PRIDE in YOUR WORDS

Featured Excerpts

Vagabonds!
by Eloghosa Osunde

Acts of Service
by Lillian Fishman

All the Flowers Kneeling
by Paul Tran

I’m Not Broken
by Jesse Leon
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Introduction

Culture has always been made at the margins. One queer voice out loud can mean so many others are heard.

Paul Tran reading Eloghosa Osunde reading Lillian Fishman reading Jesse Leon reading Paul Tran. All of us reading this—reading them. Think about all the writing that will come from all this reading, all the understanding that wouldn’t otherwise have come into being. Art needs people. People need art, and we can literally expand our consciousness with words.

This book, this zine, this map of a moment is art and words. It’s tangible—it’s something you can touch and underline and make notes in and share with people you love. It’s full of the voices of contemporary queer luminaries, as well as recommendations for other voices to listen to and books to read.

Queer voices are as old as all human voices, but too often they have gone unrecorded, unheard, or unacknowledged. They are resistance and joy. They take up space and demand to be heard.

While we now live in times where queer voices have gained traction, the LGBTQ+ community still disproportionately experiences struggle. This is especially true for queer and trans youth. Because of that, queer voices, queer art, queer pride, and queer resistance are deeply important. Art can, on some level, offer a safe place. And when it is unsafe to be yourself, joy can be an act of resistance.

Queer culture has historically found a home in literature. We’ve been publishing books for a long time, and there’s a whole future of voices to queer the canon.

Books give people the opportunity to better understand themselves and others—especially people who are different from them. It’s a magical feeling to read someone write the way you understand things, or to challenge that understanding. We find ourselves in books, in art, in so many ways.

Here at Penguin Random House, we have a shared mission: to ignite a universal passion for reading by creating books for everyone. We believe that books, and the stories and ideas they hold, have the unique capacity to connect us, change us, and carry us toward a better future for generations to come.

Here’s to that better future. Here’s to that queer future.

Words By The Penguin Random House LGBTQ+ Network

“It’s a magical feeling to read someone write the way you understand things, or to challenge that understanding. We find ourselves in books, in art, in so many ways.

“"
HOPE:

This is the

LIBERATION

that waits for us

through the smoke

Words from Here For It by R. Eric Thomas. Lettering and illustration by Kyle Letendre.
Throughout the full ninety minutes of the match, Nigeria’s players did their best, as Nigerians do: sprightly on their feet and quick to react, just as their coach had taught them. But something kept happening: Every time one of the players went near the ball, it morphed into something else. Some say it was a lion that came roaring into the air, all hungry-mouthed and thirsty-eyed; some say it was a snake uncoiling itself from the dead leather; others say it was both interchangeably. The rest claim that the match was only confusing because the ball kept on doubling, or tripling, and Nigeria’s goalkeeper found it impossible to know which one to focus on.
latter was what Thomas’s uncle claimed.

“That day? Ha! The whole Nigeria went haywire! The country was vibrating with shock. A whole us? Lose to India? India? One of our players even died. I forget his name now. One Samuel, abi Simon something, dropped dead on the field from a heart attack. People had so much anger in them that they poured into the streets and started to fight each other. Strangers who’d never met before in their lives o, lunging at each other, trying to draw blood. But in the end, many people made friends that day.”

No need to question it, or search for it, or relive it. It’s a story that happens to you once and then lives with you forever.

Thomas could see the streets as his Uncle Anjos spoke, people grappling mercilessly, butting heads like rams, like they had nothing to lose; women on the sidelines picking fights with each other, children following suit. None of it was done with malice, or directionlessly. It was for a purpose. Everybody outside was trying to prove the same thing to themselves and everyone else: We’re a strong and talented people; it’s not that we were not ready, they insisted, it’s just that India used juju to confuse our players. They would never have won if they didn’t use juju. If one of us beats the other here, we can show each other we’re still strong. They fought to exhaustion, then hugged and shook hands before heading off together, asking: “So what was that your name again?” Some joked about it: “My name is Yusuf. But guy, you beat the hell out of me wallahi,” and got placating replies: “Sorry, my brother, you know we did what we had to do.” And they did.

After that match, India was banned from playing international football. It’s hard to know the year, but it’s a fact. It really happened. Everybody saw it. After all, what’s the alternative: That an entire country had a choreographed hallucination? A nationwide delusion?

Exactly.

Thomas knew animal stories too. He knew that tortoises had cracked shells as punishment for their unrepentant greed, from when they were dropped from heaven on their backs by a tired God. For all their haste, God had decided to delay them as a lesson. Hyenas sounded the way they did because they were found gossiping among themselves during a meeting in heaven which ended with God turning to them and saying in a bitter voice: Oh, you want to laugh? You will keep laughing forever. To Thomas, all this was believable because he had read Genesis, which made it clear how God felt about disobedience. A moment in time could lead to punishments forever. God seemed to love forevers.

