

Student: Michael Malatesta (12<sup>th</sup> grade)

School: Herndon High School

Principal: Dr. Elizabeth Noto

A good book will either repaint the world or make readers reevaluate themselves. The most inspirational and important book I've read has to be *Symptoms of Being Human* by Jeff Garvin, which follows a gender-fluid protagonist and paints a vivid picture of the struggles faced by LGBTQ teenagers. As a teenager who has experienced several instances of bullying, discrimination, and violence for my identity, I was inspired to see a character who faced the same challenges I do, and face them head-on. The book motivated me to begin seeking out more Pride events and to participate in my high school's Gay-Straight Alliance, where I became the president of the club in 2017. I was able to increase the membership of the club and turn it into an established safe place for questioning teens or those who have parents who may not be accepting. *Symptoms of Being Human* was also one of the first LGBTQ-oriented novels I'd ever read, and it made me so happy to see the topic of the LGBTQ community take center stage in a narrative. I am also a writer, and it gives me hope that my own stories that feature LGBTQ characters will be well received. This book is also my go-to recommendation to people who want to understand the perspective of a gender-fluid person, or just a go-to recommendation in general.