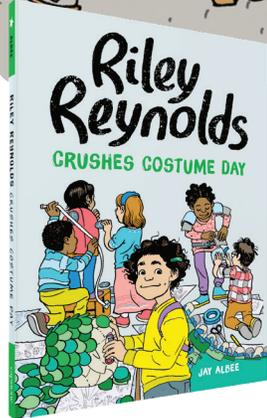


Riley Reynolds

CRUSHES COSTUME DAY

Educator's Guide



Riley Reynolds Crushes Costume Day Created by Jay Albee

It's book week at school, and nonbinary fourth grader Riley and their best friends craft hard for the Dress Like Your Favorite Character Day. Colorful fabric! Paint! Glitter! They are ready to make the biggest and best group costume ever! But most of the other kids are having trouble coming up with costumes. Riley is ready to use their creativity and vision to help as many kids as possible so Character Day will be a big success!

MEET THE CREATORS



Jen Breach

Jay Albee is the joint pen name for LGBTQ+ couple Jen Breach and J. Anthony. Between them, they've done lots of jobs: archaeologist, illustrator, ticket taker, and bagel baker, but now they write and draw all day long in their row house home in South Philadelphia, PA. Jen's best costume ever was a railway conductor. J. once dressed up as the sun.

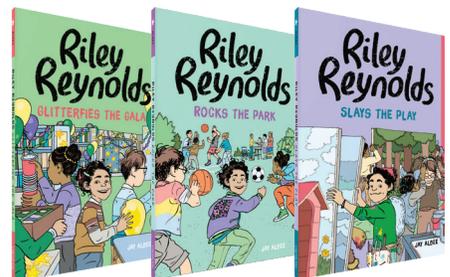


J. Anthony

ABOUT THE SERIES

Riley Reynolds loves crafting (and making messes), music (and playing it loud), and animals (from unicorns to dragons to fish and birds). They also love their family and friends. From making costumes to saving a park, Riley is always ready to help!

Riley is nonbinary and loves that too, proving that you don't have to identify as a boy or girl. You can just be yourself and be happy! Riley shows that being true to yourself is the most important thing you can do in this lively chapter book series by Jay Albee.



Before Reading

Explain to students that gender is a way to group people together based on who they are, how they feel, and how they express themselves to the world. So while some people identify as women and girls and others identify as men and boys, there are people who identify as nonbinary. Nonbinary people are neither a girl nor a boy, but may identify as a combination of both.

Gender attribution describes how your gender is perceived by others. Misgendering refers to the experience of others labeling a person with a gender they do not identify with.

- From [GLSEN](#), an education organization working to create safe and inclusive K-12 schools: “The essential thing to do after learning someone’s pronouns is remembering to use those pronouns when referring to that person. If you accidentally use the wrong pronoun when identifying someone, please correct yourself in front of that person and begin using the right pronoun. Everyone makes mistakes and making visible your work to respect and use someone’s pronoun after a mistake is an important moment to take. It is not the responsibility of the transgender or gender non-conforming person to address your feelings after misgendering.”

Cisgender people may rarely or never be misgendered. This can happen when, for example, you identify as a boy who was assigned male at birth, your gender expression stays in what is considered “masculine” in your culture, AND you stay around people who perceive and read your expression as masculine. You might even get to move through the world without thinking about gender, being misgendered, or feeling limited by gender stereotypes.

- Ask students if they have ever experienced this and acknowledge that it is a type of privilege called “cis-privilege.”

Sometimes people who aren’t cisgender or don’t have a binary gender identity can feel safer if they “pass” for cisgender and binary (usually in regard to their gender attribution or how they are perceived by others).

- Ask your students for examples of when they have pretended to be something or someone they are not because it seemed easier—not necessarily about gender.