But the stories Thomas loved the most were the ones about humans; stories that could still be happening right right now in the world as his uncle spoke. Still just a young teenager in secondary school, there was little else to do, so apart from serving God, Thomas had made it his life’s purpose to stack stories, to hunt and squash the fear that came with them.

Every evening, his uncle told him tales by moonlight. A genius with four degrees under his belt, Uncle Anjos wore his belt tightly. Thomas enjoyed horror because it added speed to his breathing and a sheen to his heart. Sometimes he dissolved into the words as Uncle Anjos was talking, fading off in the middle of a sentence, going somewhere new on the wing of a detail with his mouth ajar.

Like Thomas, when Anjos was a boy, he studied old stories from before the country earned its name, from way before the land was taken and way way way before it had to be wrested out of white hands. He filled notebooks with true and frightening realities he’d gathered from his grandparents. His peers couldn’t bear them; there had been enough bloodshed, enough loss, too much grief behind, the promise of freedom in front and they were only trying to be young in peace. Anjos, they decided, was the delusional one. He was the one imagining things. And this was what frightened his family about him: What do you mean you want to dig the past? Why are you trying to trouble the ground? If we get to know what happened then, how will we survive what did or didn’t happen after? Whose child is this? Take this Bible and eat it.

As with Thomas now, the rumor back then was that Anjos had turned out this way because he took books too seriously, too literally. They weren’t even saying this to be cruel o. They were only worried for him, because the family tree seemed to grow toward a warning: madness was wet soil and many people, once they’d stumbled on it, couldn’t help hurrying to the end of a too-dark valley. If Thomas’s parents were around enough to talk a lot, he would have been warned to take everything his uncle said with a hill of salt, warned about how some resemblances should be left alone. But even without their talking, Thomas heard them clearly through the parallels and proverbs they shared in letters; through the roundabouts in their speech. He knew exactly what they were talking around, but still he loved Uncle Anjos thickly, specifically because he’d managed to protect his childliness in a way most adults could not, and he wasn’t afraid to show how brightly his eyes could shine with belief, new faiths brewing behind them. Listening to him, Thomas could feel both the danger and the promise of the world in full, and it thrilled him to the bone.

Uncle Anjos told Thomas about a time when mobile phones had just come out and jazz caught up with technology. People were warned not to take phone calls from unknown numbers, but the stubborn ones did. And you know what happened? Exactly what they had been warned about. It didn’t happen now anymore, but it used to. It really really used to. People who answered those calls heard something-godknowswhat — a crackling sound? A threat? An incantation?—that made their bodies go haywire, bleeding through the ears and nose and eyes until they died. This story was told to Thomas when he was ten.

After he turned eleven and got his first phone—a Nokia 3310—a call came in one day from an unknown number. His heart was pounding in his bladder when he pressed answer. But it was just his father calling from somewhere in America, where he’d been working for years.

“How are you, my boy? You’re okay?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good. Give the phone to your uncle.”


But that rush? That rush from doing something that could have killed him if he’d just been unfortunate that day? It never left him. He tried it with chain messages, too, when he started receiving those. “If you don’t forward this in the next ten minutes, you will die within seven days,” the messages read, complete with the full names of people who’d fallen down in front of their families, foaming at the mouth. Thomas watched the ten minutes go by, rebellion hissing up his spine. On the seventh day, he ran laps around the house, rode his bicycle, and ate vegetable soup with snails and periwinkles—all of this in a hedonistic chase, a
Thomas blushed under his skin, pleasure perching on his smile. “But... how do they steal it? And why? What do they use it for?”

“Why? Because the heart of man is desperately wicked. Even the Bible says so. And what do they use it for? If they can apply your destiny to themselves, their lives can change course. What should have been your future then becomes theirs—and you will suddenly find yourself on their own dull road.”

Thomas had friends whose hairbrushes he sometimes borrowed at school to keep the waves rolling in his hair. It was important for all the cool boys to have, because the girls always checked for them. His star—whatever that meant—still seemed to be there, what with all the As he was still getting in most subjects. The only exception was spelling, because he and technology simply didn’t agree with each other. So, even if all these stories were true—and he did believe them—by some odd magic, he seemed to be cosmically protected from their dangers.

What turned Uncle Anjos into who he was? Thomas wanted to know.

