

*Providing  
a Window  
for All*

**LGBTQAI+**  
**BOOKS**

*for Children  
and Teens*

Foreword by  
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and Liz Deskins

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## Foreword

# LGBTQAI+ Books Save Lives

JAMIE CAMPBELL NAIDOO, PHD

Quality books representing culturally diverse children and their families can serve as mirrors, reflecting one's culture; windows, providing glimpses into the lives of other cultures; or doors, allowing one to walk in someone else's shoes.<sup>1</sup> A good book can also save lives and build bridges between seemingly disparate worlds.

As a gay child raised in rural Kentucky, I was surrounded by classmates, religious leaders, and caring adults who clearly conveyed that something was wrong with me because I did not fit in to society's strict views of gender expression and masculinity. When I was younger, I played with dolls and pink ponies, cooked mud pies and held tea parties, and dressed in my grandmother's scarves and costume jewelry. In kindergarten, I was Raggedy Ann in the Halloween parade and often found myself in the "play house" learning center where I could cook and play "daddy" to all the babies. In first grade, my prized possession was a pair of rainbow roller skates. Most of my friends were girls. When I grew older, though, I was discouraged from playing with girls and participating in "girl" activities. In junior high, it became horrifying clear that I was different from other boys. While my male classmates were interested in sports and the physical development of my female friends, I was more interested in crafts and the physique of guys in gym class. Initially, I would tell myself that I was scientifically studying the other boys to compare physical changes in our bodies, while also wishing that I could look like them. Eventually, I admitted to myself that I found some of them attractive. But I knew better than to tell anyone! There was only one student in our small school who was out, and everyone heard the slurs hurled toward him and saw the blind eyes of teachers as he was being bullied.

Like many queer teens in rural areas or hostile environments, I learned how to live firmly in the closet. I was alone and thought there was no one like me. Books with LGBTQAI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, asexual, intersex, and other diverse identities and expressions) characters were not plentiful and certainly not present in my conservative school library. The public library in our town, run by volunteers from the Women's Club, was open only two days a week. Even if the library had stocked copies of the few gay-friendly young adult books available in the late 1980s and early 1990s, I would not have checked them out due to the lack of privacy inherent in a paper-based library card system that allowed anyone to track borrowers of a particular title. It wasn't until I was in college that I found a book that truly served as the mirror for which I had long been searching. Todd Brown's *Entries from a Hot Pink Notebook* was my savior. I could completely relate to the main character's experiences; the fourteen-year-old protagonist could have been me in high school. I used the book to help sort out some of my feelings related to religion, sexuality, and identity; and eventually I used it to come out to my mother.

While this book has a special place in my heart, thinking about it also brings up resentment. Where were books like this when I needed them as a child? As a teenager? Why did I have to wait until college before I could see myself in the pages of a book? Rainbow families, or families with LGBTQAI+ children, teens, caregivers, and/or family members, are everywhere, found in every community and present in schools and libraries across the country. Like all children, children in rainbow families deserve to see their experiences and family structures represented in the books they read and in library activities. Yet many youth today are still robbed of these opportunities because librarians are afraid to have LGBTQAI+ books in their collections. Some library workers find the books' topics deplorable, while others are afraid of censorship challenges. According to the American Library Association's Office of Intellectual Freedom, almost all of the challenged books for children and teens have diverse content and many represent LGBTQAI+ experiences.<sup>2</sup>

I often wonder how contemporary youth in rainbow families feel when all the library displays, programs, and collections feature cisgender, heterosexual characters and families with a mother and a father. Do they possess enough self-awareness to be angry, or will that come only later as they mature into young adulthood? Do they feel as alone and self-loathing as I did because I thought something was wrong with me?