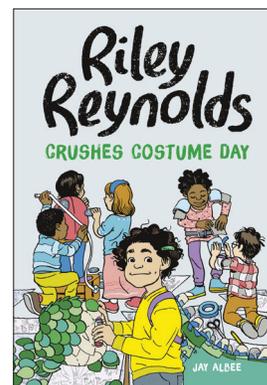
Discuss with students the stereotypes about their gender or the gender they were assigned at birth. Even though nonbinary people aren’t boys or girls, they may still be teased for breaking stereotypes associated with their sex assigned at birth or the gender they are perceived as being (*Girls like pink, boys don’t cry, etc.*).

- Ask your students about gender stereotypes they don’t believe in. Can you think of a time when you may have broken a gender stereotype? Are gender stereotypes useful?

Explain to students that you’re about to read a story about Riley Reynolds, whose gender is nonbinary. So when you talk about Riley, you will use the pronouns “they” and “them.”

Show the students the cover of the book and read the title out loud.

- Who do students think the story is about? (*A kid named Riley.*) What do you think Riley will do in this story? (*Have the best costume.*) What do you see the students doing on the cover? (*Making costumes with each other.*) Do you think Riley and their friends are having a good time? Why or why not? Do you think Riley is a creative kid? Why or why not?



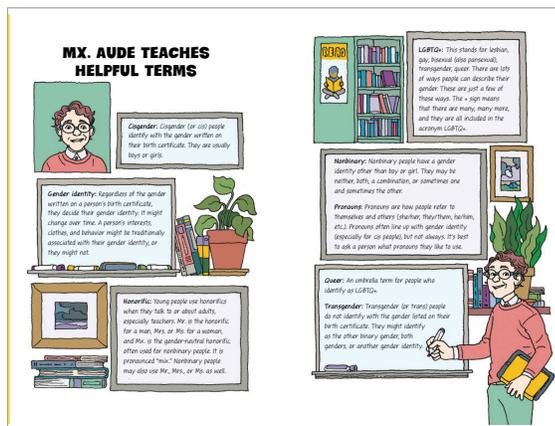
In this story, Riley uses their creativity to create their own amazing costume and also help all their schoolmates come up with awesome costume ideas.

- Why is creativity important? Ask students to share a time they were creative.



Using the Introduction

Go through the “Mx. Aude Teaches Helpful Terms” section in the book (pages 6–7) and decide which terms you would like to draw your students’ attention to while reading the book. Read the terms you chose to your students, as well as the definition from the page. Use any of these follow-up questions.



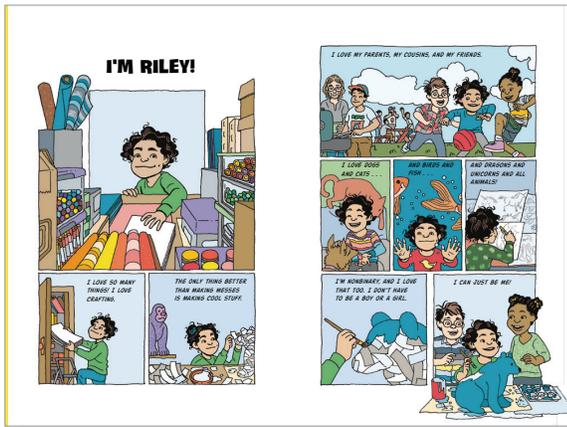
- Read **cisgender** and **gender identity** together. Ask your students how someone’s gender identity might change over time. (*They might say from a boy to a girl. They might say nonbinary.*) Ask your students if everyone’s gender changes over time. (*No, there are cisgender people.*) Ask your students what is something they do or like to wear to express their gender. (*Might start by giving an example of something you do or like to wear.*) This also presents an opportunity to reflect on gender stereotypes.
 - Draw a spectrum on the blackboard, or another relevant diagram, and discuss the ideas of “masculine,” “feminine,” and “gender neutral.” Ask students to think about gender stereotypes—the assumptions about what people should like and how they should dress or act based on their gender. Do only boys play video games or with Legos? Do only girls play with dolls or like nail polish? Does the color blue always have to be on the “masculine” end of the spectrum, or the color pink on the “feminine” end? Can you really know someone’s gender identity by the colors they wear? How does wearing blue or pink make you feel? Maybe no different than the way you feel when you wear yellow—or it makes you feel special and more like you. Do the colors you like change over time? Maybe sometimes they do.
- **Nonbinary:** Ask students what they think it means to identify as **neither** a boy or a girl and what it means to identify as **both** a boy and a girl. If you have already read the book, what does nonbinary mean to Riley?