Well. Anjos used to have an aunt. His family still lived in Benin then, and he believed that all the stories his father was telling him were just stories, because he had the privilege of a strong bubble, and just enough distance. Like his nephew, Anjos had found the stories thrilling to hear; but the man said had in a coiled voice. “I did it for you, because with the life you have ahead, you’re going to need faith. You’re going to need to root your eyes in places other people can’t see.” Anjos didn’t understand what the man meant then, but he took note of what he felt in his own body, of how witnessing that miracle had put weight in his feet, had scrambled his gut.

He’d heard a theory once that gods lose power if you stop believing in them. It seemed possible.

Unlike Thomas, had felt that it was only uncivilized people who stretched that fascination into faith by truly believing things they could not see, gods who revealed themselves out of people’s mouths, who demanded sacrifices and called for libations to be poured into the ground.

In Benin those days, there was a notorious whirlwind called Eziza. People believed that the gods sent Eziza as an ambassador of their anger. Little Anjos was gifted a story about this whirlwind through an encounter with a rainmaker. Right there in his grandfather’s house, he’d watched the man start and stop a furious downpour-complete with streaks of thunder—in the space of ten minutes. When he waved his handkerchief and let out a string of Bini prayers and incantations, the rain immediately ceased. Anjos, seeing this was no coincidence, asked him to do it again. “I don’t abuse my power,”

When Eziza came, the man explained, it arrived in full force, seizing whole human beings in its body. People could be sitting down in a beer parlor casually drinking and the whirlwind would swoop in suddenly to collect a single person from their midst. The gods were very sure of what they were looking for whenever they sent Eziza, the rainmaker told Anjos, but in the process of trying to find those things and those people, they didn’t hesitate to clear anything or anyone that stood in their way. They seemed to be calmer now, though, he said. His theory was that they had probably grown tired of fighting to retain their worshippers, and had resigned themselves to letting people face the Christ they were hellbent on choosing. As Anjos listened to all this, with his elbow in his grandfather’s lap, he wondered what factors determined the strength of gods’ tempers. He’d heard a theory once

He knew, he always had, that life was about timing and death was always lurking and all of life was hide-and-seek. Why not enjoy the game?
They were looking for cardboard for their school project when a small child looked up and said, See oh, see, pointing at the sky. They looked, and true true, somebody was trapped up there inside the wailing wind like a small, weightless kite. Nonsense, little Anjos thought, nonsense, even though he could see it. But people were exclaiming as they deserted the market quick quick, so he followed them, running with his hand in Sam's. Later, when they got back home, his rascal of a neighbor, a ten-year-old boy called Bingo, told him what had happened. He said that Iye Ruth was sitting down in her backyard, washing clothes under the big ebelebo tree, when Eziza encircled her body and took her into a dizzying lightness.

Anjos's mother knew that story too. When he went home and told her about it, she confirmed it with a shrug. She didn't need a rainmaker to convince her; she already believed. She had lost an old classmate to Eziza back in the day, so none of this was new. (She wasn't there o. But must she be there to know?) So she pulled her ear as she told Anjos, “Stay away from Eziza, if you like your life; just stay away. If you see strong breeze, run enter house. You hear me?” Little Anjos had questions, but his mother had long decided for him that he would keep liking his life, and that no spirit would come out of nowhere to claim him.

Photograph courtesy of the author.

To me, queer literature is a place where freedom meets possibility meets courage meets creativity and expansive imagining. It’s where I go to flex my hope and sharpen my love. The queer books I’ve loved the most have taught me to do miraculous things like bend time, find where I belong, and to see alternate futures. Knowing this is what helped me to write Vagabonds! — which is essentially a book about audacity, living, and what it takes to make new worlds for ourselves. I hope these stories continue to meet new readers who need them.
Knowledge was a strength. Even when it hurt.
BIOLUMINESCENCE

There’s a dark so deep beneath the sea the creatures beget their own light. This feat, this fact of adaptation, I could say, is beautiful though the creatures are hideous. Lanternfish. Hatchetfish. Viperfish. I, not unlike them, forfeited beauty to glimpse the world hidden by eternal darkness. I subsisted on falling matter, unaware from where or why matter fell, and on weaker creatures beguiled by my luminosity. My hideous face opening, suddenly, to take them into a darkness darker and more eternal than this underworld underwater. I swam and swam toward nowhere and nothing. I, after so much isolation, so much indifference, kept going even if going meant only waiting, hovering in place. So far below, so far away from the rest of life, the terrestrial made possible by and thereby dependent upon light, I did what I had to do. I stalked. I killed. I wanted to feel in my body my body at work, working to stay alive. I swam. I kept going. I waited. I found myself without meaning to, without contriving meaning at the time, in time, in the company of creatures who, hideous like me, had to be their own illumination. Their own god. Their own genesis. Often we feuded. Often we fused like anglerfish. Blood to blood. Desire to desire. We were wild. Bewildered. Beautiful in our wilderness and wildness. In the most extreme conditions we proved that life can exist. I exist. I am my life, I thought, approaching at last the bottom of the sea. It wasn’t the bottom. It wasn’t the sea.
PROGRESS REPORT

