

# **Rainbow Road Study Guide**

## **Rainbow Road by Alex Sánchez**

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# Plot Summary

Rainbow Road is the third novel in the Rainbow series by Alex Sanchez. In this novel, Nelson, Kyle, and Jason decide to take a road trip when they learn that Jason has been asked to speak at the opening of a new lesbian/gay high school in Los Angeles. Along the way, Jason and Kyle struggle with their relationship as they hit obstacle after obstacle, while Nelson continues his search for love. In the end, Jason discovers that although he did not like some of the things they did and saw along the way, that the trip was an important part of his journey of self-acceptance. Rainbow Road is an eye opening, coming of age story that brings a happy conclusion to the series for its many fans.

Jason tells Kyle that he has been invited to speak at a new lesbian/gay high school in Los Angeles based on his fame the previous spring when his coming out became public. Kyle is thrilled for Jason. It is Nelson, however, who comes up with the idea of instead of Jason flying to Los Angeles alone, that the three of them drive. At first Kyle does not like the idea because he is worried that Jason will not be comfortable being in a car for two weeks with Nelson. However, Jason loves the idea and everything quickly falls into place.

On the first day of the trip, Nelson oversleeps and puts them behind schedule. As they leave town, Nelson lights up a cigarette, annoying Jason. Kyle's fears seem to be coming true mile by mile. However, when they reach the first campground that night where they plan to spend the night, Nelson provides some alcohol and this seems to draw him and Jason closer while Kyle sits back in displeasure. The next morning, Kyle pours out the alcohol to prevent Nelson from drinking any more.

The next day, Jason accidentally allows the car to run out of gas as the trio are on their way to the Radical Faeries sanctuary. Fortunately, they are picked up by two of the faeries, one of whom has horns and with whom Nelson quickly falls in lust. At the faerie sanctuary, the trio is invited to a campfire party. Nelson imbibes in some illegal smokes while Jason finds himself fascinated with the topless females walking around, again causing Kyle to not only feel uncomfortable, but placing him in the role of the one responsible member of the group.

The group moves on, stopping in Nashville and then Memphis. Kyle discovers that he has lost his wallet, along with two hundred dollars of their traveling money and his driver's license. Although Kyle feels badly about this, Jason is relieved because Kyle has never messed up before and Jason feels as though this mistake places them on more even footing.

The next day, the boys meet a teenage transsexual who is on her way to a Britney Spears look-alike contest. Nelson and Kyle offer the girl, BJ, a ride to New Orleans. In exchange, BJ offers the boys a place to spend the night. Nelson allows BJ to dress him up like Britney so that he might compete in the contest as well and they all go to the bar. Jason is uncomfortable, as is Kyle, but Nelson has a grand time.



The following day, the boys stop in Texas and decide to go to a bar. There they meet a couple of girls who are bisexual. When Kyle leaves the club to get some air, he is shocked when he returns to find Jason kissing one of the girls. The following day, while Kyle and Jason are still fighting, they meet a gay couple who have been together for twenty years. Despite their anger, Kyle and Jason both find themselves thinking about their relationship and the possibility of it lasting a long time.

Before they reach Los Angeles, Nelson overeats at an all you can eat restaurant and suffers food poisoning. After a brief stay in the hospital, the boys continue their journey. Once in Los Angeles, Jason finds himself suddenly faced with having to write and perform a speech, something he has put off all through the trip. Instead of writing a speech, Jason speaks from the heart, inspiring the crowd with his thoughts on his own struggle with his sexuality.

Nelson falls in love with Manny, a young man who works at the school and who recommended Jason to the principal in the first place. Manny invites Nelson to remain in Los Angeles. After some soul searching, and a conversation with his mom, Nelson agrees. Jason and Kyle make the four day trip home alone, more confident in one another and better prepared for the future.



# Chapters 1-7

## Chapters 1-7 Summary

Rainbow Road is the third in a series of novels about gay teens, Nelson, Kyle, and Jason. In the previous two books, Jason has come to terms with his sexuality and come out to his friends and teammates, causing him to lose his college basketball scholarship and gaining fame when his story reached the public. Jason and Kyle are lovers, while Nelson is Kyle's best friend.

Chapter 1. Kyle wakes to a call from his boyfriend, Jason. Kyle and Jason have not been able to see one another as much this summer as Kyle would have liked because Kyle has been working to save up money for his first semester at Princeton in the fall. Therefore, Kyle is happy when Jason asks him to come over before work that morning.

Chapter 2. Jason tells Kyle that he has been invited to speak at the opening of a new lesbian/gay high school in Los Angeles. Kyle is thrilled until he learns that the speech will be the same week they had been planning to go on a camping trip, taking away their final opportunity to be alone together before Kyle leaves for Princeton.

Chapter 3. In his car on the way to work, Nelson tells Kyle that they should make a road trip out of Jason's trip to Los Angeles. They could take Nelson's car and have the school send the money they would have used to buy Jason's plane ticket. Every argument against the trip Kyle comes up with, Nelson has an answer for. However, Kyle continues to resist the idea.

Chapter 4. Kyle thinks about the road trip idea all day as he works. Kyle's real fear is that Jason and Nelson will not get along. Kyle also worries that being in a car continuously together with Jason will put a strain on their relationship. However, the idea of sharing a tent with Jason every night, even with Nelson there, excites Kyle and he surprises Nelson by agreeing.

Chapter 5. Kyle goes to Jason's house and explains to him Nelson's idea of a car trip. Jason is all for the idea until he realizes that Nelson would be going along. Jason argues against it and Kyle drops the idea. However, after Kyle leaves Jason continues to think about the idea. Jason tells his mother about the car trip idea and even calls the school to see if they would be willing to send the money. When it all falls into place, Jason calls Kyle and makes him promise they will have some time alone together during the trip.

Chapter 6. Nelson is thrilled they will be going on the road trip. However, telling his mother proves to be a difficult proposition. Nelson's mother comes up with all the reasons why they should not do it, but finally caves and gives her consent. However, Nelson's mother insists he have the car thoroughly checked out before they leave and that she be allowed to have a conversation with Kyle before they go.



