

Activity Idea

Thank You Letter to Queer Pioneers

Recommended for Adults

After reading one of the books or watching one of the documentaries on our list of materials below, use the following prompts to reflect on the life of a queer pioneer and how their experience intersects with your own. Pull out some paper and a pen and write a letter to your queer pioneer, highlighting some of the reflections that resonated with you. You don't need to mail the letter but give yourself a moment to recognize those who paved the way before you.



General questions:

What aspects of the person's life most affected you?

How did the way they handled adversity change the way you thought about them?

How would you like to express thanks to your queer pioneer?

What barriers has your queer pioneer broken in their work towards justice and equality?

Many of these books provide us with some of our queer pioneer's inner dialogue through interviews, diary entries, or first-person accounts. What were you most surprised about when you read it? How has reading some of this inner dialogue changed how you see your queer pioneer?



Cultural Shifts:

Reflect on a time when your queer pioneer faced adversity. How might you have reacted if you were in the same place? What parts of that reaction might be different due to current events, change in cultural norms, or the work this individual has done for queer history?

What change in attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people do you believe have taken place in your lifetime? What current queer events would your pioneer be most satisfied or dissatisfied with?

Many of our queer pioneers have faced challenges other than those related to their LGBTQ+ identity. How do different challenges and barriers intersect in your life? How do you work to overcome them?

How did your queer pioneer challenge the gender or sexuality norms of their time and place? Did their refusal to assimilate assist in your discovery of your gender or sexuality?

Reflection:

Have you experienced discrimination in your own life? How did this experience inform your identity or change you as a person? Did this experience alter the way you view yourself and/or the world? How do you think your queer pioneer would have reacted?

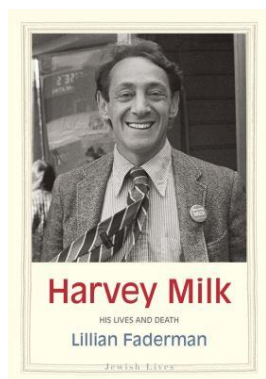
In what ways did your queer pioneer use their influence and skills to fight discrimination, protect themselves or seek acceptance? Do those personality traits or spheres of influence protect individuals today? Reflect on what tools you use to protect yourself.

How does your queer pioneer's philosophy of life compare to yours?

How did your queer pioneer build a support system and involve themselves in queer community? How have you been able to be involved in the queer community around you or online?

Need some more inspiration? Check out the list below for some suggestions on memoirs and nonfiction books and movies by and about queer folks to get you in the mood for growth and self-reflection.

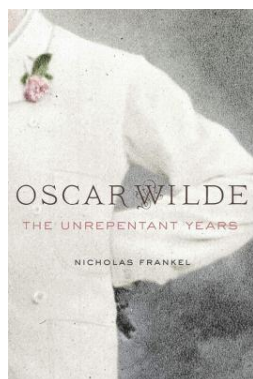
BOOKS



***Harvey Milk: His Lives and Death* by Lillian Faderman**

From the prizewinning Jewish Lives series, a lively and engaging biography of the first openly gay man elected to public office in the United States, a man fiercely committed to protecting all minorities.

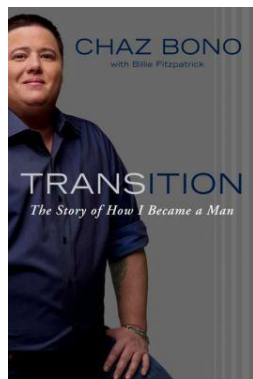
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***Oscar Wilde: The Unrepentant Years* by Nicholas Frankel**

Nicholas Frankel presents a new and revisionary account of Wilde's final years, spent in poverty and exile on the European continent following his release from an English prison for the crime of "gross indecency" between men. *Oscar Wilde: The Unrepentant Years* challenges the prevailing, traditional view of Wilde as a broken, tragic figure, a martyr to Victorian sexual morality, and shows instead that he pursued his post-prison life with passion, enjoying new liberties while trying to resurrect his literary career.

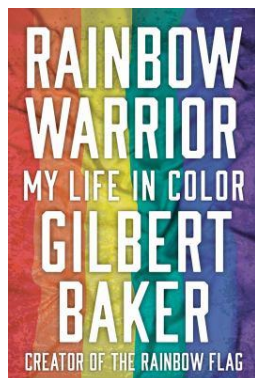
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***Transition: The Story of How I Became a Man* by Chaz Bono**

A groundbreaking and candid account of Chaz Bono's forty-year struggle to match his gender with his physical body.