I had a new form.
The new form said Name of survivor.
The new form renamed me.
The new form was a form of renaming.
Renaming gave me new form.
The new form said Relevant history.
History could be relevant.
History could be irrelevant.
History had a form.
History was a form of renaming.
The new form said Daily function.
Days could be measured by and a measurement of history.
Function could be defined by and a definition of history.
Both had a form.
Both were a form of renaming.
The new form said Identify triggers.
Click of the key turning in the lock of the door.
The new form said Identify recurring memories.
Repetition of one foot placed in front of the other.
The new form said Identify survival strategies.
Pulling the string I thought was for the light.
I marked Rationalizing.
Ceiling fan whirring like helicopter blades.No child in our family stays a child their mother can love.
I marked Denial.
Odor of Heineken and pubic sweat.
I marked Fantasizing about the future.
Altar where my mother and I knelt before Ngài Quán Thọ Âm.
I marked Obsessing about the past.
Fresh oranges arranged in a glass bowl.
I marked Compartmentalizing.
Hallway from the living room to the bedroom.
I marked Dissociating.
My bed stripped of sheets.
I marked Not eating.
Stack of high school yearbooks.
I marked Compulsive eating.
Gym uniform embroidered with my name.
I marked Not sleeping.
Clang of the Science Fair trophy hitting the floor.
I marked Compulsive sleeping.
Poem I wrote in fifth grade rhyming the word heart with the word start.
I marked Avoiding sex.
Photograph of me sitting next to my father.
I marked Compulsive sex.
Photograph of the '93 Mazda MPV he reportedly turned into an ice cream truck.
I marked Humor.
Holes where the nails had been in the wall.
I marked Self-harm.
Wind through the window.
I marked Caregiving.
Alarm clock unplugged.
I marked Drug use.
The room emptied even of time.
I marked Staying busy.
The air as if on fire.
I marked Controlling others.
Pile of things to keep and pile of things to throw away.
I marked Perfectionism.
(Let go.)
I marked Repeating abuse.
The decision to keep nothing.
I marked Suppression.
(Set free.)

I marked Suppression.
(Set free.)
I marked Creating chaos.
Broom sweeping into the dustpan the need to hold on.

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EXCERPT FROM ALL THE FLOWERS KNEELING
JUDITH SLAYING HOLOFERNES: OIL ON CANVAS: 
ARTEMISIA GENTILESCHI: 1620

I know better than to leave the house without my good dress. My good knife
like a crucifix between my stone breasts.
Mother would have me whipped, would have me kneeling on rice until I shrilled so loud I rang the church bells.

Didn’t I tell you that elegance is our revenge? That there are neither victims nor victors
but the bitch we envy in the end? I am that bitch.
I am dogged. I am so damned
not even Death wanted me. He sent me back after you’d sacked my body
the way your armies sacked my village, stacked our headless idols in the river where our children impaled themselves on rocks. I exit night. I enter your tent gilded in a bolt of stubborn sunlight. My sleeves already rolled up. I know they’ll say I’m a slut for showing this much skin. This irreverence for what is seen when I ask to be seen. Look at me. My thighs lift from your thighs. My mouth spits poison into your mouth. You nasty beauty. I am no beast. Still my blade sliding clean through your thick neck while my maid keeps your blood off me and my good dress will be a song the parish sings for centuries. Tell Mary. Tell Eve. Tell Salome and David about me. Watch their faces, like yours, turn green.

LIPSTICK ELEGY

I climb down to the beach facing the Pacific. Torrents of rain shirr the sand. On the other side, my grandmother sleeps soundlessly in her bed. Her áo dãí of the whitest silk.
My mother knew her mother died before the telephone rang like bells announcing the last American helicopter leaving Sài Gòn. Arrow shot back to its bow. Long-distance missile. She’d leap into the sky to fly home if she could. Instead she works overtime. Curls her hair with hot rollers. Rouges her cheeks like Gong Li in Raise the Red Lantern. I’m her understudy. Hiding in the doorway between her grief and mine, I apply her foundation to my face. I conceal the parts of me she conceals, puckering my lips as if to kiss a man that loves me the way I want to be loved.

I speak their bewitching names aloud. Twisted Rose. Fuchsia in Paris. Irreverence. I choose the lipstick she’d least approve of. My mouth a pomegranate split open. A grenade with a loose pin. In the kitchen, I wrap a white sheet around my waist and dance for hours, mesmerized by my reflection in a charred skillet.
I laugh her laugh, the way my grandmother laughed when she taught me to pray the Chú Đai Bi, when I braided her hair in unbearable heat, my tiny fingers weaving the silver strands into a fishtail, a French twist. Each knot a future she never named, buried in the soil of her, where she locked away the image of her sons and daughters locked away. I’m sorry, mother of my mother, immortal bodhisattva with a thousand hands, chewing a fist of betel root, your teeth black as dawn.