- **Honorific:** Ask students what your honorific is. Who is someone at their school that uses the “Mr.” honorific? Who is someone at their school that uses the “Ms.” or “Mrs.” honorific? Ask your students who is someone at their school that uses the “Mx.” honorific. (*You can also use Mx. Aude from the book if there is no one at your school.*) Try to guide the discussion so that students understand why it is important to use the correct honorific. (*Because it is a word or title that expresses respect, and an individual gets to decide what their honorific is and how they want to be seen and acknowledged.*)
- **LGBTQ+:** Ask your students:
 - What does lesbian mean? (*A woman who falls in love with other women.*)
 - What does gay mean? (*A man who falls in love with other men.*)
 - What does bisexual/pansexual mean? (Someone who falls in love with all genders.)
 - What does transgender mean? (*People who do not identify with the gender listed on their birth certificate.*)
 - What does queer mean? (*An umbrella term for people who identify as LGBTQ+.*)
 - If they know anybody in the LGBTQ+ community? Have they ever celebrated Pride with their family or friends? If so, can they talk about what Pride is, and what it’s like?
- **Pronouns:** Ask students what pronouns they use when they talk about you. Ask them to share what pronouns others should use when talking about them. What pronouns are used in the book when talking about Riley? If you have already read the book, choose different characters and ask which pronouns they use.
- **Queer:** What is another term we learned that describes the queer community? (*LGBTQ+.*) Which term would you rather use and why?
- **Transgender:** Transgender people do not identify with the gender listed on their birth certificate. What does it mean to be a transgender man? (*Someone whose birth certificate says female but is actually a male.*) What does it mean to be a transgender woman? (*Someone whose birth certificate says male but is actually a female.*) What does it mean to be transgender and nonbinary? (*Someone who’s not actually the gender it says on their birth certificate—neither a male nor a female or both a male and female.*)

While Reading

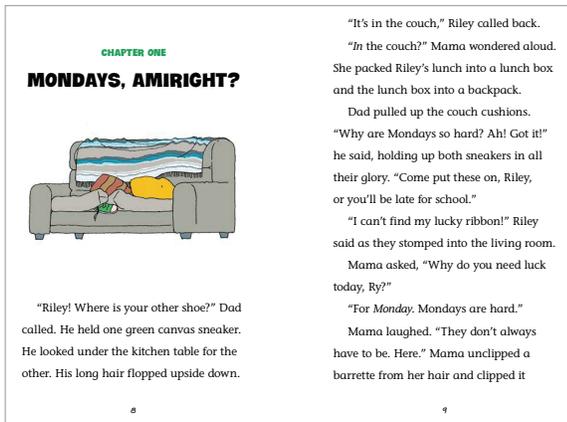
Read the **I'm Riley** introduction to the book (pages 4-5).

- What are some of the things that Riley loves? Who has something in common with Riley? What do you have in common with Riley? Why would you want to be Riley's friend?



Read the first three pages of **Chapter One: Monday Amiright?** (pages 8-10).

- Ask your students what Riley and their family think about Mondays. What in the story makes them think that? How does Riley's family support each other to get through this Monday?



At the end of the chapter, show your students the illustrations. Talk to them about how the art is in "panels," like a comic. Each piece of the story is in its own "frame," with the story moving from left to right and up to down, just like the rest of the story in the book.

- Why do they think the creators of this book put all the illustrations at the end of the chapter? How do they think having the illustrations at the end of the chapter helps tell the story?