Contrary to what some educators, librarians, and caregivers may erroneously believe, children's and young adult books with LGBTQAI+ characters and families are often no more about sex than are books with heterosexual characters and families. Often, those opposing the use of LGBTQAI+ literature with youth take the "sex education" perspective, suggesting that these books are used to indoctrinate readers into condoning and engaging in certain types of sexual behaviors. To demonstrate the absurdity of this belief, let's consider the children's picture book *Donovan's Big Day* by Lesléa Newman. This charming book captures the joys of a young boy, Donovan, as he prepares to serve as the ring bearer in his two mothers' wedding. When young readers encounter this book, they are introduced to a peer who is excited about his caregivers' union. They are not learning about lesbian sexual practices. The same holds true when children read *Lilly's Big Day* by Kevin Henkes. This book captures the varied emotions that mouse Lilly experiences as she serves as honorary flower girl in her teacher Mr. Slinger's wedding. Although Mr. Slinger is straight, readers are not learning about heterosexual bedroom practices when they read this book. Yet many educators will hesitate to use Newman's book while widely embracing Henkes's work.

LGBTQAI+ children's books and young adult books are critical to help children see those metaphorical mirrors and windows in literature. As Dorr and Deskins succinctly point out in this volume, these books can be used in many different activities in classrooms and libraries to spark critical conversations and foster understanding of "the other" in society. The authors have selected a variety of popular and noteworthy titles for children, tweens, and teens with LGBTQAI+ content. Their programming recommendations and links to author websites and book discussion guides will prove useful to librarians, educators, and other caring adults interested in creating welcoming spaces for rainbow families. While readers may not find every noteworthy LGBTQAI+ youth title listed, the suggestions for the highlighted books can be used to jumpstart program planning for other titles that represent LGBTQAI+ experiences.

Recently, I was talking with a friend about her nephew, whom she suspects is gay. Unfortunately, the child's father is homophobic and vehemently discourages the boy from expressing his identity. Does this child have access to library collections with books that show him he's okay even if his father says he's worthless? Are his teachers and librarians astute enough to help him find the right book at the right time to help him survive his homophobic

family? Or will he end up a statistic, crumpling under societal pressures to conform to such a degree that he takes his own life?

Books can save lives. I found *Entries from a Hot Pink Notebook* during a dark time in my life. This right book at the right time changed everything for me. Fortunately, many affirming, LGBTQAI+ children's and young adult books exist today that can equally save lives if librarians and educators will only add them to their collections. Professional books such as this one are crucial to identifying and using materials that build bridges of understanding and create safe spaces where all are welcome. Are you up to the challenge of saving lives over avoiding potential negative feedback? With this volume in your hands, the answer can be a resounding "Yes!"

## NOTES

1. Rudine Sims Bishop, "Selecting Literature for a Multicultural Curriculum," in *Using Multiethnic Literature in the K–8 Classroom*, ed. Violet Harris (Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, 1997), 1–20.
2. James LaRue, "Defining Diversity," Banned and Challenged Books, American Library Association, Office for Intellectual Freedom, accessed June 7 2017, [www.ala.org/bbooks/diversity](http://www.ala.org/bbooks/diversity); Nick Duffy, "LGBT Books Dominate 2016's Most-Banned List," *Pink News*, September 27, 2016, [www.pinknews.co.uk/2016/09/27/lgbt-books-dominate-2016s-most-banned-list](http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2016/09/27/lgbt-books-dominate-2016s-most-banned-list).

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## **Windows into Reality**

Many people likely remember where they were and how they felt on June 26, 2015, when the Supreme Court of the United States, in a tight and emotional vote, ruled to legalize same-sex marriage. We were attending the American Library Association Annual Conference in a most appropriate setting, San Francisco. The joyful heartbeat of that decision was palpable, as cries of celebration rang throughout the conference and the entire city. This landmark decision forced the country to turn a corner in regard to attitudes, legal rights, and the freedom to discuss LGBTQAI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, asexual, intersex, and other terms that describe members of the community) concerns like no other phenomenon before ever had.

And, as expected, the response to that decision caused a backlash by ultraconservative groups. For example, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act passed in Indiana and elsewhere effectively twists the 1993 federal law of the same name by providing “ways that could allow businesses a wider berth to discriminate”<sup>1</sup> against the legal rights of the LGBTQAI+ community by claiming that the provision of service would infringe upon the business owner’s religious freedoms. The transgender bathroom law passed in North Carolina, and in other states, is a “wide-ranging bill barring transgender people from bathrooms and locker rooms that do not match the gender on their birth certificates.”<sup>2</sup> It effectively creates a discrimination policy, forcing transgender individuals into possible predatory situations. And the June 2016 massacre of more than fifty people at a gay Latino bar in Orlando might be the most insidious recent event in the United States.

