect she is. She has been nicknamed "Miss Mack Truck" or "Big Mac," which are the only clues to her physical description. Ms. MacTrough is the only teacher at the school in support of the Gay-Straight Alliance Kyle and Nelson hope to start, and she fights for the school to recognize this newly formed student organization.



Shea

Shea is Nelson's close lesbian friend, and the person in charge of all Nelson's new hairstyles. Nelson share everything with Shea, but when they have a fight, she claims that their friendship is one-sided. Nelson only talks about himself and his problems, never asking about hers. Shea is in a long-term relationship with Courtney, but they break up before Courtney leaves for college. Just as Shea expected, when she reaches out to Nelson, he is too absorbed in his own problems to listen to hers and she ends the friendship.

Blake

Blake is a hot gay guy that attends the Rainbow Youth meetings. When Blake breaks up with his long-term boyfriend, he comes on to Nelson at a party. The two make-out in Blake's car, drunk on rum. Blake tries to have sex with Nelson, but its clear that Nelson is a virgin. Rather than forcing Nelson into something he will regret, Blake tells Nelson to save himself for someone special.

Melissa

Melissa is Jason's six-year-old little sister. She is a beacon of light in Jason's life, and a never-ending pool of love and affection. She is the first person in Jason's life to accept Kyle, and to accept Jason as gay, so long as it makes him happy.

Brick

Brick is the twenty-nine-year-old stranger that Nelson loses his virginity to. Nelson and Brick had been flirting online and on the evening that Nelson's father stands him up for Christmas, Nelson is desperate for some affection. When Brick suggests that they hook-up, Nelson agrees and the two have unprotected sex. Brick later reveals that he already has a boyfriend and that he has no intention of starting a relationship with Nelson.

Jeremy

Jeremy is the handsome new guy that joins Rainbow Youth, and the guy everyone has a crush on. After Nelson's encounter with Brick, he learns that Jeremy is HIV positive, and that the diagnosis no longer equated to a death sentence. Jeremy's story gives Nelson hope for his own future and a romantic relationship soon develops between the two boys.



Objects/Places

Rainbow Youth

Rainbow Youth is an organization created to support the emotional needs of teenagers in the process of "coming out" as gay. Rainbow Youth runs a 24-hour hotline for gays in distress and weekly meetings for teenagers to discuss the struggles with their sexuality in a group setting, much like a support group. At the opening of the novel, Jason attends a Rainbow Youth meeting for the first time, essentially making himself vulnerable to Nelson and Kyle.

PFLAG

PFLAG is a support group for parents of gay teenagers. Nelson's mother is the founder and president of the organization, and eventually, Kyle's parents also become members. PFLAG is responsible for helping spread education about homosexuality as a way of combating the bullying many teenagers face as a result of their sexuality.

Coming Out

Coming Out is the process of revealing one's sexuality to their family and friends. This is a shortened phrase for "coming out of the closet." Being "in the closet" refers to the act of hiding one's sexuality from the outside world, in a closet, for example, rather than living the truth. Coming Out is one of the biggest steps a homosexual person can make in their quest to live a happy, healthy life.

Al-Anon

Al-Anon is a subsidiary organization working in partnership with Alcoholics Anonymous. Al-Anon provides support for the families of alcoholics, giving them advice on how to deal with abusive addicts. Jason's mother attends Al-Anon as a way of dealing with her alcoholic husband and she encourages Jason to attend as well.

The Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA)

The Gay-Straight Alliance is the school club Nelson and Kyle start to provide support for homosexual students at their high school. Both Kyle and Nelson are seniors, so they won't benefit from the organization after graduation, but they hope to put it in place to save future students from the abuse and torment of homophobia in the hallways. The organization seeks to bring together gay and straight students in an alliance that supports everyone's lifestyle regardless of their sexuality.



The Kinsey Scale

The Kinsey Scale is a scale of sexuality created by Dr. Kinsey in the 1950s. The scale, which runs from zero to six places individuals from completely heterosexual (0) to completely homosexual (6). Kyle jokes that he is a Kinsey Six, meaning that he's never even been attracted to women.

