QYA July Zine

Cover art by Cora (any pronouns)
Due to our strong belief in uncensored creativity, we decided to not put content limits on our creators for this publication. However, we understand that some of the content within this zine may be triggering to some readers. In this and future QYA zines, a list of specific triggers can be found at the top of each page, and any potentially triggering themes can be found at the beginning of each zine. This issue includes a brief mention of sexual content for educational purposes. If you find yourself struggling after reading, we encourage you to reach out for support.

We hope you enjoy this publication, and are inspired to create whatever your heart desires.

With love and care,

Esmée Silverman (she/her)
Queer Youth Assemble Co-Founder

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Queer Youth Assemble Writing Team Lead
What is QYA?

Queer Youth Assemble is a non-profit youth-led organization dedicated to serving queer youth across the United States and its territories. We are committed to nurturing the joy, interests, and talents of queer youth, and giving queer youth the resources and support to create positive change within their communities. We envision a day where all queer youth are happy, supported, and able to reach their fullest potential.
Six Queer Books to Read this Summer by Zoe M.

1. *Heartstopper (Volume One)* by Alice Oseman
   This is the graphic novel that inspired the hit Netflix series! The author is openly aromantic asexual and uses she/they pronouns. *Heartstopper* is an LGBTQ+ coming-of-age story about two boys getting to know themselves and each other.

2. *Red, White & Royal Blue* by Casey McQuiston
   This novel is a perfect beach read—it is a cute, lighthearted queer romance that doesn’t linger on homophobia. The author, Casey McQuiston, is non-binary and uses they/she pronouns.

3. *This Way Out* by Tufayel Ahmed
   *This Way Out* is a queer romance with a Bangladeshi protagonist who faces pushback from his Muslim family after announcing his engagement with a man. This novel involves homophobia, but it is a powerful story to read about a young queer man balancing his family, culture, and identity.

4. *I’ll Be The One* by Lyla Lee
   *I’ll Be The One* is a lighthearted novel featuring a bisexual Korean protagonist about defying stereotypes and feeling comfortable in your own skin.

5. *Stay Gold* by Tobly McSmith
   This novel features a transgender protagonist in a heterosexual relationship. It focuses on themes of staying true to yourself despite societal pressures and biases. Author Tobly McSmith is a trans man who uses he/him pronouns.

6. *The One Who Loves You the Most* by Medina
   *The One Who Loves You the Most* is a story about finding yourself and finding community while questioning your sexuality, gender identity, and your place in the world. The author is a queer nonbinary Afro-indigenous person who uses they/them pronouns.
Nowadays, Polari is seen as a relic to the British queer community—and is almost wholly obsolete to everyone else. Although its common usage has ceased, the remnants of Polari have seeped into mainstream culture. But what was Polari, and why is it important now?

The Polari sociolect was in part created to define aspects of gay culture and homoeroticism that didn’t already have words in the English language. It was also used to avoid persecution at a time when homosexuality was still illegal (it was only decriminalized in England in 1967, where Polari was created). Words attributed to this sociolect include “drag” (which contains a more neutral connotation than “crossdressing”) and certain sexual positions/acts that don’t fit the heteronormative mold. These words were revolutionary, as they empowered queer people to better define themselves and exist in their own circles.

Although this secret dialect was groundbreaking for its time, its necessity faded along with its usage.

As society progressed, Polari was bound to die out eventually—but a few fragments remain, as if Polari culture was the Achillean equivalent to Sapphic poetry. If you’d like to hear Polari spoken, the BBC has recordings of Round The Horne, the radio show that familiarized non-queer people with the sociolect. To read Polari, check out the Polari translation of the Christian Bible by the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. Professor Paul Baker of Lancaster University has written extensively on the subject as well, to get more historical context.

If Polari is practically a dead sociolect, how is it still relevant now? Polari was a great example of how queer cultures could exist and flourish in a society that actively criminalized and punished them for their love. While Polari was fairly isolated, usually used by cisgender, white, British gay men, it gives some insight into how revolutionary and radical movements can continue in secret without government interference. It also offers hope to a new LGBTQ+ generation, who have already started creating their own “technological Polari”—alternate spellings/words describing sensitive topics like race and sexuality are commonplace on social media platforms, which often use community guidelines as an excuse to censor. Looking at how queer history has progressed, I am optimistic towards the future of queer literature and education.