No child in our family stays a child their mother can love.

“Didn’t I tell you that elegance is our revenge? That there are neither victims nor victors but the bitch we envy in the end? I am that bitch.”

PRIDE IN YOUR WORDS
COPERNICUS

Who doesn’t know how
doubt lifts the hem of its nightgown
to reveal another inch of thigh
before the face of faith?

I once didn’t. I once thought I was
my own geometry,
my own geocentric planet

spinning like a ballerina, alone
at the center of the universe, at the
command of a god

opening my music box
with his dirty mouth. He said,

_Let there be light—_
And I thought I was the light.

I was a man’s failed imagination.

Now I know what appears
as the motion of Heaven
is just the motion of Earth.

Not stars.
Not whatever I want.

Every poem I write begins with a
question. Who am I? Who do I want
to be? How can I give myself the life
I deserve? The poems in my debut
collection, _All the Flowers Kneeling_,
spring from that spirit of inquiry and
discovery. These are poems of love.
These are poems of survival in the
aftermath of personal and public
trauma, but the word “trauma” is
never used in the book. Instead,
you will find the word “freedom.”
You will find “letting go.” “There’s a
difference between letting go and
setting free.” “When I am deliberate,
I am liberated.” “Whatever my life
was, only I could save it.” Like the
flowers themselves, this is a book
about survival and how we—on our
own terms, in our own miraculous
ways—survive against all odds, every
day, time after time.
The following artwork from award-winning illustrator Anshika Khullar is meant to be colored. No need to stay inside the lines.
Make a list of your favorite books by queer authors here!

Queer Literature Edition

Black people
Brown people
Indigenous people
trans & queer people
marginalized people
fat people
sex workers
homeless people
deaf and disabled people
mentally ill and neurodivergent people
survivors
door & working-class people
Muslim people
Jewish people
Anshika Khullar

Anshika Khullar is an illustrator based in Southampton, England, whose bold and vibrant work aims to showcase the ordinary as beautiful. Ash is an Indian, non-binary transgender creative with a BA in English literature and media from the University of Brighton. They are an ALA Stonewall Book Award winner and CILIP Kate Greenaway Medal longlist nominee for their artwork in the YA novel The Black Flamingo.
I had hundreds of nudes stored in my phone, but I’d never sent them to anyone. The shots themselves were fairly standard: my faceless body floating in bedrooms and bathrooms, in mirrors. Whenever I took one I fell in love with it for a moment. Standing there, naked and hunched over my little screen, I felt overwhelmed with the urge to show someone this new iteration of my body. But each photo seemed more private and impossible than the last.

You could see in them something beyond desire, harder and more humiliating. While I was brushing my teeth or stepping out of the shower I would see my own body and find myself overwhelmed with a sense of urgency and disuse. My body was crying out that I was not fulfilling my purpose. I was meant to have sex—probably with some wild number of people. Maybe it was more savage than that, that I was meant not to f*** but to get f***ed. The purpose of my life at large remained mysterious, but I had come around to the idea that my purpose as a body was simple.

I was too fearful of the world to go out and get f***ed, too plagued by hang-ups, memories of shitty girlfriends, fears of violence. Instead I took photos. In the photos my body looked stunning, unblemished, often...
I was like a spinster full of anxieties and repressions, charged with chaperoning a young girl who could not fathom the injustice of the arrangement.
Politics, history, and the crucial art of synonyms. It felt lucky that she was a young gay woman, only five years older than I was and separated from me by only about a mile.

She didn’t love me for my body, though once we were intimate she claimed to recognize a special beauty in it. I didn’t believe her. She wasn’t discerning. The rapport we’d created online was the clear basis of Romi’s affection. Because I was decidedly superficial, and always had been—nothing interested me more than the prettiness of a girl on the street—a small but relentless part of my life entailed predicting the many ways I could *f*** up* our love. If I was going to deserve her I would have to remain as attentive as she was, as sexually generous, as loyal. Needless to say, I would have to avoid posting my nudes online.

But beyond Romi my desire was thirsty and fickle. I was neither loyal nor anarchic but, unable to decide between the two, guilty and scheming. The primary fantasy that followed me everywhere was a vision in which I was naked, lined up in a row of twenty girls, a hundred girls, as many naked girls as would fit inside the room I was in—the café, the lobby of Romi’s building, the subway car. Opposite the line of girls was a man who scrutinized us. I can’t tell you what this man looked like. He was nondescript, symbolic. I would never actually *f*** him. After about thirty seconds he pointed, without equivocating, at me.