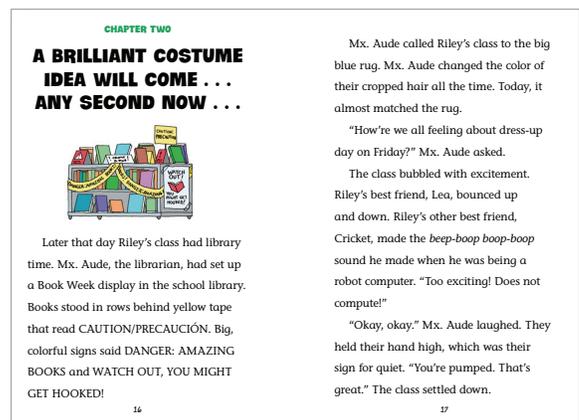


Read the part where Georgie comes up to talk to Riley about Character Day (pages 12-13). Draw your student's attention to the illustrations.

- What do the sketches inside the squiggly lines mean? (*The squiggly lines are thought bubbles, so the drawings inside the thought bubbles are different things Riley is imagining.*) What ideas does Riley have for their costume? (*You can point to each thought bubble and ask about just the one you are pointing to.*)

Read the first two pages of **Chapter Two: A Brilliant Costume Idea Will Come... Any Second Now...** (pages 16-17).

- Mx. Aude asks Riley's class how they're feeling about Character Day on Friday. What do Riley's classmates do to make Mx. Aude understand they're excited? (*Lea bounced up and down; Cricket said it was too exciting, etc.*)



Mx. Aude assigns the class to draw or write a story about their favorite character from a book.

- How does Riley and their friends feel once they have their paper and pens in front of them? Ask students what words from the book make them think that. (*Riley is suddenly faced with a blank page; Lea's feet went tippy-tap; Cricket beep-booped, etc.*) What illustrations from the book make them think that? (*Lea and Cricket are smiling and have their pens on the page; Riley is frowning and holding their head, etc.*)
- What does Riley do when they cannot come up with a fictional character to write about? (*Draws a picture of herself, Lea, and Cricket going on space adventures.*) What does that tell you about Riley? (*That they are creative by making up their own story. That they have good coping skills when frustrated, not dwelling on what they cannot do and instead doing what they can.*) Ask your students if there was a time they felt like they couldn't do something but figured it out.

Read **Chapter Three: Big Questions** (pages 22–31).

- Maddie and Tunde need help with their costumes. Do both Maddie and Tunde have the same problem with making their costumes? (*No. Maddie doesn't want to dress up, and Tunde doesn't know how to make his costume.*) How is Riley able to help both Maddie and Tunde? (*They were creative. They thought outside the box for solutions for both kids—Maddie dressing up her dog instead of herself, and Tunde dressing up as a rainbow instead of an elephant.*) Can your students think of a time they used creativity to solve a problem?

CHAPTER THREE
BIG QUESTIONS



At lunchtime, the playground buzzed with talk of dress-up day. Riley's classmate Olivia drew hearts on the blacktop with fat, colorful chalk.

She said, "I'm going to wear the flower-girl dress and tiara I wore at my cousin's wedding. I'll look just like a princess."

"Cool," said Riley. "Which princess?" Olivia shrugged. "They're all my favorite." Then she sighed. "I guess I'll have to pick one."

"I'm dressing up as something scary," yelled Marco, bouncing a rubber ball. Olivia rolled her eyes. "If anyone could like scary books, it'd be you, Marco."

Maddie pulled the end of her long braid. "I can never finish a scary book or movie. I hate being scared."

"I love it!" Marco yelled. Marco only had one volume on the playground. "When I'm president I'll make it so kids read only scary books." He kicked the ball across the playground and ran after it, yelling, "You'll see!"

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On pages 27–28, Olivia tells Lea that she cannot be a knight.

