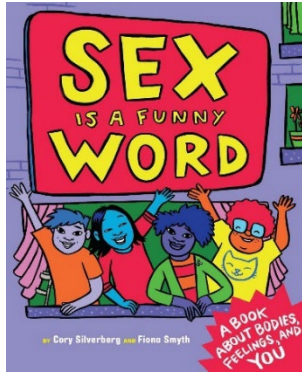




[Sex is a Funny Word: A Book About Bodies, Feelings, and You](#)

by Cory Silverberg, Illustrated by Fiona Smyth

Triangle Square, an imprint of Seven Stories Press, distributed by Penguin Random House, 2015

ISBN 978-1609806064

Age Range: 8-10

Grade Range: 2-6 (Recommended by School Library Journal)

PUBLISHER'S BOOK SYNOPSIS

A comic book for kids that includes children and families of all makeups, orientations and gender identities, *Sex is a Funny Word* is an essential resource about bodies, gender, and sexuality for children ages 8 to 10 as well as their parents and caregivers. This book opens up conversations between young people and their caregivers in a way that allows adults to convey their values and beliefs while providing information about boundaries, safety and joy.

REVIEWS AND PRAISE

[Kirkus Reviews](#) - Moving up in target audience from their explanation of reproduction, *What Makes a Baby* (2013), Silverberg and Smyth explore various meanings for the word “sex.”

In their own ways, Zai, Cooper, Mimi, and Omar respond to information in chapters about bodies, “Boys, Girls, All of Us,” touch, language, and “Crushes, Love, and Relationships.” With skin tones in unlikely shades (blue! purple! green!) and wildly diverse crowd scenes, chances are good that any reader can identify with someone in these pages. Refreshingly, these crowds are diverse in a way that does not appear assembled by checklist. 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. Puberty will be addressed in a third title.

This carefully thought-out explanation may surprise but should be widely appreciated. (glossary) (*Nonfiction*. 7-10)

[Publisher’s Weekly](#) - Silverberg and Smyth follow *What Makes a Baby* with a highly visual introduction to sex education for older readers, featuring four characters between the ages of eight and 10 with skin in a rainbow of crayon-box colors. 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. Ages 7–10. *(July) Starred Review*

[School Library Journal](#) Gr 2–6—Silverberg and Smyth follow up their book for younger readers, *What Makes a Baby* (Triangle Square, 2013), with this engaging introduction to gender, bodies, and relationships. A diverse cast of cartoon kids—in terms of appearance, ability, and point of view—explore the multiple meanings of the word *sex* with their teacher, friends, and family members. 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. The quality text is enhanced and brought to life by comics drawn with bold lines on bright, full-bleed pages. Smyth's illustrations are interactive, fun, and edifying, presenting a range of body types and diversity. 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*

[Common Sense Media](#) - Not your typical book about sex for kids, this fun, honest volume covers the topic in new and exciting ways. *Sex Is a Funny Word* provides a framework of foundational information about bodies, gender, and touch, and then invites young readers and their adults to talk to each other in order to "fill in the blanks" with beliefs, values, and connections to family history, culture, and community. This book isn't actually about sex: It's about providing a foundation for kids to understand sex as a big, multifaceted life experience.

Also notable is the book's lack of jargon -- you won't find identity labels or advanced terms in the text (though there is a useful glossary) -- which means that all the different ways we talk about and define ourselves are available to use in the conversations this book will inspire. The interesting, diverse characters and inclusive language and art mean that every reader will be able to see themselves in this book. Fiona Smyth's thick-line cartoon drawings and bold color choices make for a visually absorbing read. This truly modern and open-ended guide about sex, bodies, and touch will help parents and kid readers alike take a thoughtful, relationship-building path toward growing up. 5/5 stars

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

2016 [ALA/ALSC Notable List](#)

2016 [Stonewall Book Awards-Honor](#)

2016 [Norma Fleck Award for Canadian Children's Non-Fiction](#)

MEDIA AND RESOURCES

[How One Author Is Aspiring To Make Sex Education More Relatable To Today's Kids](#)- NPR Interview

[Sex IS a Funny Word!](#)- Medium Interview

AUTHOR STATEMENT

"My work focuses on talking about sexuality and reproduction in a way that includes all kinds of families, and that is inclusive of all kinds of gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, and sexual identity." Cory Silverberg

RESPONSES TO PRIOR CHALLENGES

[Book Challenge Ludlow, MA Middle School](#)

Some parents challenged *Sex is a Funny Word* at Baird Middle School. It went through and survived a vetting process and remains on the shelves.

[Book Challenge Meridian, ID Pubic Library](#)

On August 17, 2022 members of the groups Idaho Liberty Dogs and Concerned Citizens of Meridian spoke out against *Sex is a Funny Word* by Cory Silverberg during the public comments of the Meridian District Library's board meeting. They referred to the developmentally-appropriate sex education materials as "smut-filled pornography" and claimed it was "time to defund the Meridian Library Tax District." The title remains available throughout the library system.

BCLS RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTION

After reviewing the book, *Sex is a Funny Word: A book About Bodies, Feelings, and YOU* and the accompanying Request for Reconsideration of Materials form submitted by [REDACTED], it is the Review Committee's recommendation that the book be retained in its location in the children's department.

The Burlington County Library System provides non-fiction materials for children of varied reading levels, and based on publishers' guidelines, the age range for this material makes it appropriate for the Children's Department.

This request really focused on the drawings presented in the comics, as well as the sentence that usually accompanied the drawing of the body part, saying that it might feel good to touch it, or it might hurt, or it might be sensitive. Saying the way a body part might feel when it is touched is just an objective description about the human body, it is not sexualizing children in any way, nor is the text salacious. Additionally, this type of sentence is usually part of a detailed section that describes the basic anatomy and function of the body parts. The author uses humor and cartoons to help lighten up what is a lot of information-- it is, after all, written in a comic book style and the title tells you it's going to be humorous.

We understand this book may not be for everyone, but many of the examples presented as concerning do not take into consideration the entirety of the selection in which they exist in the book.

Throughout the book, the themes of being informed, feeling good about having privacy and body autonomy, and the importance of communication with trusted adults is enforced repeatedly. Looking at it again, it's easy to see why it is so highly rated by industry professionals.

As to the concern that children will think it's acceptable to have sex at a younger age, or that it's only fun without consequences, this book does not provide proof to support that concern. On page 13, in the

cartoon a child states “My dad says sex isn’t funny at all. It’s something special and beautiful for when I grow up.” On pages 24- 25, it provides three definitions for the word sex, including that it’s something grownups do, and that it is a way to make babies (reproduction). There are no depictions of sex in the book, nor is it encouraged as an activity.

██████ requested that the book be moved to the adult parenting section so that parents can decide if they want their child exposed to this book. Our Parent Resources collection is housed in the children’s department, so this doesn’t seem like a solution. If █████ meant to reshelve it in the Adult Nonfiction section, it does not belong there as it is meant for children. BCLS’s [Customer Conduct Policy](#) states that children age 11 and under should have an adult or caregiver within sight and sound range at all times. We trust that parents and caregivers are supervising children at the library and implementing the restrictions they wish to place on their own children’s reading or viewing materials.