Chapter 7. Kyle tells his own parents about the road trip. They agree to allow him to go, despite their own reservations, but Kyle's mother warns him to be sure to give Jason and himself some space during the trip. Kyle finds this ridiculous since the main reason he wants to go is to be alone with Jason. Later, they discuss the trip, planning their route and the places they want to stop and see. Kyle is shocked when he sees how well Jason and Nelson get along during the planning session.

## Chapters 1-7 Analysis

Jason has been invited to speak at the opening of a gay/lesbian high school because of his fame stemming from the loss of his scholarship when he came out and the media coverage of that situation. It is an honor to have been asked and Jason is excited about the idea, even though he has not yet thought about what he might say.

Kyle and Jason have known each other throughout high school, but only in the past few months have begun a romantic relationship. Kyle has been deeply in love with Jason since the moment he first saw him. It has taken Jason longer, not because he dislikes Kyle, but because Jason had been dating a girl and had been unclear about his own sexuality. Now that Jason has accepted that he is gay and is in love with Kyle, they have been romantically involved. However, Jason still struggles with his feelings for his ex-girlfriend and his appreciation of the female body. This confusion has caused trouble between Kyle and Jason in the past and could possibly cause trouble in the future.

Nelson is a wild personality who enjoys shocking people. Nelson's hair is currently pink, the latest in a long line of strange hair styles and colors. Nelson has always known he was gay and he tends to behave somewhat flamboyant, things that have caused him to become ridiculed by others. Nelson has also had a crush on Kyle for several years and is desperately seeking a love affair of his own although secretly convinced that he will never really find love.

These three friends are very different. Kyle is the responsible one, Jason the athlete, and Nelson the character. The reader cannot imagine how complicated a road trip with these three might be, but it will surely lead to some interesting situations as the plot continues to develop.



# Chapters 8-14

## Chapters 8-14 Summary

Chapter 8. Jason goes to say goodbye to two important figures in his life, Coach Cameron and his ex-girlfriend, Debra. Coach Cameron gives Jason some simple drills to do to keep himself in shape for when he begins community college in the fall. Debra wishes Jason good luck.

Chapter 9. Nelson takes his car to the shop and discovers it needs a great deal of work. Nelson's mother refuses to pay for it, so Nelson ends up spending half the money he has saved since he began working. Then the night before the trip, Kyle stays the night at Nelson's to save time in the morning. Nelson and Kyle stay up late talking.

Chapter 10. Kyle wakes long before Nelson. Kyle takes a shower and has breakfast with Nelson's mother, who makes Kyle promise to watch out for Nelson. Kyle then drags Nelson out of bed. They are running late, but Kyle decides to stop by his house once more to say goodbye to his parents again. When they reach Jason's, Jason is waiting outside, annoyed they are already running late. Then, before they even reach the highway, Nelson lights a cigarette, annoying Jason.

Chapter 11. Kyle is already worried that the trip will go badly. When they stop in Shenandoah Park and run into a church group, one of the adult leaders takes an instant dislike to Nelson and moves her charges away. Jason and Nelson argue, adding to the tension in the car.

Chapter 12. Kyle takes Nelson aside at the campground that night to ask him to tone things down, but Nelson takes offense. Nelson goes off to take a shower in the bathhouse. A short time later, Jason comes in and prepares for his own shower. Nelson cannot help but notice how attractive Jason is. Back at camp, after dinner, Nelson pulls some rum out of the car and shares it with Jason. Kyle is annoyed, especially because Nelson becomes drunk and begins to compliment Jason's body.

Chapter 13. The trio goes to bed. Kyle is happy to be sleeping beside Jason despite Nelson's presence. However, Kyle is shocked when he discovers that Jason snores quite loudly. Both Kyle and Nelson have trouble sleeping until they discover they simply have to roll Jason over. The next morning, Jason offers to teach Nelson how to play basketball, but Nelson refuses. Later, Kyle finds Nelson's bottle of rum and pours it out. Nelson gets angry.

Chapter 14. As they set off that morning, with Jason driving, Nelson explains how the athletes in school treated him badly and that is why he does not like to play sports. This makes Jason feel badly for all the kids like Nelson he watched his friends tease over the years. As they cross into Tennessee, Nelson recalls leaving his sweatshirt, with his cellphone in the pocket, in the bathhouse of the campground. They turn around and



drive back two hours only to discover Nelson's sweatshirt in the trunk of the car. Still an hour out from the faerie camp where they are to stay the night, they run out of gas. They are frightened when a truck comes up behind them, but it turns out to be a couple from the faerie camp.

## Chapters 8-14 Analysis

As the trip begins, tension immediately erupts between Jason and Nelson. Kyle is worried that this trip was a mistake and that his boyfriend and best friend will fight the whole way. This seems to be reinforced by Jason's unhappiness when Nelson begins a fight with a church woman who tries to move her students away from Nelson for no reason other than his flamboyance.

Nelson has never really liked Jason much because he is a star athlete, the kind of person who has always tortured Nelson at school. However, Jason once came to his defense against a bully and then Jason came out of the closet in a very public way, earning him Nelson's respect. Now, Nelson discovers that Jason is a very good-looking young man and he finds himself attracted to him. This is an awkward situation for both Jason and Nelson, because Nelson is definitely not Jason's type and Jason is Nelson's best friend's boyfriend. Nelson buries himself in alcohol to deal with his feelings, but this backfires when Kyle becomes upset, proving Nelson's claims that Kyle tends to be controlling.

When Jason runs the car out of gas, it seems this road trip that was supposed to be a time of fun and bonding for the young friends is simply turning into a disaster. Then, when a pickup comes up behind them it seems to confirm Jason's fears of being targeted by bigots because of the rainbow flag on their back bumper. Instead, this time the truck proves to be occupied by friends. However, the reader must realize that it might not always be that way for these young friends.