Resources & Further Reading:
Babbel Article on Polari
BBC Article and Video on Polari
Lancaster University Article on Polari
by Scarlet (she/her)

Image description: a pair of small rainbow striped flip-flops with black straps are cross-stitched onto white fabric.
Oh, great mountains,
Why must you stand so tall?
The shadow of your cliff
eclipses the trees
The roads
The alleyways
Everything but the yellow line on the tar
The sounds of crickets and frogs
hide under you
They drag me back to a time
When I was so scared of you
Little light posts cast over you
As you drive to the motel
Casting a spotlight ahead
And a shadow behind

The howling of a train
Pierces through the sound
of the chirping frogs
Just as the cool breeze
Pierces the warm air

Little light posts cast over you
As you drive to the motel
Casting a spotlight ahead
And a shadow behind

You have a bag of snap peas
And a container of hummus
The radio is on
Playing lullabies

I really used to miss you
I look behind your light posts
You drove by so fast
As I walked forward
when i first saw you 
it wasn’t some special realization 
it was just someone looking back at me 
i could even sully the comparison 
with freyja, ishtar, eros. 
i can’t say you complete me, 
for i am whole alone 
nor do you bring all that i need 
nor i to you 
but in this eternal dance 
we, for now, are partners 
our dance is sometimes 
three or four 
together or in pairs 
but our hands shall always meet 
when the band reposes
A System’s Experience with Drag

by Nikei (they/he/she)

Me getting into drag was simply a coincidence. I saw a video from RuPaul’s Drag Race pop up on my YouTube feed, I watched it, and I found it interesting. Naturally, I decided to watch more and dive into a rabbit hole of drag, which explains why I have this sudden interest in the world of drag today.

I love peering into the many layers of drag, from the art of putting the outfits together, to learning how to improve on makeup, to finding out what makes a lip sync performance so captivating. But of course, simply reading and watching the art wasn’t sufficient enough for my curious little brain to eat up, so I had the brilliant idea to try doing drag myself. I followed makeup tutorials on TikTok and watched performances on Instagram and tried to copy everything that I saw on social media just so I could participate in drag and enjoy myself. However, I wasn’t the only one whose curiosity was piqued, and the other one just so happened to be sharing the same body.

Although I am not diagnosed with DID (Dissociative Identity Disorder) yet, I did discover at the beginning of the year that I’m actually a system. There are 4 other alters who share the same headspace and body as me, two of them being fictives, one of them a child, one of them who only recently started helping me. One of my fictives just so happens to be a character from Persona 5, an artist named Yusuke Kitagawa (he/they). Not only has he expressed interest in visual arts, such as drawing and painting, but he also dabbles in the performing arts sometimes, having done a little bit of piano and dance. They also helped me during my application for the performance major at Berklee, and I have to owe it to their rendition of Billy Joel’s “Vienna” for my acceptance. Later on, I learned that he had also taken an interest in doing drag; not just the makeup and outfit part, but also the lip syncing part. So as a result, I decided to give Yusuke a little crash course on drag before officially starting our career (if you could call it that).
Prior to the crash course, my family had gone on a trip to New York for spring break, where I splurged on K-beauty products and bought setting spray, foundation, and an eyelash curler, among other things. A few weeks later, I wrote down a list of the order in how to apply makeup, from skincare all the way down to setting spray. I picked up some tips on applying makeup, which is where I learned the following things:

- Primer is essential and should be one of the first things you apply
- Don’t cake too much foundation on your face or it’ll be a pain later on
- Bronzer outlines the face, highlighter goes in the middle of the face
- Don’t skip the bottom lashes when applying mascara
- If you’re planning on wearing a wig, wear the hair net while doing your makeup

In the end, I had to be the one to dress the body and paint the face because Yusuke was still making an attempt to learn. I had to explain to him why some products had to be applied a certain way and why I did things in a certain order, which helped him significantly when he did the body’s makeup for the first time. They took care of the performance part, researching different drag queens and how they lip sync differently depending on the song, as well as depending on their style of drag. The two of us decided to collaborate and drag up the body together in the end; while I would be taking care of the outward appearance and the costuming, Yusuke would deal with the performance aspect and how to carry us while we were in drag.