Atticus

Atticus is Nelson's dog and a black Labrador. Nelson loves Atticus because whenever he's feeling down, his dog always seems to sense it and give him extra attention.

Rex

Rex is Jason's cat. During a fight between Jason and his father, Rex gets underfoot, causing Jason's father to stumble and drop Jason's stereo, breaking it.

Whitman High

Whitman High is the school Nelson, Jason, and Kyle attend. It is run by superintendent Mueller, who seems adamant against creating a Gay-Straight Alliance, fearing that there will be too much backlash from conservative parents.

The Zephyr

The Zephyr is the Whitman High School yearbook with photos of each of the students. The Zephyr is Kyle's favorite book and he regularly opens the page to Jason's school picture and stares at it, or masturbates while he looks at Jason's picture. He is constantly afraid that his mother will catch him staring at Jason's picture and realize that he has a crush on him.

ATZ

ATZ are the morning after drugs given to individuals who fear that they might have been exposed to HIV. Nelson's mother is devastated that Nelson kept his encounter with Brick hidden for so long that the drugs would be useless.



Themes

Being True To Yourself

All the three main characters are on the journey to self-discovery. The three boys in this novel, Nelson, Kyle, and Jason, are at various stages of discovering and accepting their sexuality. On the surface, it appears that Nelson's identity as a homosexual male is the most defined, while Jason's is the least. Underneath his public displays of confidence, however, the reader learns that Nelson is an insecure boy who is just as scared and confused by homosexuality as Jason. All three boys learn throughout the course of the novel how to be true to themselves and love who they are.

There is a lot of peer pressure for the boys to change or to ignore their homosexual urges. The reader sees this most clearly in Jason's struggle. He fears that coming out as gay could lose him his basketball scholarships, his friends, and what little respect his father has left for him. Nelson, on the other hand, is living a life true to his personal identity, but constant threats and bullying send the message that he should reduce his flamboyant behavior, that he should appear "straighter" in order to fit in. Even Principal Mueller suggests that Nelson brings the bullying on himself through his effeminate manner. No matter who the pressure is coming from, all three boys eventually learn to lean on each other and to accept who they are. They leave the reader with this positive message, "If those around you don't support you, they weren't your friends to begin with."

Homophobia

Through the narration of these three characters, the reader sees homophobia in all its ugly variations from "harmless" jokes at the expense of a homosexual individual, to homosexual stereotypes, to isolation in school, to physical violence. The character of Jack Ransom symbolizes pure hatred and violence, arguably the most devastating form of homophobia. There have been many cases in recent news of homosexual teenagers being bullied and even killed because of their sexuality, and Jack Ransom's character embodies that violence. However, Sanchez wants to make it clear that homophobia can be just as devastating to an individual when it is exhibited through non-violent actions. Jokes, like the jokes Debra and Corey make about the homosexual couple at the shopping mall (p. 28) feed into a society that identifies and isolates individuals based on their sexuality. While Debra's joke may have been harmless in nature, it perpetuates negative stereotyping that can leave homosexuals feeling rejected in their everyday life. Depression and suicidal thoughts are prevalent in the teenage gay community - the reader sees this in all three characters' personal journeys - and non-violent homophobia feeds into negative self-image as much, if not more than, violent homophobia. It is clear that Sanchez includes many different forms of homophobia in his novel hoping that the reader will identify themselves in the harmless actions. If the reader experiences the

way jokes and stereotypes can affect a homosexual individual, hopefully they will be less inclined to perpetuate these actions.

Friendship

All three of the novel's main characters struggle with feelings of depression and isolation within their high school community. As a result, close friendships are integral to their success later in life and their personal acceptance and self-esteem. Rainbow Youth is an organization created to support homosexual teenagers as they go through the process of coming out. Feeling loved and supported during this tumultuous time helps keep down teenage depression and suicide rates. As Nelson, Kyle, and Jason all learn, true friendship is defined as the loving acceptance of another person, regardless of their age, race, gender, or sexuality. In high school, finding true friends is a difficult task as most teenagers are not concerned with acceptance, but with "fitting in" with the cool kids. The Gay-Straight Alliance will hopefully help save high students from the abuse and torment of homophobia in the hallways and will encourage true friendships between teenagers regardless of their sexuality.