I liked extreme people, people who seemed to embody an unambiguous idea about life. What would it feel like to be unwaveringly good?

Queer literature showed me how rewarding stories about investigation could be—investigation into culture, into pleasure, into the self—from *The Well of Loneliness* to *Zami* to *Detransition, Baby*, *What Belongs to You*, and *A Year Without a Name*. These were books that helped me learn to grapple with the gap between myself and the expectations of my culture and socialization. I’ve always needed and gravitated toward art that articulates the discomfort of feeling taboo inside yourself, and illuminates how you might follow that discomfort toward freedom. The relentless curiosity and liminality of queer experience, and queer literature, were what pushed me to write *Acts of Service* and to unpack its problem of heterosexual desire.
Maybe in this life you get all kinds of soulmates: multiple people who vibrate at the same level you do.
between her breakfast and lunch shifts, she volunteered at the school, doing whatever she could to make it a better place. She stayed there as I progressed to middle school and high school.

When I was a kid, I never thought twice about the types of jobs my mom worked because so many of my friends’ parents were farmworkers and dishwashers. I was happy when my mom got a job at the school cafeteria, because it made her happy. It gave her, and us, stability. At least, that’s what I overheard her tell the neighbors.

For me, though, that job became a thorn in the side. Every time I’d get into trouble, the teachers or other students would tattle to my mom. And
my mom didn’t talk quietly; she talked by yelling. So every time she heard I was up to no good, she would find me in class, pull me hard by the arm, and shout at me to behave. In front of other students and teachers, I would be filled with shame. It felt like my mom always had eyes on me. She was there to pressure me, to make sure I did well in school. I didn’t like Ama yelling at me. Although she never told me this herself, I felt I was making her look bad in front of people, especially the teachers. So I tried my best to not disappoint my mom.

Ama was a healthy, solidly built woman standing at five feet, five inches tall with a round face and glasses. I remember she had wavy black hair that flowed down her back. But at some point, while I was still a young kid, she cut it short for practical reasons. It was too thick to maintain while raising kids and still she didn’t have the luxury of getting a haircut. As the years passed, she gained weight. She became diabetic and had high blood pressure. But she always maintained her joyful spirit, and she loved making other people happy. Most of all, she was never ashamed of being poor.

When I got accepted to Harvard, I called Ama from my tiny apartment in Berkeley, where I was living at the time, to share the good news. I was giddy with excitement.

“¿Y qué es eso?” she asked. “¡Ay, mijo, pero por qué Boston? Es muy lejos. Tienen muy buenas universidades aquí en San Diego. Y en las noticias dicen que hace mucho frío allá y te puedes enfermar. ¿Por qué no mejor te regresas a casa y vienes a la escuela acá?”

Immediately my spirits fell. I had disappointed Ama, who had never heard of Harvard or Cambridge. And I was angry at our life’s circumstances. To my mom, Boston was a far-off place at the other end of the country. She hadn’t heard of UC Berkeley, where I did my undergrad, my carrera, either. But she knew it was in California, and close by. She understood what that carrera was. In her mind, a bachelor’s degree was all I needed to be successful in the United States. She reasoned that I simply didn’t want to move back home.

Even though she had little formal education, Ama learned the names of the local colleges and universities because these were the places the teachers she worked with talked about. San Diego State University (SDSU) was the best of the best, and she dreamed that I would attend there. She didn’t realize that there could be better opportunities elsewhere.

“Oh, Mom,” I told her.

“Thanks. I love you. I gotta go. I have a class that I need to get to.” I lied just to get off the phone.

“I am super proud of you,” she assured me.

I didn’t doubt her pride in me, but I cried tears of anger and sadness when I hung up the phone. I was angry that we were poor. I was angry that my mom worked so hard and still she didn’t have the luxury of knowing what I knew. I was angry at the injustice of it all.

The day before I was to leave for Harvard, I picked up my mom from work, when the secretary at the elementary school explained to me how Ama finally accepted that I would be leaving. Ama was sitting in the school cafeteria during her break between the breakfast and lunch shifts when the school’s secretary walked in. Ama was wearing her hainrett and a work apron over her usual flower-patterned blouse. She sat on a cold plastic school lunch bench in the middle of the cold, drab concrete room. She was crying, all alone, with her head between her hands. Shocked, the secretary asked Ama how Ama finally accepted that I was going to Harvard. I picked up my mom from work, when the secretary at the elementary school explained to me how Ama finally accepted that I would be leaving. Ama was sitting in the school cafeteria during her break between the breakfast and lunch shifts when the school’s secretary walked in. Ama was wearing her hainrett and a work apron over her usual flower-patterned blouse. She sat on a cold plastic school lunch bench in the middle of the cold, drab concrete room. She was crying, all alone, with her head between her hands. Shocked, the secretary asked Ama how Ama finally accepted that I was going to Harvard.