# Chapters 15-22

## Chapters 15-22 Summary

Chapter 15. The faeries, two men from the Radical Faerie sanctuary, give the trio gas and lead them to the sanctuary. There they are encouraged to dress in faerie clothing and to join in the rituals of the sanctuary. They have a nice dinner and then are shown to a meadow where they can set up their camp. Later they are invited to a fire circle. Nelson smokes some marijuana that is being passed around and then tries to escape into the woods for some intimacy with horn boy, one of their rescuers, but Kyle brings him back to the fire circle. At the same time, Jason appears overly interested in the bar chests of some of the women at the fire circle.

Chapter 16. Nelson joins the dancing around the fire before the trio calls it a night and heads back to their camp. Kyle and Jason wake first. Jason becomes impatient and wakes Nelson up so that they can move on. As Kyle and Jason sit in the car, Nelson says a passionate goodbye to horn boy. A short time later, they arrive in Nashville. Rather than join Nelson and Kyle on their tour of the Grand Ole Opry, Jason goes off to do his basketball drills. As Kyle and Nelson walk, they talk about Nelson's unsafe behaviors with some of the guys he has met.

Chapter 17. Jason performs his drills and then joins a game going on in the next court. As he plays, Jason thinks how nice it is to feel normal again. When he rejoins Kyle and Nelson, he feels a little sad at missing the tour of the Opry. However, Jason is once again angered when he sees that someone has scratched a misspelled, vulgar word into the side of the car. Over lunch, Nelson interrogates Jason about the guys with whom he played ball.

Chapter 18. They arrive in Memphis late in the afternoon and just make the last tour of Graceland. Afterward, they discover that the tent poles are missing. They are forced to buy another tent, this one smaller than the last. When they stop for dinner, Jason is shocked to discover the counter boy flirting with him.

Chapter 19. Kyle pushes the boys to get going early the following morning so they can visit a Civil Rights museum. Jason and Nelson are less than impressed until they sit in a bus designed like the one Rosa Parks rode, complete with a talking bus driver statue. Kyle then stresses to them how alike the treatment blacks received is to the treatment gays often suffer. Later, when they stop for lunch, Kyle discovers that he has lost his wallet. Kyle calls his father and receives permission to use a credit card his father gave to him for emergencies.

Chapter 20. The trio stops at a gas station outside Memphis. There they meet BJ, a transsexual, who is dressed for a Britney Spears competition later that night. Kyle and Nelson tell Jason that BJ wants a ride into New Orleans. In the car, BJ tells his story



and Jason is shocked to learn this beautiful girl is a boy. As they reach the city, BJ offers the trio a place to stay for the night since it is raining.

Chapter 21. Nelson is fascinated with BJ. Nelson has always liked to play dress up, but never doubted he was a boy. However, he can identify with BJ's story of feeling different from everyone else. Therefore, when BJ offers, Nelson jumps at the chance to be transformed into Britney Spears to compete with BJ in the contest. The gay bar and the contest are both a first for all three boys. Nelson has a great time. BJ wins the contest.

Chapter 22. That night, Kyle and Jason talk about BJ. Kyle is concerned that Jason is attracted to BJ, but Jason quickly sets him straight. Jason and Kyle then slip to the floor because of the noisy springs of the pull out bed and make love. The next morning they have a hot breakfast with BJ before heading out again. When they stop outside of Austin, Nelson suggests they go out dancing that night. Kyle does not want to, but agrees when Jason says he would like to go. While searching for a club, they run into a group of girls Nelson thinks are lesbians. They follow the girls to a club and learn that two of them are what they call heteroflexible.

Inside the club, Kyle immediately feels ill at ease. Kyle decides to go out for some air, but Jason refuses to go with him. When Kyle comes back in, he finds Jason dancing with one of the girls, the straight one, and Nelson with a boy he has invited back to the campsite. Kyle is annoyed, causing Nelson's friend to leave. Then Kyle looks up and sees Jason kissing the girl on the dance floor.

## Chapters 15-22 Analysis

The trio spends the night at the Faerie sanctuary. Jason finds the whole thing bizarre, especially the people dressing up as faeries and sharing intimate details about their lives. However, Jason likes looking at the naked tops of the lesbians at the fire circle, making Kyle wonder once more how committed to their relationship Jason really is.

Nelson falls in love everywhere he goes. Nelson falls for horn boy at the faerie sanctuary and then with Arturo at the night club. Nelson also seems to have feelings for BJ, though these feelings are different and confusing for Nelson. Meeting the faeries and BJ, however, has an impact on Nelson because these people are more like Nelson than Jason and Kyle, even more so than his own mother. This makes Nelson realize that there are places where he will be accepted and that he can be strong enough to be himself no matter what.

As the trip continues, disaster continues to happen. Kyle loses his wallet, causing them to lose two hundred dollars of their money. Jason loses the tent poles, causing them to have to buy a new tent. It seems every day there is some new problem for the boys to deal with. These problems bring tension to their relationships, but it also draws them closer in some ways.

In Nashville, someone writes a nasty word on the side of their car. This angers Jason, blaming Nelson because he refused to remove the rainbow flag from the back of the

car. However, this flag has saved them once. However, this incident again makes it clear to the reader that there is danger in the world for young men such as these three. The question is, should they hide their differences in fear or wear them proudly as Nelson insists they do.



# Chapters 23-28

## Chapters 23-28 Summary

Chapter 23. Jason is dancing with Leah, the straight girl, and enjoying it. However, when Leah kisses him, Jason immediately pulls away. Kyle has seen the kiss, however, and will not speak to Jason all the way back to camp. Jason and Kyle argue at camp and Kyle insists on sleeping in the car.

Chapter 24. Nelson cannot sleep that night, in part because of Jason's kiss with the girl and in part because of Jason's snoring. Nelson tries to talk to Kyle the next morning about Jason, but Kyle refuses to listen. Nelson then goes to the bathrooms and accidentally drops the phone into the toilet while talking with his mother. The phone is ruined and cannot be used. Nelson is embarrassed to tell Kyle and Jason the truth and when he finally does, Kyle gets angry. Later, Nelson drives too closely to a dump truck. A pebble from the truck hits the car's windshield and cracks it.

