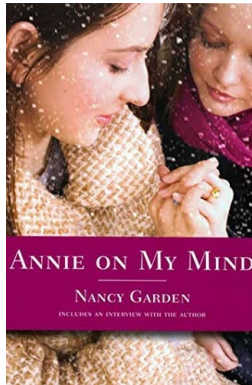


## ***Finalist, High School Category***



Essayist: Ellie, age 17, Thomas Jefferson High School for Science & Technology

Advocating for: *Annie on My Mind* by Nancy Garden

"I like women," I proudly proclaim. I am neither a boy nor a man.

"In a feminist way or a gay way?" my friend laughs.

"Both. I like women in both ways. A book that also likes women in both ways is *Annie on My Mind*, written by Nancy Garden."

Published in 1982, *Annie on My Mind* follows the journey of high school senior Liza Winthrop, the student council president at her high school in Brooklyn whose dream is to attend MIT and become an architect. One day at a museum, she meets a girl her age named Annie Kenyon, who lives in a poorer part of New York, has a vivid imagination and bright personality, and dreams of studying music in college. The two girls become friends and fall in love as they battle strains on their relationship from their difference in class, Liza's struggles with adults at her school, and the suffocating homophobia surrounding them.

This novel brings positive representation and thus meaning to all the girls and women reading it. Both young women, Liza and Annie, are depicted as girls with agency and ambition. While leadership roles such as being a student council president might typically be given to a male character, Liza bears the burden of responsibility. Annie's playfulness and imagination, which give her an almost childish image, are treated with reverence instead of ridicule. Liza and Annie also both are successful in what they love; they end up at very good universities, MIT and UC-Berkeley, respectively. While reading this book, I was elated to find girls written in a realistic, positive, non-demeaning light, girls in whom I could see myself. When well-written female characters are still difficult to find today, the 1982 novel *Annie on My Mind* provides not one but two ambitious, successful young women for girls to look up to.

The novel also brings hope to its LGBTQ+ readers. One major plot point is when Ms. Stevenson and Ms. Widmer, two older women who teach at Liza's school and live together under the guise of close friends, are outed as gay. Despite being fired from their jobs and suffering the derision of adults and children alike, the two women bravely carry on with their lives and support Liza and Annie's relationship.



As an LGBTQ+ individual, seeing two women able to grow old while remaining strong and in love meant a lot to me, especially because there is a history of LGBTQ+ people dying due to hate crimes and stigma. The book also has a happy ending, which is unfortunately uncommon for LGBTQ+ stories, concluding with a sprout of hope for Liza and Annie's loving relationship. Other LGBTQ+ bibliophiles deserve and *need* to feel the same kind of hope *Annie on My Mind* brought me.

As a book that likes women, *Annie on My Mind* deserves to be available for everyone, and especially for the women who like women.