- Why does Olivia say this? (*Because Lea's a girl, and knights are boys.*) How does Riley convince them both that Lea can be a knight? (*By reminding them of The Princess in Black, who—while not a boy—is as tough as a knight.*) Ask your students if they think only boys can be knights.

Lea is worried that if she dresses up as a knight people will laugh at her.

- What does Riley's dad mean when he says that people laugh because they got the joke or because they didn't know what to think? When is it kind to laugh at someone else? When is it unkind to laugh at someone else?

Read **Chapter Four: Poof, Floof, Beads, And More!** (pages 32–37) and **Chapter Five: Crafting Is Serious Business** (pages 38–43).

- On pages 32–40, how do Riley and their parents come up with a plan that will help Riley's classmates finish their costumes? (*Riley asks if Lea and Cricket can come over to work on costumes together. Riley's dad suggests taking the entire walking carpool to thrift and craft shops.*) Once they get to the shops, how does Riley continue to help their classmates? (*Riley helps Georgie make his costume more theatrical and helps Nelle figure out how to make her Grumpy Ladybug costume.*)

CHAPTER FOUR
POOF, FLOOF, BEADS, AND MORE!



When they arrived at the store the next day, Marie pulled some boxes out from the back.

"You can have anything from these boxes you want," she said.

The kids dived into the boxes. They were full of great stuff—lengths of fabric

and strange shirts and socks and hats and teapots and all kinds of things! It was everything Riley had hoped!

Cricket quickly found the perfect puffy-sleeved prince's tunic. It had a rip in it, but that would be easy to fix. Riley found what they were looking for too.

The other kids kept digging, hoping they'd know what they were looking for when they found it. Georgie picked some bead necklaces out of the box.

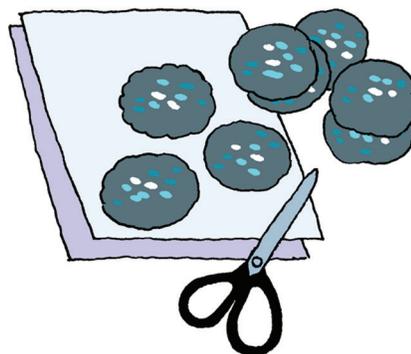
"Cool beads, Georgie. What are you thinking?" asked Riley.

Georgie sighed. "I want to dress up as Melissa from the book by Alex Gino. You know she's my favorite character." Riley did know that. Georgie talked about that

32 35

On page 41, Lea, Cricket, and Riley start working on their costumes.

- Ask students if they think Lea, Cricket, or Riley could make their costumes by themselves. When is it better to work as a team? Ask your students if there ever was a time they needed help from others to get something done.



Read the first three pages of **Chapter Six: Riley Reynolds, Costume Visionary** (pages 44-46).

- Riley wonders if they really are a costume visionary. What worked best when Riley helped classmates come up with costume ideas? (*When they listen carefully and help them come up with their own ideas.*) Ask your students about a time they listened carefully to help someone else or when they were helped because someone listened to them.

CHAPTER SIX
**RILEY REYNOLDS,
COSTUME VISIONARY**



All Wednesday morning at school, Riley daydreamed about paper-mache dragon heads and before they knew it, it was lunchtime.

"Dress-up day is going to be so fun!" said Georgie.

"I know, right?" said Riley. "How's your costume-making going?"

"It's so much fun. And Mom is reading me *Melissa* again for inspiration," said Georgie. "Your idea is turning out so great, Riley. I told my whole class that you're a costume visionary!"

Riley grinned.

"In fact," continued Georgie, "some of them need help figuring out their costumes. Do you think you could come talk to them?"

"Oh!" said Riley. "Um." Georgie had called Riley a *costume visionary*. Riley liked the sound of it but wondered what it actually meant. Riley thought about helping Lea and Cricket with their

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Continue on reading the rest of chapter six.