Chapter 25. As they drive, Nelson lights a cigarette and Kyle makes him put it out. Later, they stop for lunch and run into a gay couple who are celebrating their twentieth anniversary. The couple joins them for their meal and they talk about what it takes to stay together for twenty years. For a brief moment, they draw Kyle out and remind him what drew him to Jason in the first place. Afterward, Kyle calls his mother, but becomes annoyed by her reaction to the news that he and Jason fought. While they wait for Nelson, Kyle and Jason sit alone in the car. Jason asks if Kyle wants to break up, causing Kyle to become angry again.

Chapter 26. As they continue their drive, they come to an isolated section of highway. Nelson pulls over to urinate and is so inspired by the isolation that he undresses and runs around nude, annoying a passing motorist. Later that night they arrive in Carlsbad, New Mexico and have some trouble finding a camping spot. When they finally do, they discover it is next to a couple from Utah and their small son. When Nelson begins to talk to the boy, his father comes out and drags him back to their tent where he yells at him for a long time. The incident brings up dark memories for both Jason and Nelson who both have difficult relationships with their fathers.

Chapter 27. Nelson and the others listen to their neighbors yell at their kid for a long time that night. The next morning, Nelson wakes early and decides to do a facial mask. While he is looking for the mud, the kid comes over and asks what he is doing. When Nelson explains, the kid asks to have his face done too. Nelson takes the kid to the bathroom, and while wiping off the facial mask, tells the kid to always be true to himself. However, the kid's father comes in and finds them. The man tells Nelson to stay away from the kid or he will call the police. Nelson tells the man that someone should call the police on him. When the man turns on Nelson, Jason jumps in and warns the guy to back off. Jason then tells the man that one day his son will rise up and hit him. Kyle comes out and tells Jason and Nelson both to back off.



The trio goes to Carlsbad Caverns and takes the tour. Nelson is quickly bored and makes his way to the bottom of the caverns where there is a cafeteria, but is annoyed by the crowd. Nelson then hangs around waiting for his friends, but when they do not show up, he goes up to the parking lot and finds them there. Kyle is annoyed when Nelson finally shows.

Chapter 28. When they stop for lunch, Jason realizes they are near Roswell and insists on going there. As Kyle begins to object, Nelson joins Jason's side. When they arrive, there is little to see but a few tourist shops. Jason asks for money. Kyle gets mad and gives Jason their remaining money and Jason proceeds to buy a bunch of useless souvenirs. As they continue their journey, they stop at a gas station. Alongside them is a pickup and two cowboys. When one of the cowboys asks what the rainbow flag means, Nelson tells him they are all gay. The trio then pulls out of the gas station. A few minutes later, they see the cowboys following them. When the truck pulls up next to them, they motion for them to roll down their window. When Nelson refuses, they pull up ahead of them and throw a beer can at the windshield. This causes the crack to get worse. Jason urges Nelson to pull up ahead. As the truck continues to chase them, it spins out on a curve. Kyle wants to go back and make sure they are okay, but the others disagree. For this reason, Kyle curls up in the back of the car and cries himself to sleep.

## Chapters 23-28 Analysis

Jason kisses a girl at a club. Even though the kiss is not his idea and he immediately walks away, Kyle is very angry with him. This leads to a great deal of tension in their relationship, even when they run into a couple who have been together for twenty years. Kyle begins to wonder if Jason really is the one and if they could make it twenty years together. Kyle is not sure now, especially when Jason asks him if they should break up.

The issues of parental conflict come up when the trio arrive in Carlsbad and find themselves camping beside a family in which the father is something of a bully toward his effeminate son. Nelson and Jason both relate to this child because they were both in his position once upon a time. Jason's father was an alcoholic who tried to beat him into being masculine while Nelson's father lost interest in his son all together when he began acting in odd and flamboyant ways. For this reason, Jason and Nelson get into an argument with the man over his treatment of his son, causing great tension between Jason and Nelson and Kyle.

Kyle is beginning to feel disillusioned, to discover that his boyfriend is not the person he thought he was and that being this close to both his boyfriend and his best friend is not as fun as he thought it might be. Kyle feels as though he is losing control of the situation. Therefore, when the boys are followed by some cowboys who clearly mean them harm, Kyle panics and loses control, falling apart when the situation is over. This shows the reader how badly Kyle needs to be in control and how helpless he is beginning to feel.



# Chapters 29-37

## Chapters 29-37 Summary

Chapter 29. Jason and Nelson grow concerned over Kyle and Jason begins to realize how much both he and Nelson really rely on Kyle's strength. Jason talks to Nelson about his often risky behavior, such as telling the cowboys they were gay, and Nelson admits that he knows his actions are risky but he cannot always contain himself. The boys later stop at an all you can eat restaurant. Nelson eats way too much, sticking mostly to seafood. Kyle, however, refuses to eat more than a few bites. They continue their journey, attempting to make it to the Grand Canyon before they stop.

Chapter 30. Nelson becomes sick as they continue to drive. Kyle realizes Nelson has a fever and insists they stop at a hospital. Once in the hospital, Nelson rests in Jason's lap while Kyle deals with the paperwork. When Nelson becomes nauseous, Jason takes him to the bathroom and cares for him. Later a doctor checks Nelson out and says he only has food poisoning, but decides to put him on an IV and observe him for a few hours. Nelson calls his mother and cries on the phone with her.

Chapter 31. Kyle wakes in the night after a nightmare that Jason has died. When he reaches for Jason and finds him gone, Kyle slips out of the tent to find Jason lying on the ground. Jason invites Kyle into his sleeping bag and they talk about everything that has happened between them. Kyle tells Jason that their relationship is changing but he does not think that is necessarily a bad thing.