But she always maintained her joyful spirit, and she loved making other people happy. Most of all, she was never ashamed of being poor.
And so everyone did. Teacher after teacher, and even the principal, came by to congratulate Ama that day. Her tears of sadness turned into tears of joy. She looked up to these teachers, and she finally began to understand that Harvard was one of the best and most prestigious schools in the world. And her son, who she had sacrificed so much for, was going to be attending Harvard.

As a teenager, I wasn’t sure I’d live long enough to finish high school—let alone graduate from Harvard, or write a book. Sleeping in parks and using drugs was my only escape from the violent, traumatic abuse that drastically shaped my life. It wasn’t until I heard stories from people with similar experiences that I realized I wasn’t alone. I wasn’t the only person overlooked by state-sanctioned programs meant to help survivors who spiraled into cycles of addiction and suicidal thoughts. I wasn’t the only gay Latino in the universe. My journey of healing and self-acceptance began with people in my community loving me unconditionally, exactly as I am. 

I’m Not Broken is the story of the journey I took to win back my life. I share my story to remind others struggling with identity, addiction and suicidal thoughts that we are not alone. In spite of our sometimes painful realities, we too can accomplish anything.
I think a lot of love is just telling the truth.
Kyle Letendre is a lettering artist/type designer/illustrator/human disco ball based in Portland, Oregon. Born and raised in Minnesota, they became obsessed with the expressive qualities of letterforms from a young age.

Their work explores schmaltzy excess, queering historical influences, and social justice—design is nothing if not a conduit to talk about the things that matter.

We partnered with Kyle to bring some of the most powerful words from LGBTQ+ literature to life. You can find Kyle’s work throughout this zine, and for the month of June, you can also find it on signs and billboards across the country—from New York City and Chicago to Dallas and Orlando.

"Queer happiness is so powerful. And it terrifies the closed-minded to know you can color outside of the boxes assigned to you, to invent your own shapes to fill."
How to Make a Zine

Zines have long been an important part of queer culture; a form of personal expression and a creative outlet for people and communities whose stories have been buried. The beauty of a zine is that anyone can make one—all you need is paper, scissors, and inspiration. We teamed up with Jade Levine, a NYC-based writer and zinester, to share a simple guide on how to make your own 8-page zine. Share your work on social using #PrideInYourWords. We can’t wait to see it.
I made my first zine in middle school with other campers at a girls rock camp, where I was surrounded by queer people before knowing how to name why I felt so comfortable there. We learned about zines as a way to see the power of our ideas on a page in a world where mass media doesn’t prioritize marginalized voices. The zines we made were messy, unevenly folded, and completely ours.

Queer people have used zines to find community (through the mail and in person), share art with each other, and build political power. Whether as containers for the logistics of organizing or the pleasures of fandom, zines let us share stories and information that otherwise wouldn’t have been distributed in print. Zines allow self-publishing to become a space for self-determination.

Making a zine allows you to move past the constraints of traditional publishing and take control of your creative process. You design the pages, choose the content, and decide how to distribute it. You get to camp out at the copy shop, or sneak into the supply closet at work, where you can nurse paper cuts and drink ginger ale while making a mess. Making a zine is an act of resistance, and reading a zine is a queer act of joy. Every page can be a reminder that our voices, art, and messy feelings have, and always will, belong in print.

**You WILL NEED:**
- an 8.5” x 11” piece of paper
- scissors
- stapler
- ideas

When I’m teaching a zine workshop & participants don’t know where to start, I ask: What’s something you care about?

1. **Make your MAIN copy.**
   Put your content on your piece of paper (you have 8 pages to work with.)

   ![Diagram]

   2 7
   4 5
   BACK SIDE OF PAPER

   3 6
   FRONT SIDE OF PAPER

   BACK COVER
   FRONT COVER
② Make a TEST copy.
   (A double-sided copy of your main copy!)
   Adjust the contrast & reposition it until you like how your copies look.
   Make A BUNCH of COPIES.

③ Fold along the vertical. ("hot dog")
   Cut along the horizontal. ("hamburger")

④ Nest 63 (back is 45)
   inside 81 (back is 27)
   like this!
   Staple along the middle.

⑤ Assemble all your copies & share with your friends, lovers, & neighbors!