These issues have caused deep emotional reactions on both sides. The country takes three steps forward, only to take two steps back. And consensus won’t be reached for many years, if ever, but nonetheless, a corner

has been turned. The time has come for librarians, teachers, and other professionals who work with children and young adults to open discussion, encourage understanding, and hopefully garner acceptance. And the avenue we use to advocate is through high-quality literature for all.

Why share LGBTQAI+ literature with all children? Because, we argue, it's an issue of basic human rights—rights that all of us deserve. We no longer hesitate to share books about other forms of diversity: race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age, language, women's issues, and more. Why are we still hesitant to share books about sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and nontraditional family structures with all children?

Here's how a good friend of Christina's, an excellent, forward-thinking, literature- and discussion-loving fifth grade teacher, describes his worries:

[Sharing these books] is a prickly topic. It's like walking through thorns, and you don't want to get pricked. You plan out where you want to walk, so you don't get pricked. . . . I'm self-conscious about the topics. . . . The developmental level of my students must lead me how to share. . . . I worry about parents' anger.

After some discussion, Christina realized that he was essentially worried about the sexual issues of the literature. He said, "I wouldn't share any books or discussion about heterosexual relationships, and I won't with homosexual relationships, either." This led to a great discussion that included, "Of course you wouldn't discuss either. But that's not what sharing LGBTQAI+ books is all about. It's about fairness, equality, and understanding, dealing with basic human rights for all," and also to the acknowledgment that that's where his class discussions should focus. We parted as good of friends as ever, with more for both of us to ponder.

Liz asserts, as a parent of a gay son, which was evident when he was a child, that she was always searching in books for role models and examples of positive gay people and experiences to share with him. In the 1980s, there were very few picture books available, and it was not until her son was in high school when they found good books that had characters with which he could identify. Liz's favorite book, published in 1987, but not available in the United States until 1997, was *The Straight Line Wonder* by Mem Fox. Liz's son was headed for a career as a ballet dancer, and seeing this line who moved the way that made it happy instead of staying a straight line like its friends, gave her encouragement that her son would be happy if

he followed his dream. While it is not quite that easy in real life, this book became a symbol for them.

Arguments for inclusion of these books in libraries and curricula for all children come from a wide variety of sources. In a powerful talk at the 2016 Virginia Hamilton Conference (VHC), poet Nikki Grimes asserted that “hatred is not inevitable . . . [because] the most important common denominator is the human heart . . . ; [therefore,] what’s missing in the talk about diversity in literature is that they’re needed for everyone.”<sup>3</sup> At the same conference, author Margarita Engle, concurred, stating, “When we read about others’ lives, we learn about empathy, the first step in peacemaking.”<sup>4</sup>

At the 2016 *School Library Journal* (SLJ) Day of Dialog, author Jason Reynolds argued for inclusion of diverse books, because “the authenticity you find in another person is the authenticity you find in yourself. . . . [R]eaders [may not know] the actions in the book, but can recognize the truths . . . and that truth lies not in disseminating the facts but our ability to disseminate the questions.”<sup>5</sup> What a powerful argument for inclusion, discussion, and finding the common ground of our human experiences!

Gene Luen Yang, author of the Printz Award–winning young adult graphic novel *American Born Chinese* and the fifth National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature named by the Library of Congress, had this to say at a conference we recently attended: “Books themselves are ambassadors . . . books can be advocates. . . . This is why we need diverse books [as they] teach kids to love others [and act as a] moral foundation.”<sup>6</sup>

Following a random link on a website we’d never perused before, we discovered a freelance writer who had this to say:

No matter who you are—black, white, gay, straight, male, female—reading provides you with an opportunity to see inside someone else’s life. Books are the perfect tools to help you navigate through the diverse experiences of other people, and they have the ability to help you better understand and empathize with someone outside of your own circumstances.<sup>7</sup>

Rudine Sims Bishop, an enduring voice in the field of diverse children’s literature, writes:

When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable,

they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part. . . .

