

Sex Is a Funny Word: A Book about Bodies, Feelings, and You

Cory Silverberg, illus. Fiona Smyth

Triangle Square, 2015

Reviews

- [Kirkus](#) (Mar. 31, 2015): “Lively design, bright, clashing colors, cartoon-style illustrations, comic strips, and plenty of humor support the informal, inclusive approach. Each chapter ends with questions to think and talk about. The author’s respect for different approaches to the subject comes through. No actual sexual activities are described except for masturbation, in the chapter that also deals with ‘secret touches.’ The gender chapter tells how gender is assigned but notes ‘there are more than two kinds of bodies.’ The character Zai doesn’t identify as either boy or girl. Illustrations show body parts of kids and grown-ups (nipples, breasts, bottoms, and parts biologically specific to boys or girls) demonstrating wide variety. [...] This carefully thought-out explanation may surprise but should be widely appreciated.”
- [School Library Journal](#) (Mar. 25, 2016): “There is a heavy emphasis on the importance of thinking for oneself and developing one’s own opinions. The language is conversational and accessible, as well as direct, fastidiously accurate, and entirely gender-neutral. Each section ends with conversation-provoking questions, reinforcing the suggestion that the book be read and shared in conversation with a trusted adult. What makes this volume exceptional is its introduction of the subjects of transgender identity, intersex conditions, and masturbation. [...] Despite the title, the topic of sexual intercourse is not covered; but Silverberg prepares readers for this information by introducing concepts such as respect, trust, and joy. **VERDICT** Exciting, enlightening, and innovative, this book addresses timeless questions about sex for a new generation of kids who are increasingly aware of the broad spectrum of gender and sexual identities.” (Starred review).
- [Publishers Weekly](#) (Jun. 22, 2015): “Full-page artwork and comics sequences follow the students as they react to discussions of gender, bodies (including what Silverberg calls ‘middle parts’), touching, and the emotions that lead to sexual contact; the book stops short of getting into the mechanics of intercourse. Throughout, Silverberg invites readers to consider their own feelings through activities and questions (‘Why do you think people want to know if a baby is a boy or a girl?’). Emphasizing the importance of trust, respect, justice, and joy—as well as open communication—it’s a thoughtful and affirming exploration of relationships, gender identity, and growing sexual awareness.” (Starred review).
- [The Marginalian](#) (Nov. 5, 2015): “[T]his candid, inclusive, stereotype-defying, and absolutely wonderful primer on sexuality and gender identity embraces diversity in all of its dimensions. [...] With the playfulness of the comic genre and the solidity of thoughtful sex education, Silverberg and Smyth strip this universal coming-of-age process of its cultural baggage and celebrate the openminded, openhearted spirit of discovery so vital to fostering a healthy relationship with sexuality and a lifelong respect for one’s own body.”

Awards

- [ALA Mike Morgan & Larry Romans Children's & Young Adult Literature Award](#), 2016
- [Norma Fleck Award for Canadian Children's Nonfiction](#), 2016

Lists

- [ALA/ALSC Notable Children's Books](#), 2016

Response to Challenges

- Author Cory Silverberg, in an open letter on the Seven Stories Press website: "When [illustrator Fiona Smythe and I] began the project of re-imagining sex education for young people we didn't start with the idea of teaching certain information or topics, we started with an approach. One of the things that makes our books different is the way that the questions asked of the reader are treated with as much importance as the information we provide. Contrary to the fears of some adults, our books are written precisely to provide information in a way that makes room for every family's values and beliefs." ([Seven Stories Press](#))
- In response to a challenge from Fremont, NE community member Sandra Murray, Keene Memorial Library director Laura England-Biggs wrote: "Having looked at professional reviews and taken the time to read 'Sex is a Funny Word' several times, it is my finding that this title is appropriate for inclusion in our collection and remain on shelves." The book was moved from the children's nonfiction section to the adult nonfiction section. ([Lincoln Journal Star](#))
- In response to challenges from community members in Lafayette, LA, Jefferson Parish Library director Jessica Styons stated that librarians "try to develop as vast of a collection as all the interests and needs and people that we have in our parish." Sex Is a Funny Word, along with eleven other challenged books, was retained. ([Times-Picayune](#))

References

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