

**Flamer**  
Mike Curato  
Henry Holt & Company, 2020

## Reviews

- [Kirkus](#) (Jun. 14, 2020): “This is a story that will be read and reread, and for some, it will be the defining book of their adolescence. Buy it. Read it. Share it.” Starred review.
- [School Library Journal](#) (Aug. 28, 2020): “Curato’s incredible art conveys Aiden’s point of view, his thoughts, and his reimaginings of his physical form with compelling beauty and empathy. The drawing style feels specific to a teen’s world, spare yet filled with distinct characters and an idyllic camp setting. Most images are in shades of black and gray, which makes the appearance of fire in Aiden’s dreams and fantasies—in hues of red, yellow, and orange, signifying his passion, rage, desire, and shame—even more poignant as more light is shed on his true self. **VERDICT** Curato has created a beautiful story of a teen who must decide if he will force himself into the mold of what he thinks a ‘normal’ boy is, or if he can allow himself to live life on his own terms. An essential book that shows readers that they are never alone in their struggles.” Starred review.
- [Booklist](#) (Sept. 1, 2020): “Just as his deft artwork meticulously balances between blazing feelings and quiet contemplation of natural beauty, Curato gives Aiden a poignantly well-rounded character: for all the homophobia and racism inherent in institutions like the Boy Scouts and the Catholic church, Aiden still defiantly finds inspiration and strength there. Masterfully nuanced and stunningly told, this is visual storytelling at its finest.” Starred review.
- [Shelf Awareness](#) (Sept. 4, 2020): “Cleverly inked and masterfully told, *Flamer* by Mike Curato is a life-affirming story about finding the power within. [...] Both heartbreaking and joyous, *Flamer* acknowledges the brutal weight of hatred, yet inspires the courage to live.” Starred review.
- [Publishers Weekly](#) (Jul. 9, 2020): “Emotional and raw, Curato’s story plummets Aiden deep into despair, including suicidal ideation, juxtaposing powerful moments of burning, fiery hope.”
- [The Horn Book](#) (Dec. 15, 2020): “Grownup LGBTs will know exactly what Aiden is going through, but this book speaks so well to those kids currently undergoing the ordeal. [...] The drawing is expertly cartooned, and the palette is black and white with occasional, and then increasing, daubs and splashes of red whenever passions — of many kinds — ride high. The variation of small, storytelling panels and full-page and double-page spreads for big moments is wonderfully effective, and the climax — Aiden in a literal dark night of the soul in the outdoor chapel — is high drama indeed, emotionally powerful, proudly and extravagantly spiritual (and as Catholic as any Graham Greene epiphany). He comes through it to have one perfect day at camp to sustain him going forward. If you will forgive the editorial intrusion, I wish I had had this book fifty years ago.” Starred review.

## Awards

- [Lambda Literary Award for LGBTQ Young Adult](#), 2021
- [Massachusetts Middle Grade/Young Adult Literature Award](#), 2021

## Lists

- [NPR Favorite Reads](#), 2020
- [Kirkus Best Young Adult Books of the Year](#), 2020
- [School Library Journal Best Graphic Novels](#), 2020
- [Hornbook Fanfare Booklist](#), 2020
- [YALSA Great Graphic Novels for Teens](#), 2021
- [ALA Rainbow Book List](#), 2021
- [New York Public Library Best Books for Teens](#), 2020
- [Chicago Public Library Best Teen Graphic Novels & Manga](#), 2020
- [Texas Maverick Graphic Novels Reading List](#), 2021
- [Penn GSE Best Books for Young Readers](#), 2020
- [Cooperative Children's Book Center Choices](#), 2021

## Response to Challenges

- Author Mike Curato, in an interview with PEN America: “I think most people haven’t read the full book because then they would know, I’m trying to help someone. I’m trying to stop someone from taking drastic measures of self harm or suicide. And so that’s the shocking thing for me is that they’re basically telling queer youth, we don’t care about you, we don’t care if you hate yourself, and we’re just fine if you decide to end things. Because we’re more concerned about shaming you about your sexuality, shaming you about masturbation. There are some taboo themes that I addressed in this book that I’m sure some parents are uncomfortable with. But these are experiences that most teenagers go through. Some parents would prefer their children read about uncomfortable topics in a book because it’s a very safe place to learn. They can digest it at their own pace. They can put the book down if they want to. And then I think there are some parents that would rather just uphold a taboo and not talk about anything. And all that does is just perpetuate this cycle of shame.” ([PEN America](#))
- Newtown, CT parent Tim Stan, on attempts to remove Flamer from the Newtown High School library: “Attempts to ban this kind of literature is really like an attempt to further marginalize the LGBT community and kind of erase our existence.” ([CT Insider](#))
- University of Wisconsin-Madison professor Michael Apple, in support of the decision by the Luxemburg-Casco, WI School Board to retain Flamer in the school library: “When we look at the statistics of suicide among bullied kids, we’re not just talking about censorship because parents don’t want that book. We’re talking about kids lives.” ([NBC15](#))

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