Children from dominant social groups have always found their mirrors in books, but they, too, have suffered from the lack of availability of books about others. They need the books as windows onto reality, not just on imaginary worlds. They need books that will help them understand the multicultural nature of the world they live in, and their place as a member of just one group, as well as their connections to all other humans.<sup>8</sup>

And maybe most simply and directly put by author Kelly Barnhill, “If you change the narrative you change the world.”<sup>9</sup> So let’s all take the prickly path and begin to change the world by first looking briefly back at the roots of children’s and young adult (YA) LGBTQAI+ literature, and then at the world today, and then forward into what we can create.

## HISTORY OF CHILDREN’S AND YOUNG ADULT LGBTQAI+ LITERATURE

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There is not a long history of gay literature for children and young adults. The first book considered by some to be a book for children in the LGBTQAI+ spectrum was published in 1936. *The Story of Ferdinand*, written by Munro Leaf, was the first book that portrayed a gender-nonconforming character, although not one who was openly gay. Ferdinand was a bull that would rather sniff flowers than behave like an aggressive typical bull. The story was very popular, and Walt Disney even made it into an award-winning animated film in 1938.

In 1969, the first YA book to deal with LGBTQAI+ content was written, John Donovan’s *I’ll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip.*, published by Harper and Row. In it, thirteen-year-old Davy loses the grandmother he lived with and is sent to live with his divorced and unhappy mother, where he feels like all he has left is his dog. He meets and connects with a classmate and they form a relationship, which progresses until Davy’s mother finds them in bed with their arms around each other. She puts an end to the relationship temporarily, but by the end of the story, they seem to have reconciled, and one is led to believe there will be a happy ending. Interestingly, this book was published at the beginning of the Stonewall Rebellion.

By the 1970s, a few children's picture books dealing with LGBTQAI+ issues had been published in foreign countries. One example is *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin* by Susanne Bösche, published in Denmark in 1981 and translated into English in 1983. This black-and-white photographically illustrated picture book presented everyday activities Jenny did with her father and his boyfriend. Jenny's mother lived down the street and was also portrayed positively. The author's intent was to allow children to see a variety of families and family life. Many called it "homosexual propaganda," and it met with great challenge and censure.<sup>10</sup> The first picture book of record that dealt openly with a lesbian couple was *When Megan Went Away* by Jane Severance and Tea Schook. Published in 1979 by a small feminist press, it was not widely circulated, which was unfortunate because it was a realistic portrayal of a lesbian relationship and the difficulties inherent in such a relationship during that time period.

*Arizona Kid* by Ron Koertge, published in 1989 by HarperCollins, was a critical book at the time for several reasons:

- It was published at the beginning of the Stonewall Rebellion.
- It openly talked about AIDS.
- It shared healthy gay relationships.

*Weetzie Bat* by Francesca Lia Block, published by HarperCollins, was another groundbreaker. Often called an urban fantasy set in altered Los Angeles, Weetzie, and her best gay friend, Dirk, live their own lives full of acceptance and joy. When a genie gives Weetzie three wishes, she asks for a love for Dirk named Duck, one for her named My Secret-Agent Lover Man, and a house where they can all live. These things manifest, and though the magic is almost incidental, these wish fulfillments and the life they create make this story an impactful one. Although it contains references to gay love, rape, raising children out of wedlock, AIDS, and death, because these are just inferred or mentioned and the characters carry on and decide to live happily, if not happily ever after, it became a touchstone novel for many young people for the next decade. Of course, the very mention of those topics led to its being challenged and censored in many school and public libraries.