Chapter 32. Jason feels relieved when Kyle says he does not want to break up. They begin to kiss, but the noise of their neighbors makes them aware that they are outside where others can see them. Instead, they go to the edge of the canyon to watch the sun rise.

Chapter 33. When Nelson wakes, he finds Jason and Kyle playing cards. Nelson gets dressed and they go to the Grand Canyon. The trio hides out in the souvenir shops for most of the day and goes to the edge of the canyon to watch the sun set. The next morning the trio begins the last leg of their journey. When they arrive at the high school, they meet Manny, a young man who works at the school who has the same pink hair as Nelson. Manny is assigned to show them around, taking them to their hotel and arranging to pick them up for a special dinner with some of the school board.

Chapter 34. Jason and Kyle talk about the speech Jason is supposed to make and has yet to write. Kyle agrees to help Jason write the speech after dinner. However, Jason grows more nervous during the dinner and when Kyle tries to help him write the speech, he becomes angry. Jason goes to do his basketball drills, leaving Kyle alone.

Chapter 35. Jason is deeply worried about the speech, and about his fight with Kyle, so he works his feelings out on the basketball court as he always does. The next morning,



as they arrive at the school, Jason is made even more nervous when he sees television news trucks parked outside to film the protestors. Inside, Jason has to sit through the other speeches as his nervousness grows. When Nelson comes inside after antagonizing the protestors, Jason suggests that Nelson do the speech instead. However, Nelson insists that Jason do it. When it is time to go on stage, Jason has no idea what to say. As he looks down at Kyle and Nelson, however, Jason is inspired. Jason talks about his experiences with his father, about the lessons he learned on their road trip, and the support he has from his friends that has gotten him through.

Chapter 36. After the speech and luncheon, Nelson goes with Manny to have the windshield repaired and do some laundry. Nelson and Manny make love. Afterward, Manny asks Nelson to stay in Los Angeles with him. At first Nelson hesitates, but then he realizes it is a great idea. Nelson tells Jason and Kyle, who are supportive, then he calls his mother. At first Nelson's mother is unhappy with the idea, but then she agrees.

Chapter 37. Jason teaches Nelson how to play basketball. Nelson wants to learn because Manny plays. The following day, Jason and Kyle load up Nelson's car for the trip home. They say a tearful goodbye to Nelson and make the trip back in four days. Once home, Jason and Kyle have dinner with Kyle's parents. As they tell his parents about the trip, Kyle finds himself able to see himself and Jason twenty years into the future still living happily together.

## Chapters 29-37 Analysis

Jason begins to see Kyle in a new light after the chase with the cowboys and Kyle's meltdown. Suddenly Jason sees Kyle as the rock that keeps him and Nelson together. This is a big insight for Jason, especially in light of their recent fight. Kyle then goes on to prove his usefulness when Nelson becomes ill and Kyle takes charge of the situation. Jason also proves himself to be reliable by helping Nelson through the worst of his illness as they wait to see the doctor. This shows the reader that not only has Jason and Nelson's relationship changed and grown, but Jason and Kyle's relationship is also changing, becoming deeper and more meaningful for both young men.

When they reach Los Angeles, Kyle is frustrated that Jason has not written his speech and is not prepared. Jason is frightened, and his fear causes him not to write a speech at all. Jason tries to get out of the speech moments before he is due to go on, but when he stands in front of the crowd and looks down on Kyle and Nelson, he suddenly feels inspired. Jason's words are inspiring, expressing not only his own experiences, but expressing some universal truths about what it is like to be gay in America. It is a touching speech that clearly comes from the heart.

Nelson finally finds love, deciding to remain in Los Angeles with Manny, a place where he feels he has found acceptance. At the same time, Jason and Kyle move on with their relationship, moving to a new place that suggests a better understanding of one another and a better chance at a long lasting relationship. As the novel comes to its conclusion,

the reader feels secure in the idea that all three boys will find happiness in this new turn in their relationships and their lives in general.





# Characters

## Kyle Meeks

Kyle Meeks is a responsible eighteen year old boy who is about to begin his first semester at Princeton. In high school, besides being a good student, Kyle is a star swimmer on the school team. Kyle takes up swimming because his father has always wanted a son who is a star athlete and swimming is the only sport Kyle feels confident in pursuing. This causes some friction between Kyle and his father, especially when Kyle tells his father that he is gay. However, time has passed and Kyle's father has come to terms with his sexuality. It helps that Kyle's boyfriend is a star basketball player.

Kyle is a responsible kid. When he and his friends decide to go on a cross country road trip, it is Kyle who takes control of the money and who tries to keep his friends in line, keeping them out of trouble. However, it quickly becomes clear to Kyle that keeping his friends out of trouble is a full time job that he does not particularly want. At the same time, Kyle had been hoping this trip would bring him and his boyfriend closer together. Instead, this trip exposes Kyle to sides of his boyfriend that he had never thought about and puts a strain on their relationship. In the end, however, Kyle comes to realize that every relationship has its ups and downs and his is no exception.

## Jason Carillo

Jason Carillo is a star athlete who has always suspected that there was something different about him, but he did not accept that he was gay until his senior year of high school. Jason has had a long term girlfriend with whom he has been intimate and has had friends who are homophobic, making Jason not only afraid to face the truth about his sexuality, but also confused because of his desire to be with a girl. At the same time, Jason's alcoholic father has made things difficult for Jason by trying to beat the homosexual tendencies out of him. This adds to Jason's confusion, making it difficult for him to face the truth about himself. Despite all this, Jason finally accepts that he is gay. However, when he comes out to his basketball team and coach, Jason loses his scholarship to college, but also becomes a brief media star.

Now it is summer and things have settled down in Jason's life. Jason has a steady boyfriend and he is planning on going to community college in the fall so he can remain close to his mother and sister. Then Jason gets an invitation to speak at a new lesbian/gay high school that is opening in Los Angeles. When Jason shares the news with his boyfriend, Kyle, Kyle's best friend Nelson suggests a road trip. Jason sees this trip as a chance to get to know Kyle better and to have some alone time with him. However, Jason is disappointed to learn Nelson will be coming along as well. Nelson and Jason have not always gotten along in the past. Surprisingly enough, however, Jason and Nelson get along quite well on the trip. At the same time, Jason learns some



things about Kyle and his attitude toward him that allows them to deepen their relationship and take it to a new level, just in time for Kyle to go off to Princeton.