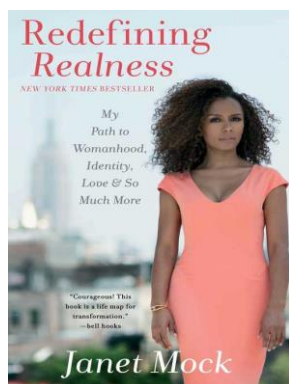
Catalog Link: <https://tinyurl.com/transitionbono>



Rainbow warrior: My Life in Color by Gilbert Baker

In 1978, Harvey Milk asked Gilbert Baker to create a unifying symbol for the growing gay rights movement. On June 25th of that year, Baker's Rainbow Flag debuted at San Francisco's Gay Freedom Day Parade. Baker had no idea his creation would become an international emblem of liberation, forever cementing his pivotal role in helping to define the modern LGBTQ+ movement.

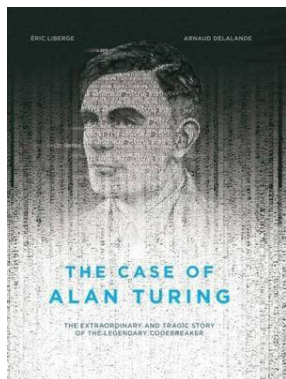
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Redefining Realness by Janet Mock

With unflinching honesty and moving prose, Janet Mock relays her experiences of growing up young, multiracial, poor, and trans in America, offering readers accessible language while imparting vital insight about the unique challenges and vulnerabilities of a marginalized and misunderstood population.

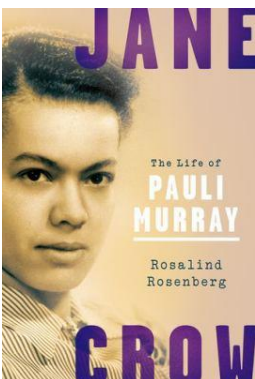
Catalog Link: <https://tinyurl.com/realnessmock>



The Case of Alan Turing: The Extraordinary and Tragic Story of the Legendary Codebreaker by Eric Liberge

The particulars of Turing's achievements were only made known in 2012, following the release of once-classified papers. Authors Liberge and Delalande used this information to create a graphic-biography that is scientifically rigorous yet understandable for the lay reader. Delving deep into Turing's life, this graphic work is an intimate portrayal of a brilliant gay man living in an intolerant world.

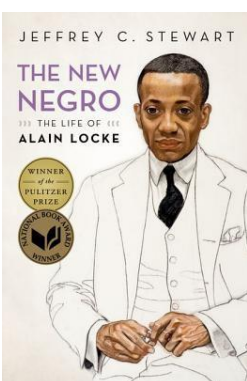
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***Jane Crow: The Life of Pauli Murray* by Rosalind Rosenberg**

Throughout her prodigious life, activist and lawyer Pauli Murray systematically fought against all arbitrary distinctions in society, channeling her outrage at the discrimination she faced to make America a more democratic country. In this definitive biography, Rosenberg offers a poignant portrait of a figure who played pivotal roles in both the modern civil rights and women's movements.

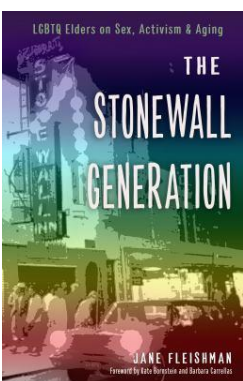
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***The New Negro: The Life of Alain Locke* by Jeffrey Stewart**

A tiny, fastidiously dressed man emerged from Black Philadelphia around the turn of the century to mentor a generation of young artists including Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jacob Lawrence, and call them the New Negro—the creative African Americans whose art, literature, music, and drama would inspire Black people to greatness.

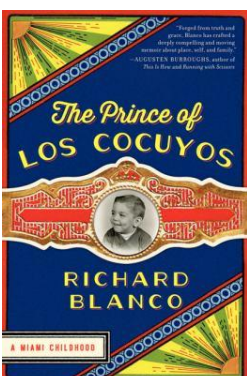
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***The Stonewall Generation: LGBTQ Elders on Sex, Activism, and Aging* by Jane Fleishman**

In this book, sexuality researcher Jane Fleishman shares the stories of fearless elders in the LGBTQ community who came of age around the time of the Stonewall Riots of 1969. In candid interviews, they lay bare their struggles, strengths, activism, and sexual liberation in the context of the political movements of the 1960s and 1970s and today.