Probably for many today, the most widely recognized LGBTQAI+ book for children is *Heather Has Two Mommies*, and this was one of the first titles to go mainstream. Lesléa Newman, the author, felt that all children needed to see themselves and their families reflected in books. This idea

is an important example of windows in children's and YA books, that is, the value of seeing one's face, culture, community, and family reflected in what one reads. Because, as Bishop asserts, "when there are enough books available that can act as both mirrors and windows for all our children, they will see that we can celebrate both our differences and our similarities, because together they are what make us all human."<sup>11</sup> Newman explains her reasoning for writing the book:

When I was growing up, there were no picture books that showed a Jewish family like mine. I remember wishing that there were. So when someone asked me to write a book about a little girl with two moms for her daughter to read, I was happy to do so. I wrote *Heather Has Two Mommies* so kids with two moms would have a book that showed a family just like theirs.<sup>12</sup>

*Heather Has Two Mommies* was initially self-published, but ten years later, Alyson Wonderland, a small publishing house with the mission statement of "focus[ing] on books for and about the children of lesbian and gay parents," purchased it.<sup>13</sup> At that time it was widely distributed, but along with the wider audience came many challenges and attempts at censorship. In fact, it was the second most challenged book in 1994.

Interestingly enough, the only book with more challenges that year was *Daddy's Roommate* by Michael Willhoite. This title was another variation on a family setting, this one a divorced father whose life partner has moved in. It's a story that demonstrates a family consisting of two fathers doing typical family things. Most of the time, the public censorship of these books was at the hands of individuals, usually parents, who would take them from public libraries and then refuse to return the books. Occasionally, the challenge came from a school system, but these books were not normally included in school collections.

Over the next decade, more LGBTQAI+ books were written, primarily about families with two mothers or families with gay uncles, and mainstream publishers published few of them. Here are examples of published books that offered windows and mirrors for children in the ensuing years:

## A Joyful Story Sharing LGBTQAI+ Ideals

*Boy Meets Boy*, written by David Levithan. Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.

Called by some a “gay utopia,” this is the story of what life would be like at a school where everyone is gay, and that’s just fine. There are normal teen issues but no angst about being gay. This delightful story is a great way to show that we may all be different but we are also the same.

## A Gay Main Character Making a Life Choice

*King and King*, written by Linda de Haan and illustrated Stern Nijland. Tricycle Press, 2003.

This story finds the prince uninterested in the potential brides his mother parades by, as he has a prince in mind.

## Based on a True Story

*And Tango Makes Three*, written by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell and illustrated by Henry Cole. Little Simon, 2005.

This book is a new and different way to present gay parents based on a true event at a public zoo.

## A Transgender Child

*10,000 Dresses*, written by Marcus Ewert and illustrated by Rex Ray. Triangle Square, 2008.

Bailey is a boy who dreams of dresses.

## A Bisexual Character

*Cut Both Ways*, written by Carrie Mesrobian. HarperCollins, 2015.

This book is an authentic portrayal of a young man first realizing, and then coming to terms with, his bisexuality.



Finally, today, we are finding good-quality picture books written about a variety of family structures with which all children can identify.

Books for young adults have taken a similar path, one just as bumpy with many challenges and issues. Even before we had literature classified

as YA, there was a novel, *Chocolates for Breakfast* by Pamela Moore, first published in 1956, whose thirteen-year-old main character had a crush on her female teacher and a relationship with a bisexual man. This eye-opening book dealt frankly with issues about questioning one's sexual identity during the coming-of-age years.

One of the first YA books to deal with gay identity and questioning was *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth It.*, written by John Donovan, published in 1969 and rereleased in 2010 on its fortieth anniversary. One of the best-known and groundbreaking lesbian YA novels is *Annie on My Mind* by Nancy Garden, originally published in 1982. This book relates the story of two young women and the development of their relationship from friendship to something more, in spite of resistance from everyone.

Another book remembered by many gay readers and writers who were teens in the 1990s is *Entries from a Hot Pink Notebook* by Todd Brown. This title is told in first person by Ben, a fourteen-year-old boy who is trying to figure out the world around him and his place in it. His angst arises from breaking up with a girlfriend who loves him, losing his heart to a boy, and living a life of poverty. Because it is both humorous and realistic, this book reached many readers who were also trying to puzzle their way through their teen years.