## **Nelson Glassman**

Nelson has been Kyle's best friend for many years. Nelson has helped Kyle accept himself and his homosexuality, while Kyle has helped Nelson through the ups and downs of adolescence, as well as relationship highs and lows and Nelson's difficult relationship with his father. For this reason, Kyle and Nelson are extremely close. Therefore, when Nelson suggests the road trip, Kyle is all for it until he realizes that Nelson and Jason will be stuck in a car together. Nelson and Jason are as different as two people can be and Nelson often gets on Jason's nerves with his flamboyant and odd behaviors. Kyle is surprised when the two actually get along quite well.

Nelson has had a crush on every young man who is absolutely bad for him, including Kyle and a boy who is HIV positive. None of these relationships has ever worked out, so Nelson is concerned that he will never find love. On the trip, Nelson falls quickly for every guy who looks twice at him. Unfortunately, the boys do not stay in one place long enough for Nelson to explore any of these relationships. This leaves Nelson free to explore new options. When they arrive in Los Angeles, Nelson meets Manny. The two seem made for one another, therefore when Manny asks Nelson to stay, he agrees.

## **Manny**

Manny is a young man who works for the gay/lesbian high school in Los Angeles and is partially responsible for Jason being there to give a speech. Manny has pink hair nearly the same shade as Nelson's. This draws the two together. In a short time, Nelson and Manny are madly in love with one another. Manny asks Nelson to remain in Los Angeles so that they might explore their relationship and Nelson quickly agrees.

## **Mrs. Glassman**

Mrs. Glassman is Nelson's mother. In the past, Mrs. Glassman has been highly supportive of Nelson, joining PFLAG and becoming the president of the group in order to show her support to her gay son. Mrs. Glassman has even stood up with Nelson against the school board to force them to allow a Gay-Straight Alliance at the high school. However, Mrs. Glassman is aware that her son is somewhat unreliable and often irresponsible. For this reason, Mrs. Glassman is hesitant to allow Nelson to go on this road trip. Later, Mrs. Glassman puts up a fight against Nelson remaining in Los Angeles with Manny. However, Nelson has grown up enough to assert his independence, forcing his mother to give her consent despite her concerns.



## Mr. and Mrs. Meeks

Mr. and Mrs. Meeks are Kyle's parents. Mr. Meeks is a big sports fan who wants his son to be a star athlete. Mr. Meeks has often encouraged Kyle to go to sports events with him and participate in other sports related activities even though Kyle does not like that sort of thing. When Kyle comes out to his parents, his father is disappointed and blames Nelson. However, over time Mr. Meeks has come to accept Kyle as he is.

Mrs. Meeks is slightly more accepting when Kyle comes out to her, but she is often confused about what it means to be gay. Mrs. Meeks is a worrier who often gives Kyle advice that he finds confusing and offensive. However, like Mrs. Glassman, Mrs. Meeks clearly cares about her son and wants only what is best for him.

## Horn Boy and other faeries

Horn Boy is a member of the Radical Faerie sanctuary. This sanctuary is run by a group of gay/lesbian people who believe in living life their own way. These people often dress up in faerie outfits and indulge in a bunch of rituals and traditions that others might find odd. Horn Boy is one of the young men who find Kyle, Jason, and Nelson on the side of the road after they run out of gas and lead them to the sanctuary. Nelson falls head over heels in love with Horn Boy, but is disappointed when Kyle does not allow him to have an intimate encounter with Horn Boy.

## Esau

Esau is an eight year old boy whom the trio camp beside in Carlsbad, New Mexico. Esau is clearly effeminate and this is also clearly a sore spot for Esau's father. Watching Esau and his father brings back dark memories for both Jason and Nelson. Therefore it is not a surprise when Nelson and Jason get into an argument with Esau's father the following morning. This incident highlights some of the difficulties some gay children must deal with as they age and the right and wrong way to deal with such difficulties as an adult.

## The Cowboys

The trio stop at a gas station and run into a couple of cowboys who are clearly not tolerant of people who are different than themselves. When Nelson tells the cowboys he, Jason, and Kyle are gay, the cowboys follow them on the highway, throwing beer cans at their car. Finally the cowboys spin out on a curve, crashing their truck. Kyle is badly frightened by this incident and ends up having a minor breakdown in the back of Nelson's car.

## **Todd and Miguel**

Todd and Miguel are a gay couple who have been together for twenty years. When the boys run into this couple, they are curious about their secrets. Todd and Miguel tell Jason and Kyle that their secret is trust, communication, and commitment. As the novel continues and Kyle struggles with a kiss he saw Jason share with a young girl, he comes to realize that they both need to work on all three elements of a lasting relationship. Kyle also comes to the conclusion that he and Jason have what it takes to last.



## Objects/Places

### Wallet

Kyle loses his wallet early in the trip with two hundred dollars inside it. This makes Kyle unable to drive due to the loss of his license and leaves the boys short on their budgeted funds. The wallet is later found under the front car seat.

### Souvenirs

Kyle and Jason fight over whether or not Jason should be allowed some money to buy souvenirs in Roswell. Kyle gives Jason the remaining cash out of anger, then worries that there will be no money left to get home.

### Cellphone

Nelson brings his cellphone so the boys can stay in contact with their families. However, Nelson accidentally drops the phone into the toilet, ruining it.

### Tents

The boys share a tent that Kyle originally bought with just him and Jason in mind. Later, when Jason leaves the tent poles behind at the faerie sanctuary, the boys are forced to buy another tent that is even smaller.

### Cracked Windshield

Nelson's windshield is cracked when he drives too closely behind a dump truck and a pebble hits the windshield. This crack grows larger in the battle with the cowboys when the cowboys throw beer cans at Nelson's car.