The first time Yusuke saw the body in drag, he barely had any words. He was shocked at how we looked and how well we had dressed ourselves up. He developed a newfound confidence in himself and took on an entirely different version of himself. I could tell they felt much more comfortable in this new look when we made a couple of videos in drag and they carried themselves like a true, professional drag queen. To this day, they still look forward to every time we put the body in drag so they can experience that feeling again, and so do I.
The Stress of Summer
by Blayr (he/they)

i tell people i don't know how to swim,
i'm lying, i learned to swim when i was a toddler

i tell people i don't own a bathing suit,
i'm lying, i own plenty of bathing suits

i tell people i don't like to swim,
i'm lying, i love swimming

but still i lie, why? i look around at all the other boys,
they're wearing their swim trunks, no shirt

i look at myself, i'm wearing my swim trunks,
but the difference is i'm wearing a binder, they're not

i stand out, people often stare, my body isn't right,
why can't it be right?

i'm trapped in my body, trapped like a bird in cage,
a bird who just wants to fly, to be free

let me be free
Sometimes I think I'm beautiful
Sometimes I take lots of pictures and post them
Sometimes I feel confident in my body and wear what I want
Sometimes I believe it when my partners tell me they think I'm pretty
Sometimes I believe myself that I'm pretty

Other times I want to smash my mirror into pieces
Other times I can't stand my friends taking pictures with me
Other times I wear what I think people I value will like best
Other times I want to scream when anyone compliments me on anything
Other times I truly hate my reflection

Both of these parts of me are valid
They come and go as they please
It's about which side I choose to listen to more
Every person is beautiful and belongs in their body and that is something I will fight for people to be able to believe
In the last couple years, animation has become a beacon of positive, explicit representation for the LGBTQ+ community. From She-Ra: Princess of Power to more recent shows like The Owl House, there has been a transformation in representation in animation.

The roots of queer rep relied on subtext, as stating a character was queer was taboo. But that didn't stop queer animators. While there is still a struggle to show queer relationships on screen, animation’s representation has turned from a place of stigma and negative stereotypes to a medium that uplifts the queer community.

She-Ra: Princess of Power was one of the first shows to put a queer relationship at the forefront of its story. The relationship between Adora and Catra is the cause of internal conflict for both characters, regardless of any romantic implications. While the creators had to fight for the final Catradora kiss, it was a huge moment for fans confirming the relationship.

The Owl House takes another step forward. Not only is the main romance WLW, but this show also has a very nonchalant use of the “they” pronoun, using it for nonbinary characters without question. Despite the show’s premature cancellation, Luz and Amity’s relationship will remain a fan favorite.

There are so many more shows that could have been included here; Kipo and the Age of Wonderbeasts, Sailor Moon Crystal, 天官赐福 (Heaven Official’s Blessing)... However, it all comes down to the positive impact of representation. Queer stories deserve to be told, and queer audiences deserve to feel seen.
Colors of Summer

Cover art by Cora (any pronouns)

Image description: The image has a sky blue background, and at the top reads "QYA July Zine." Below are various summer items colored as various LGBTQIA+ flags.

From top left to top right, a seagull with the colors of the nonbinary flag, a green starfish, a yellow starfish, a palm tree with the colors of the asexual flag, an orange starfish, and a pair of flip-flops with the colors of the pansexual flag. Below that, from left to right, a seashell with the colors of the aromantic flag, a sailboat with the colors of the gay/MLM flag, an umbrella with the colors of the transgender flag, and a pair of sunglasses with the colors of the genderqueer flag. Below that, from left to right, a purple starfish, an ice cream cone with the colors of the genderfluid flag, an anchor with the colors of the bisexual flag, a snorkel with the colors of the lesbian flag, and a bucket of sand and a shovel with the colors of the agender flag. At the bottom, from left to right, a red starfish, a sun with the colors of the intersex flag, a pair of swim trunks with the colors and design of the polyamorous flag, a blue starfish, and a beach ball with the colors of the Progress Pride flag.
Thank you!

Stay tuned for next month's edition & QYA zine announcements!

Visit us at:
Website: queeryouthassemble.org
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