It wasn't until 2008 that the first book about a transgender character, *Luna* by Julie Anne Peters, was published. Although he was called Liam by day, the main character did not really come alive until nighttime when he became Luna, decked out in beautiful dresses and makeup. Making the decision to share Luna with his family and friends comes about through a voyage of self-discovery.

Stories about characters within the spectrum of LGBTQAI+ continue to evolve and show a broader swath of gay characters, both primary and secondary. Sometimes transgender characters are the focus of the story and other times they are of lesser importance, but regardless, these stories all reveal the depth and variety of people and families today.

*Rainbow Boys* by Alex Sanchez, published in 2001, is the first of a series of books about high school boys who are frankly facing their homosexuality and everything that goes with it. AIDS, gay bashing, homophobia, and other topics are explored in this realistic fiction title. The characters in *Two Boys Kissing* by David Levithan, published in 2013, share a same-sex kiss, one that goes on and on, because they are trying to break the Guinness World Record.

The book is also notable because the story includes a chorus, not unlike a Greek chorus, that emerges periodically throughout the story. Consisting of all of the men who previously died of AIDS, the chorus talks about the way gay people have become more accepted and how many attitudes have changed. This book shares a heartfelt perspective and even a little history.

Published in 2015, *None of the Above* by I. W. Gregorio became the first book to deal directly with the issues surrounding intersex. Written by a doctor who also writes young adult literature, this story deals with a popular high school girl who seems to have everything, until after she and her boyfriend are crowned Homecoming King and Queen and the two attempt to consummate their relationship. Kristin feels so much pain they must stop. She visits her gynecologist and learns that she is intersex; while she looks and feels like a girl, she has male and female organs, each only partially formed. To make matters worse, she tells her best friend who then shares it with the entire school body through a text that goes viral, and Kristin's world comes crashing down around her. The rest of the book describes how she deals with this potentially life-changing event. Woven into the story is factual information about intersex organizations and medical treatments for intersex issues.

And a final book to consider is *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* by Alison Bechdel, published in 2007. This graphic novel is a memoir that details Bechdel's life from childhood through college. During this time, she navigates the twists and turns of realizing she is lesbian while being raised by her closeted gay father who runs the town funeral home. This is a unique recipe for a story, especially a true one, and it is told through a different format, that of a graphic novel. Even more interesting is that it was turned into a Broadway show.

## DEALING WITH OBJECTIONS

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As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, homophobia is alive and well. Naidoo's definition of homophobia is "a societal belief that individuals who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer/questioning are demented, evil, harmful to society, disgraceful, perverse, and otherwise unfit to live in society."<sup>14</sup> We are well into the twenty-first century and these messages, both subtle and overt, can be seen everywhere, from young children at play to politicians making laws and public policy. Though society has turned a

corner in terms of acceptance and willingness to engage in dialogue, the backlash has been severe.

Though more common in the past, unfortunately, even now, children are often discouraged by teachers, librarians, and other professionals from discussing family situations and their own gender identities. Naidoo acknowledges that “children feel unimportant and invisible when they do not see representations of their lives and families in books,”<sup>15</sup> and other children aren’t given the opportunity to explore and understand these issues in ways that will build empathy. As noted earlier in relation to the discussion with a fifth grade teacher about incorporating books on such topics in his classroom, it’s not about the issue of sex (though with older students, it can be); it’s about the issues of understanding, empathy, acceptance, and respecting basic human rights.

So if we agree that all children need exposure to LGBTQAI+ books and honest, open discussion, how do we deal with stakeholders who disagree? Here are our suggestions:

1. *Begin by taking a look at your collection, library, or classroom.* Does it contain a variety of fiction and nonfiction titles that explore LGBTQAI+ themes? Do you have titles with diverse secondary characters who offer a realistic mix of people one might expect to find in a group? Are there titles written on a variety of reading and interest levels? If your collection is genrefied, are these books blended in with their genres or do you have a separate section? Though there’s validity to both approaches, we’d argue that unless you separate out books with topics related to other forms of diversity (race, ethnicity, class, age, etc.), then don’t form a separate section for LGBTQAI+ books.