### Nelson's Car

Jason, Kyle, and Nelson decide to drive cross country in Nelson's car in order to spend as much time together as possible before Kyle goes off to Princeton.

### Washington, D.C.

Kyle, Jason, and Nelson live near Washington, D.C. It is from here that they begin their journey to Los Angeles.



## **Tennessee**

Tennessee is where Kyle, Jason, and Nelson stay at the Radical Faerie sanctuary. Later they visit the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville and Graceland in Memphis.

## **Austin, Texas**

Kyle, Jason, and Nelson go to a bar in Austin where Jason kisses a straight girl named Leah. Although Jason breaks the kiss immediately and goes to find Kyle, Kyle becomes angry because he is afraid Jason is still attracted to girls.

## **New Orleans, Louisiana**

Outside of New Orleans, Nelson befriends BJ, a young transgender man who hopes to have reassignment surgery to become a woman. BJ dresses Nelson as a girl so that he might compete in a Britney Spears look-alike contest with her/him.

## **Arizona**

Nelson becomes ill with food poisoning as they reach Arizona. Later, Kyle and Jason watch the sun rise over the Grand Canyon.

## **Los Angeles, California**

The boys arrive in Los Angeles the day before Jason's speech. Jason is nervous and does not write a speech, instead speaking from the heart.



# Themes

## Friendship

The main theme of this novel is friendship. The novel is about three friends who decide to take a cross country trip when an opportunity presents itself, allowing these three friends two weeks alone together before one of them leaves for Princeton. At the beginning, it seems like a great idea, a way for these three to bond before they separate for a time. However, the trip takes on a darker side as the trip begins.

Kyle has known Nelson most of his childhood and he is used to Nelson's oddities. However, Jason is not used to them and they set him off on the first day of the trip. Over time, Jason becomes more tolerant of Nelson and soon the two become friends. This threatens Kyle for a time, making him wonder if this new friendship could mean trouble for him in the future as well as changing his relationship with Nelson. Kyle also wonders how Jason could be so different from the boy he thought he knew.

Although there is a great deal of tension throughout the novel between these three, especially between Nelson and Jason against Kyle. However, in the end the boys begin to see the important roles each plays in the others' lives. Jason sees how Nelson has opened his eyes to what it means to be different and how Kyle has given him the love and support his own father never could. Nelson sees how Kyle's concern for him has kept him out of trouble for so long and how Jason's normalcy serves to show him that not everyone who is normal has to be cruel or unaccepting. Kyle sees that his life would be boring without his friends and that Jason has faults, but he is trying to work through them to make their relationship work. In the end, all three are still friends and their relationships have grown even more important to each of them.

## Intolerance

All three main characters in this novel are gay. This is a part of their identity and it is a part that makes them different from other people. For this reason, these boys have experienced intolerance in their lives. Jason has suffered at the hands of a homophobic, alcoholic father, as well as losing his college scholarship due to his coming out publicly. Nelson has been tormented in school by bullies intolerant not only of his sexual orientation, but of his flamboyant style. Kyle has suffered at the hands of bullies as well as having to deal with Jason's doubts about his own sexuality.

As the novel begins, the readers feel a sense of peace among these boys who have suffered, but have now entered an adult world where bullies are not waiting behind every closed door. The fact that Jason has been invited to speak at the opening of a new lesbian/gay high school gives the boys and the reader hope. However, as the novel continues to develop, the reader can sense Jason's fear in the fact that he wants Nelson to remove a rainbow flag from the back of his car.



When the boys stop in Nashville, Tennessee, their car is vandalized by someone who has scratched a misspelled vulgar word into the side of their car. Then in New Mexico the boys run into a father who mistreats his son because of his effeminate behaviors and a couple of cowboys who try to run them off the road. In Los Angeles when the boys arrive at the high school for Jason's speech, there are protestors outside. Intolerance is still something the boys will clearly have to deal with for the rest of their lives. However, they deal with it the best they can, finally facing it with courage and strength.

## Love

Nelson is desperate to find love in this novel. Nelson hooks up with several young men as the novel progresses, but nothing ever comes of each meeting. Then, when they reach Los Angeles, Nelson immediately feels a connection with Manny, a young man whose hair is dyed the same color as Nelson's. The connection is so immediate that Nelson decides to remain in Los Angeles to be with Manny.

Jason and Kyle are in love when the novel begins. Even though they have been together for several months, Kyle continues to worry that Jason is not completely in love with him and that he continues to be confused about his attraction to women. This seems to be confirmed when Kyle sees Jason kiss a girl. At the same time, Jason never lets Kyle hold his hand in public and seems annoyed by Kyle's attempts at affection even in private. In the end, Kyle and Jason begin to question their commitment to one another.

Love is important to anyone. No one wants to be alone, but finding that special one who will be with you for all of your life is a difficult thing to find. Therefore, some search all their lives and have quick connections that do not last, while others fall in love in an instant and remain committed no matter what might happen. Nelson is the former, Kyle the latter. This need for love serves as a motivator to these characters and it is this that makes love a theme of the novel.



# Style

## Point of View

The novel is written in the third person point of view. The author uses the omniscient element, moving from the mind of one character to another throughout the novel. This author remains in the minds of the three main characters, taking turns in an obvious cycle that the reader can recognize, leaving confusion at a minimum.

The third person point of view allows the reader to see the thoughts and emotions of the narrating characters, but allows some distance that is not available in the first person point of view. In this novel, the author moves from Kyle to Jason to Nelson in a cycle that is predictable and clear to the reader. This allows the reader to see and feel events from each of the three main character's points of view, to encourage an intimate relationship between the reader and each of the main characters, without causing any confusion. For this reason, the point of view of this novel works well with the plot.

## Setting

The novel is set in many different places as the plot of the novel takes the characters on a road trip from Washington, D.C. to Los Angeles. The trio camp along the way, spending most of their nights in various campgrounds along their route. The trio also make numerous stops at public attractions, such as the Grand Ole Opry and the Grand Canyon.