- After reading pages 49-50, ask your students why Riley was proud of themselves even though the costume didn't turn out the way they first imagined it. (*Because Riley didn't have anything they needed to make what they imagined. Because Riley figured out how to make something really cool with what they did have.*)

Read Chapter Seven: And Then It Was Friday (pages 52-60).

- On page 59, when looking out at all their classmates, Riley "felt light as a feather." Ask your students why. (*Because Riley could feel how happy everyone was while wearing their costumes and because Riley helped so many of their classmates bring their ideas to life.*)

CHAPTER SEVEN
**AND THEN IT WAS
FRIDAY**



"On top of the fridge!" Dad called back. Mama sighed. She wasn't sure if the top of the fridge was better or worse than in the couch.

Cricket and Lea were sitting at the kitchen table, dressed in their costumes and ready to go. They had arrived at Riley's house extra early, bubbling with excitement.

Dad grabbed the shoe off the fridge with one hand and grabbed a slice of eggy bread with the other. He shoved the breakfast into his mouth and the shoe onto Riley's foot.

"Okay, team," he said. "Let's go!"

"Have a great day," Mama said, waving them out the door.

"Dad! Where is my other green sneaker?" Riley called. It was Friday morning. Riley had on the green leggings and sweater, socks of a dragon, and one green sneaker.

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After Reading

Activity Idea:

Have your own Character Day! Invite students to make a mask or a prop inspired by their favorite book character with art supplies in your classroom. Do a show-and-tell at the end or throw a parade in your school with everyone wearing their character creations.

Discussion Questions:

1. If your school had Dress Like Your Favorite Character Day, who would you choose? Why is that character or book meaningful to you?



2. Riley's classmate Maddie does not enjoy dressing up. What are some reasons someone might not enjoy dressing up? What are some reasons someone else might enjoy it?

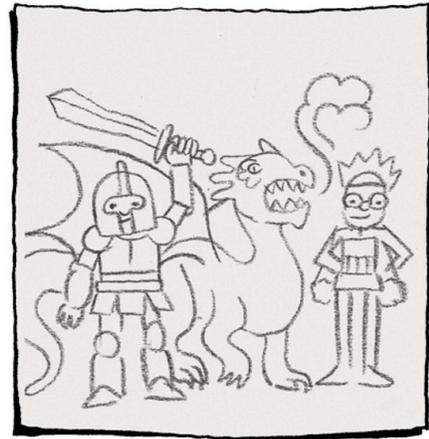
3. An important part of this story is collaboration and helping each other. Riley gets a lot of meaning out of helping others. In what ways did Riley help their friends? In what ways did everyone work together to make costume day a success?



4. What are the circumstances in Riley's life that mean they do not have to hide their gender identity? (*Supportive family, having their pronouns known and respected, not being bullied at school, not being the only nonbinary person at school, e.g. Mx. Aude.*)

Writing Prompts:

1. Write a story or article for the South Philly Elementary School newspaper about Dress Like Your Favorite Character Day. You can interview Riley, Lea, Cricket, and others for your story.
2. When Olivia wonders whether girls can be knights, Lea is worried. Has anyone ever told you that you couldn't do something because of your gender or gender identity?
3. Write a story or draw a picture of you and your favorite book character on a new adventure together.



More Resources to Support LGBTQ+ Students and Families

Advocates for Youth, LGBTQ Health and Rights
advocatesforyouth.org/issue/lgbtq-health-and-rights

American Library Association, Rainbow Booklist
glbtrt.ala.org/rainbowbooks

Athlete Ally
athleteally.org

Gender Spectrum
Genderspectrum.org

GLSEN
glsen.org

GSA Network
gsanetwork.org

HRC Foundation's Welcoming Schools
welcomingschools.org

Learning for Justice, Gender and Sexuality
learningforjustice.org/topics/gender-sexual-identity

National Education Association, edjustice,
Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth
neaedjustice.org/supporting-lgbtq-youth

A Queer Endeavour
Aqueerendeavor.org

Stop Bullying
stopbullying.gov/bullying/lgbtq