JADE LEVINE writes and makes zines in New York City.
WWW. JADELEVINE. COM
2022 LGBTQ+ READING LIST

LGBTQ+ literature has been around for generations, and there’s new work being published every day.
FOR MORE RECOMMENDATIONS, VISIT PENGUINRANDOMHOUSE.COM/PRIDEREADS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Release Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acts of Service</td>
<td>by Lillian Fishman</td>
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<td>A Hundred Lovers</td>
<td>by Richie Hofmann</td>
<td>2/8/22</td>
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<td>All Down Darkness Wide</td>
<td>by Seán Hewitt</td>
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<td>All the Flowers Kneeling</td>
<td>by Paul Tran</td>
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<td>All This Could Be Different</td>
<td>by Sarah Thakam Mathews</td>
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<td>A Visible Man</td>
<td>by Edward Enninful</td>
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<td>Be a Triangle</td>
<td>by Lilly Singh</td>
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<td>Body Grammar</td>
<td>by Jules Ohman</td>
<td>6/14/22</td>
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<td>Brace for Impact</td>
<td>by Gabe Montesanti</td>
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<td>Burn the Page</td>
<td>by Danica Roem</td>
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<td>Color Me Queer</td>
<td>by Potter Gift</td>
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<td>Dead Collections</td>
<td>by Isaac Fellman</td>
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<td>Dear Senthuran</td>
<td>by Akwaeke Emezi</td>
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<td>by Ashley Herring Blake</td>
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<td>Dream of the Divided Field</td>
<td>by Yanyi</td>
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<td>First Time for Everything</td>
<td>by Henry Fry</td>
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<td>Gods of Want</td>
<td>by K-Ming Chang</td>
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<td>by Phil Stamper</td>
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<td>by Nekesa Afia</td>
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<td>by Juno Dawson</td>
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<td>How To Succeed in Witchcraft</td>
<td>by Aislinn Brophy</td>
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<td>I Was Better Last Night</td>
<td>by Harvey Fierstein</td>
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<tr>
<td>I’m Not Broken</td>
<td>by Jesse Leon</td>
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<td>I’m So (Not) Over You</td>
<td>by Kosoko Jackson</td>
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<td>Jobs for Girls with Artistic Flair</td>
<td>by June Gervais</td>
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<td>Kings of B’more</td>
<td>by R. Eric Thomas</td>
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<td>Kiss &amp; Tell</td>
<td>by Adib Khorram</td>
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<td>Like a House on Fire</td>
<td>by Lauren McBryer</td>
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<td>Lost &amp; Found</td>
<td>by Kathryn Schulz</td>
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<td>by Zoe Sivak</td>
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<td>Melt With You</td>
<td>by Jennifer Dugan</td>
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<td>Moon Witch, Spider King</td>
<td>by Marlon James</td>
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<td>Nightcrawling</td>
<td>by Leiia Mottley</td>
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<td>OK Tarot</td>
<td>by Adam J. Kurtz</td>
<td>9/20/22</td>
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<td>Our Colors</td>
<td>by Gengoroh Tagame</td>
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<td>Queerly Beloved</td>
<td>by Susie Dumond</td>
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<td>Right Where I Left You</td>
<td>by Julian Winters</td>
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<td>Ten Steps to Nanette</td>
<td>by Hannah Gadsby</td>
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<td>The Black Period</td>
<td>by Hafizah Augustus Geter</td>
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<td>The Bone Spindle</td>
<td>by Leslie Vedder</td>
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<td>The Old Place</td>
<td>by Bobby Finger</td>
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<td>The Romantic Agenda</td>
<td>by Claire Kann</td>
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<td>The Spear Cuts Through Water</td>
<td>by Simon Jimenez</td>
<td>8/30/22</td>
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<td>Time Is a Mother</td>
<td>by Ocean Vuong</td>
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<td>Tripping Arcadia a</td>
<td>by Kit Mayquist</td>
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<td>True Biz</td>
<td>by Sara Novic</td>
<td>4/5/22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vagabonds!</td>
<td>by Eloghosa Osunde</td>
<td>3/15/22</td>
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<tr>
<td>We Do What We Do in the Dark</td>
<td>by Michelle Hart</td>
<td>5/3/22</td>
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<tr>
<td>When We Were Sisters</td>
<td>by Fatimah Asghar</td>
<td>10/18/22</td>
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<tr>
<td>When You Call My Name</td>
<td>by Tucker Shaw</td>
<td>5/3/22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working Girls</td>
<td>by Trixie Mattel and Katya</td>
<td>10/25/22</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
They say
Nothing lasts forever
But they're just scared it will last longer than they can love it.

Words from On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous by Ocean Vuong. Lettering and illustration by Kyle Letendre.
Share your favorite passages, illustrations, and handmade zines on social using #PrideInYourWords, and visit us online at penguinrandomhouse.com/pridereads to discover even more books by LGBTQ+ writers.

#prideinyourwords