The need for an alliance like this becomes clear as the reader sees how alienating homosexuality can be. The three gay teenagers simply don't have straight friends. Jason's best friend, Corey, is one of the first people Jason comes out to. Even though Corey seemingly accepts Jason's homosexuality, he urges Jason to keep his sexuality hidden and warns him to stay away from fellow gay teenagers Nelson and Kyle. The Gay-Straight Alliance, as well as this novel, seeks to bring together gay and straight students in an alliance that supports everyone's lifestyle regardless of sexuality.



Style

Point of View

This novel is recounted in the first-person narration from the revolving point of view of its three main characters: Nelson, Jason, and Kyle. First-person narration means that the reader accesses the thoughts and emotions of each narrator directly through their own thoughts. Because of this, the reader experiences the same events multiple times, through the varying perspectives of the characters. This is an interesting choice because it creates layers of understanding. Often, characters have conversations and make assumptions about how other characters are feeling. For example, Nelson and Kyle often have conversations about their relationship in which Nelson is sure that Kyle is coming on to him. When the narration switches to Kyle's perspective, however, he reveals that he is only interested in Nelson as a friend. Because of this full disclosure and complete access into the character's thoughts, there are very few mysteries in the novel. This point-of-view is important to the novel as a whole because it creates a strong bond between the reader and the three protagonists. This relationship is integral to the success of the story, which focuses on the teenagers' quest to discover their identities. Having full access into the boys' hopes, dreams, desires, and disappointments creates a strong bond as the reader roots for each of the characters' success.

Setting

Rainbow Boys is set in an unnamed city in the late 1990s. The novel was first published in 2003 and there are many pop culture references hinting that the novel is set in the same era. The boys still listen to music on cassette tapes, for example, and Jason's mother offers to buy him a cassette Walkman when his father breaks his stereo. While the city in which the teenagers live is unnamed, the same pop culture references insinuate that the boys are located somewhere in middle/north America. The boys live in a conservative neighbourhood where homosexuality is not accepted. There are a few organizations and support groups for homosexual teenagers and their families, such as Rainbow Youth and PFLAG, but schools, such as Whitman High, are hesitant to incorporate homosexuality into their discrimination curriculum. When Kyle and Nelson try to start a Gay-Straight Alliance, they are forced to threaten their principal with legal action if he denies their request. While much of the novel takes place in the characters' thoughts and emotions, they are very present in high school life. The school itself, Whitman High, is lacking in description, but it appears to be a classic, All-American high school, with jocks, popular kids, science nerds, and homecoming queens. Sanchez does an excellent job of capturing the cliques and social order of modern high school, and the ostracization of students that are not easily labelled.



Language and Meaning

Since the novel is written for teenage readers, the language is conversational and accessible to a wide range of readers. The sentences are constructed in a way that is not only easy to follow, but also to gain momentum as the reader reads on. The sentences are constructed to highlight the action of the plot, enticing the reader to turn the next page. The language of the narration, formed with bold phrases and violent descriptions form cliff-hangers which add to the intensity of the story. Occasionally, there are passages of dialogue written in "teen speak" using old vernacular and language. While these hip phrases were relevant in the late 1990s, modern teenagers may have no idea what they mean. Despite this, readers should be able to deduce what the dialogue means contextually. This language is important because it adds depth to the novel, allowing the reader to glimpse into the life of three modern teenagers and their struggles to fit into a world they feel abhors them. Since the language and dialogue is so accessible, any teenager who has struggled with self-esteem of "fitting in" should find resonance in the characters' struggles.