Also, have you collected the best titles? Have you consulted review and award lists? Have you read the books yourself? Do you have any anti-LGBTQAI+ books? Do you leave them in for balance? If so, like books that deal with diversity in other ways, be sure they are used in a manner that sparks conversation. How is this character portrayed? Is it an accurate picture? How should the author have rewritten that scene to make it more accurate? When weeding your collection, be sure to weigh the value of the book against its discriminatory content. And when purchasing new titles, be sure to consider only the best, in terms of both content and literary quality.

2. *Begin discussion with children as questions and comments arise.* Do you create a climate that fosters open discussion of ideas and acceptance of

differences in your library or classroom? Are you ready to guide a discussion that revolves around everyone, regardless of differences, being deserving of equitable treatment? We have found that one of the best ways to plant a seed is through a discussion of challenged and banned books. Christina teaches a lesson each year with eighth graders and their language arts teachers using picture books that have been banned or challenged for a variety of reasons. The hook with these books is that students remember them from their time in the elementary grades, and often they will rediscover an old favorite. Plus they are surprised, even shocked, that the titles have been challenged and are eager to learn the reasons why. The books she includes often vary each year, but one that is always included is *And Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell, with illustrations by Henry Cole. The discussion is always lively, and students extrapolate from the penguins' behavior to human interactions.

**3. Include outside stakeholders in the discussion when necessary.** We're always reluctant to give a heads-up to parents and other stakeholders about upcoming lessons and themes we're exploring in the library because it "alerts" them that there may be an issue, when there really isn't. Instead, if the talk is natural and all viewpoints are honored and openly aired, then it becomes part of the daily purpose and routine of education. Keep in mind that the issues truly at stake are those of basic human rights. At times, of course, administration, parents, or others do need to become part of the conversation. When? If a child gets upset, feeling as if he or she hasn't been heard, or any type of bullying becomes part of the scenario, others need to know. But this is really no different from any other discussion that includes topics related to diversity.

**4. Meet challenges head on, and never be afraid to explain your reasoning.** Remember, discussions around LGBTQAI+ topics are a matter of promoting basic human rights, as with any other form of diversity. Defend your choices of books by pointing to exemplary book reviews and suggested age/grade ranges. Verify that your library/school district has a plan in place for dealing with challenges, and make sure that it's followed.

A parent once questioned Christina's decision to share a picture book with first graders that, he argued, promoted cross-dressing. He went over her head, directly to the principal, who brought the complaint to her. Christina showed the principal the book, explained the lesson, and told her about the discussion. The principal defused the issue, and the parent was pacified. If Christina had the chance to relive that challenge, she would request to

speak to the parent herself, hoping to not just pacify but encourage some understanding.

**5. *Solicit allies when needed.*** Why? For a couple of reasons: First, before an issue arises, having a common base of understanding, like-minded professionals can help bolster your convictions. Second, if and when a challenge arises, you have a ready base of professionals to turn to for support. Who? Seek out other librarians within and outside of your district or system and administrators at the building or district level. Another source of support is your state library organization, and if the issue is particularly prickly, you can contact the Intellectual Freedom Round Table of the American Library Association for advice and even legal support, if needed.

Librarians—school, public, and all other types—still face the stereotypes of being old-fashioned, out-of-date, and nonprofessional, when nothing could be further from the truth. We’re truly a strong group of professionals who take our child patrons’ needs and interests to heart and are willing to fight for them and their rights. It is our hope that the tools we include in this book will further your resolve to ask the questions that help promote understanding and empathy about LGBTQAI+ issues with all children at a time when it’s crucially needed.

## EMERGING AND CHANGING TERMS

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So much has changed in our vocabulary over the past few years, including the transition from using the acronym GLBT to LGBTQAI+. The more accepted the community becomes, the greater the diversity in terminology, as people are able to be more open about and share their differences. This has resulted in more-complete definitions, as we move from simply using the terms *gay* or *straight* to *gay/lesbian* to *intersex* to *pansexual* and more; each term is acceptable and distinct. Instead of being overwhelming, this variety in terminology is our opportunity to allow for diversity in and individualization of gender identity.