Catalog Link: <https://bit.ly/3up4F1q>



***The Prince of Los Cocuyos: A Miami Childhood* by Richard Blanco**

A memoir from the first Latino and openly gay inaugural poet, which explores his coming-of-age as the child of Cuban immigrants and his attempts to understand his place in America while grappling with his burgeoning artistic and sexual identities.

Catalog Link: <https://bit.ly/3f0L3uc>

MOVIES



Reel In The Closet Restoring LGBTQ Home Movies

A film tech discovers the real lives of queer people in the past by restoring hundreds of never-before-seen home movies dating back to 1930.

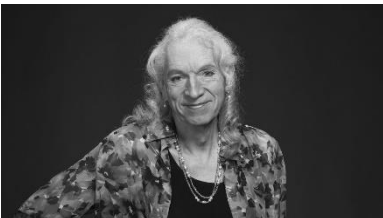
Kanopy Link: <https://bit.ly/2PVuelt>



Vito

Directed by award winner Jeffrey Schwarz, *Vito* paints a galvanizing portrait of Vito Russo, the outspoken activist in the LGBTQ+ community's struggle for equal rights, using period footage and film clips to capture a vibrant era of gay culture.

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A Chance to Dress

This film explores the complexity of gender expression through the story of MIT Professor Emertius and open cross dresser Dr. John "Tephra" Southard.

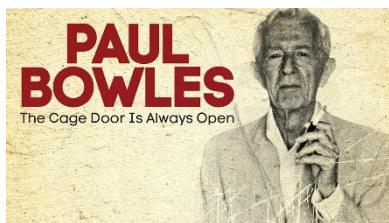
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The Cockettes

The Cockettes, a flamboyant ensemble of hippies decked out in outlandish gender bending finery created a series of legendary LSD-fueled midnight musicals in early 1970s San Francisco. This must-see documentary follows the rise and fall of this group of fashion forward performers from 1969-1972.

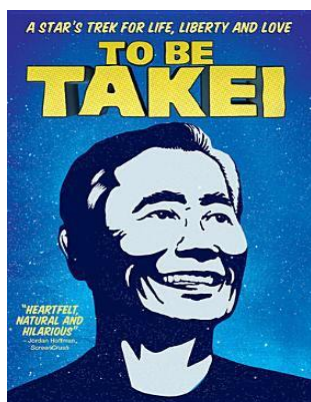
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Paul Bowles: The Cage Door is Always Open

Based on an exclusive series of interviews with Bowles shortly before his death and anecdotes provided by his friends and collaborators. This fascinating documentary reveals a daring and visionary life that went way beyond sexuality.

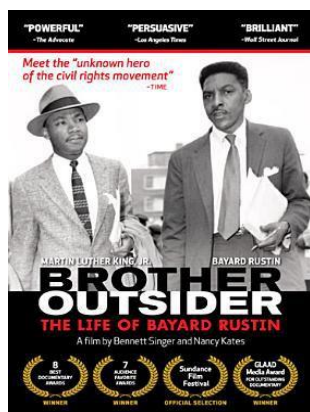
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To Be Takei

Take a hilarious, entertaining, and moving look at the many roles played by eclectic 77-year-old actor/activist George Takei. The film offers unprecedented access to the daily life of George and his husband/business partner, Brad Takei, and chronicles his fascinating personal journey from Japanese American internment camp to his iconic and groundbreaking role as Sulu on Star Trek, and his rise as a pop culture icon.

Catalog Link: <https://bit.ly/3xPt8z3>



Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin

A documentary examining the life of Bayard Rustin who, although one of the first "freedom riders," an adviser to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and A. Philip Randolph, and an organizer of the 1963 March on Washington, was forced to play a background role in landmark civil rights events because he was homosexual.

Catalog Link: <https://bit.ly/3b8mZo2>



Kiki

Filmmaker Sara Jordeno introduces viewers to some of Kiki culture's most prominent personalities, going beyond the glamour of the balls to highlight the serious challenges facing queer black and Latino young people. Bringing together heartrending personal stories with incredible displays of creative expression.

Catalog Link: <https://bit.ly/2PVwiiH>