Structure

This novel is comprised of 22 chapters averaging around 8-10 pages each. The narration rotates from Jason's perspective to Kyle's to Nelson's, in the same order each round. This structure provides unique access into the character's true thoughts and emotions. Kyle could be a secondary character in Nelson's chapter, for example, but the reader relives the previous chapter's events through Kyle's perspective when it is his turn to narrate. Because of this, the reader is never confused about the characters' true desires and disappointments.

The plot of the novel is a fairly straightforward love triangle: Nelson loves Kyle who loves Jason who is confused about his sexuality. When Jason realizes that he is in love with Kyle too, the main conflict arises: Nelson's jealousy. Since the boys are all teenagers discovering their homosexuality, a variety of expected secondary conflicts arise, from parental disappointment to school bullying, promiscuity, and HIV scares. While these conflicts seem unique when explored through a homosexual lens, many are common conflicts found in teenage romances regardless of sexuality.



Quotes

"His heart raced, as much from fear as from excitement. Excitement won out. That night he made it with her - a girl. Homos couldn't do that. Ergo, he couldn't be a homo" (p. 3).

"Nelson smiled. He loved every minute of the attention he received for his new do. Unfortunately, the person whom he most wanted to see it was taking geeky advanced-placement tests all that rainy day" (p. 21).

"What good would it do? For every Jack Ransom, there's ten more. He's not the problem, homophobia's the problem" (p. 38).

"He knew telling her would change everything ... He could imagine her disappointment. The way she saw him from that moment on would be different, forever" (p. 74).

"Nelson felt like a baby - shamefully immature, and the one the hated most in his crappy life was to think he was immature" (p. 118).

"As if sensing his sadness, Melissa climbed onto his lap. 'I know! [Gay] means when two boys are really happy 'cause they love each other.' She laughed. He wasn't certain whether to laugh along with her - or cry" (p. 161).

"I promised him that school would get better. I believed it then. Now I realize I lied" (p. 181).

"All the events of the past few months connected for Jason...Jason had feared where the experience would lead him, not sure he'd survive. But now the culminating moment had arrived, and miraculously, he was still standing" (p. 199).

"Dad, I told you before, it's not a choice. I can't change and I won't hide. Even if it means getting beat up or getting crank calls" (p. 205).

"He hesitated a moment, then continued past the boys, into the office, his heart beating wildly. He could always say he had an appointment with the counsellor. But he wouldn't. He couldn't lie. Not anymore" (p. 233).



Topics for Discussion

Compare and contrast the characters of Nelson and Kyle. In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different? How do each of these characters combat/dispel homosexual stereotypes? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Why is homophobia a problem? How do you see homophobia manifest itself at Whitford High, and in the homes of the three characters? Who is responsible to dispel homophobia in the community? Have you seen instances of homophobia in your own school, neighborhood, and community? How have you reacted to this? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Has this novel altered or changed your opinion about homosexuality? What message do you think Alex Sanchez is trying to send with this novel? In your opinion, is his message successful? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

How do each of the characters' parents react to the news that their son is gay? In your opinion, are these reactions realistic? Do they reflect society realistically? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

When discussing coming out at a Rainbow Youth meeting, Shea says, "Coming out means you're no longer ashamed to tell people. It's a question of liking yourself and feeling good about being gay." Why might some homosexuals choose not to come out? What leads Jason and Kyle to come out to their friends and family? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

At the opening of the novel, Jason refers to Nelson as "the school fag." What does he mean by this? How does Jason feel about Nelson at the end of the novel? In your opinion, what events lead to Jason's change of heart? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Nelson and Kyle want to start a Gay-Straight Alliance at their school. What is the purpose of a GSA? In what ways do Nelson and Kyle believe a GSA would benefit students? What is Principal Mueller's opinion? Do you agree or disagree with Principal Mueller? Why? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Describe the relationship between Kyle and Jason. Do you think Jason is truly ready for a romantic relationship with Kyle? Why or why not? Do you think Kyle is taking advantage of Jason's emotional vulnerability? How can you tell? Do you think the relationship between Kyle and Jason will last? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.