For this book, we’ve chosen specific definitions for terms commonly used in the LGBTQAI+ community, according to the Human Rights Campaign and the University of California, Davis. As you read through this book’s chapters and annotations, know that the following terms and definitions are the ones around which our discussions revolve. We acknowledge that

there is no definitive or agreed-upon set of terms and definitions, and we are sensitive to that; we are choosing to be as inclusive as possible.

**lesbian:** A woman who is primarily attracted (emotionally, romantically, or sexually) to other women.<sup>16</sup>

**gay:** A person who is primarily attracted (emotionally, romantically, or sexually) to members of the same sex; though traditionally a man attracted to another man, this term can be used for any sex (e.g., gay man, gay woman, gay person).<sup>17</sup>

**bisexual:** A person who is attracted (emotionally, romantically, or sexually) to a person of the same gender identity/expression or to someone of a different gender identity/expression; also called “bi.”<sup>18</sup>

**transgender:** A broad term commonly used for a person whose gender identity and/or expression is different from public expectations based on the sex the person was assigned at birth. Being transgender does not signify any specific sexual orientation; transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and so on.<sup>19</sup>

**queer:** An umbrella term sometimes used by LGBTQAI+ people to refer to the entire community; a term people often use to express fluid identities and orientations; often used interchangeably with “GLBT.”<sup>20</sup>

**asexual:** Used to refer to a person who generally does not feel sexual attraction to or desire for any type of person. Asexuality is not the same as celibacy.<sup>21</sup>

**intersex:** Used to refer to a person whose sexual anatomy or chromosomes do not fit with the traditional features of “female” and “male,” for example, a person born with both “female” and “male” anatomy (vagina and uterus, penis and testicles).<sup>22</sup>

Please see the glossary at the conclusion of this book for additional terms.

## ABOUT THIS BOOK

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The books selected for inclusion are quality pieces of literature and non-fiction, both factual and narrative, that have been crafted for children and young adults. They pass the literary tests for engaging stories and factual, intriguing nonfiction. Characters are realistic, settings are believable, even

when they're imaginary, and the stories offer a wide variety of themes. The selected books create various moods and appeal to an array of age ranges from young children to young adults. Many of the books are new, ranging from the past few years to LGBTQAI+ classics that helped launch the topic in children's literature, often with considerable backlash.

For the reader's convenience, this book has been arranged into three chapters, with additional pieces. Following this introduction to the topic, complete with history, terms, and explanations, are these chapters:

1. Books and Conversation for Young Readers
2. Books and Conversation for Middle Grade Readers
3. Books and Conversation for Teen Readers

Included within each chapter are lists of exemplary titles that include annotations with the following parts: plot summary, comments on illustrations, and evaluation of content and back matter. Entries are listed by genre, including realistic fiction, fantasy, fractured folklore, historical fiction, and informational books. Within entries, each book is coded with one or more of the letters LGBTQAI+. Awards and honors (if any), conversation starters (i.e., discussion questions), and related resources are included for each book within the genre lists. Each chapter also includes a section with program, theme, and display ideas. Complete bibliographic information for the included titles appears at the end of each chapter.

We conclude with "Final Thoughts: It's about Basic Human Rights," where we hope to convince you of the crucial need to put our young patrons' needs first by sharing books of diversity of all types with all children. The book concludes with an appendix of additional resources, a more complete glossary of terms, and an index.

## CONCLUSION

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We are very happy to be bringing this book to you. We who work with children of all ages every day realize that they come from a variety of home structures, with a variety of backgrounds and experiences, and they all have unique feelings. We recognize the importance of books/literature being a window, door, or mirror for children—a place to see themselves, to find affirmation, comfort, and even security in knowing they are not alone. Our

goal is to give you the tools necessary so that you can confidently share these books with the patrons you support.

Because of these reasons, we are sharing this work with you, professionals who work with children, whether as a public or school librarian, as a teacher, or in another educational capacity. We offer book titles for all levels of readers and introduce ways for you to happily and successfully share these books with your patrons, whether they are students, parents, administration, or other stakeholders. This is critical work we do, and the more tools we have, the better.

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