The setting of this novel is transitory, playing a part in the transitory aspect of the main characters' lives as one prepares to go off to college, one plans to work for a year, and one plans to begin classes at a community college. The author takes the characters to many points of interest along the southern edge of the country, allowing them to see important points of interest in the country in which any other teenagers might be interested. The trio stops at the home of country music, the home of the King of Rock and Roll, as well as a museum dedicated to the Civil Rights movement in Memphis. The setting highlights many things, not only the transitory aspect of life, but also the history of this country as well as the darker side of human nature. It is for these reasons that the setting of the novel works well with the plot.

## Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple English. The novel is written with young adults in mind, therefore it is written in a language that will be easy for readers as young as preteens to comprehend. There are no foreign words in the novel and few words that a young adult would not comprehend.



The language of this novel reflects language with which teenagers might converse on a daily basis, remaining authentic to the main characters who are only eighteen. The language contains little in the way of foreign languages, but does contain a great deal of slang, especially slang dealing with the gay culture. However, most of this language is easily defined by its use and should pose little problem for the intended audience to understand. For these reasons, the language of this novel works well with the plot.

## Structure

The novel is divided into thirty-seven chapters. Each chapter is narrated by a different character, beginning with Kyle and ending with Nelson in a cycle that is predictable. The author tells his story with both narration and dialogue, taking the reader along on an exciting trip rather than just telling about it. There is a great deal of inner monologue in the novel as well, as each of the main characters works out their feelings regarding one another and others in their lives.

The novel has one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows the three boys as they make a trip cross country. One subplot follows Jason's evolving relationship with Nelson. Another subplot follows Kyle as he has doubts about Jason's commitment to him. Another subplot follows Nelson's search for love. Each plot comes to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



## Quotes

"But not until senior year, when Jason stepped into a gay youth meeting, did a chain of events unfold that led to their becoming friends and falling in love." Chapter 1, pg. 5

"That was Nelson's latest shtick. If he couldn't get his way with someone, he accused them of being controlling." Chapter 4, pg. 12

"He'd feared having to referee between Nelson and Jason. But what if instead they really did become—as Nelson had suggested—'best buds'?" Chapter 7, pg. 27

"I don't try to be different, Jason. I just am. Try it sometime." Chapter 11, pg. 43

"Kyle learned something new and unexpected about the boy he loved: Jason snored. Very. Loud." Chapter 13, pg. 50

"It felt great to be around normal guys again, who played by clear, established rules; guys who looked and acted like guys were supposed to look and act, in contrast to those wacky Faeries." Chapter 17, pg. 73

"Why would a guy dress up like a girl except as a joke? With the Faeries' zany outfits at least it had seemed like they were half-kidding. This wasn't joking. Jason felt the urge to wipe off BJ's makeup and tell him to stop it. But at the same time, she looked so beautiful." Chapter 20, pg. 91

"Jason hadn't meant to let Leah kiss him. It just...happened." Chapter 23, pg. 107

"With each speed bump the car hit, Jason couldn't help thinking: That's just how this trip is turning out—one bump after another." Chapter 26, pg. 128

"Suddenly an open beer can flew out the window and through the air, bouncing onto the hood of the boys' car. Bang-bang-bang! The can slammed into the windshield, spraying its golden contents before rattling over the roof." Chapter 28, pg. 140

"'You probably saw that sign outside.' Jason pointed toward the street. 'Stop brainwashing our kids. Well, I was one of the ones brainwashed. That beating convinced me there was something wrong with me for wanting to kiss another boy like me.'" Chapter 35, pg. 177

"He realized he was getting ahead of himself again, but every time Jason smiled at him, Kyle couldn't help seeing a lifetime ahead." Chapter 37, pg. 192



## Topics for Discussion

Who is Kyle? Why has he not seen his boyfriend most of the summer? Why is this a problem? Where is Kyle going in the fall? What trip does Kyle plan on taking with his boyfriend? How does this change? For what reason?

Who is Jason? How did Jason become somewhat famous the previous spring? How did this impact Jason? Why? What did Jason lose at the same time? What is Jason's relationship to Kyle? How does Jason feel about this relationship? Why does Jason still think often of his ex-girlfriend, Debra? What about their relationship continues to confuse Jason? For what reason?

Who is Nelson? Why has Nelson dyed his hair? What does this say about Nelson? What does this say about Nelson's personality? Why do Jason and Nelson not get along? Why does Kyle want them to get along? How does Kyle feel when Nelson and Jason gang up on him while planning their trip? What does this say about Kyle's deep down feelings about both Nelson and Jason?

Why are the boys going to Los Angeles? Who invited them? For what purpose? Why is this important to these boys? How does each boy view their own sexuality? How is each a little different about his own feelings about their sexuality? How is this reflected in their relationships? How is this reflected in their behaviors and attitudes on the trip?

How does Jason feel when they reach the Radical Faerie sanctuary? Why does he feel this way? How does he respond to the things he sees there? How does Jason react to BJ? What does this say about Jason's level of tolerance? What does Jason's reaction to each of these things say about his own feelings about his sexuality? Why does Jason prefer to be around normal young men as opposed to young men like Nelson? What does this say about Jason's acceptance of himself and of Kyle?

Why does Jason refuse to write a speech before he is due to present a speech at the opening of the new lesbian/gay high school? Why does Jason try to get out of the speech? Why is Jason frightened? What does Jason end up talking about? How does this speech relate Jason's feelings about his own sexuality and about his own fears regarding his sexuality? How does this speech help change things between him and Kyle? Him and Nelson? How does this speech reflect the necessity of tolerance in society in general?

Who is Manny? Why does Nelson feel so connected to Manny? Why does Manny invite Nelson to remain in Los Angeles with him? How does Nelson feel about this invitation? Why does Nelson decide to stay? What has Nelson found about himself and about the world in the course of this road trip? How have these things changed Nelson? How have these things changed Nelson's relationships?