

Welcoming Rainbow Families in the Classroom: Suggestions and Recommendations for Including LGBTQ Children's Books in the Curricula

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As Mother's Day approached, Kayden's (not his real name) first-grade classroom prepared for the celebration in the same way as many classrooms across the United States. The teacher instructed each child to create a card and handprint collage to bring home on the Friday before Mother's Day. As Kayden industriously worked to make the perfect card, his teacher circulated the room. She stopped by Kayden's desk and gently corrected him as he printed "Happy Mothers' Day" on his card. "Kayden, sweetheart, the apostrophe goes after the 'r' and before the 's.' You only have one mother." The child responded meekly, "But Miss Repolesk, I *do* have two mommies." "No, honey, you only have one. Everyone in this room has just one mother," the teacher chided. Just down the hall in another first-grade classroom, Avery (not her real name) was having similar difficulty. Her teacher, Mr. Tackett, was scolding her for not starting work on her Mother's Day card. Avery replied, "I don't have a Mommy to give the card to. Can I make a Father's Day card instead for one of my dads?" Mr. Tackett countered, "No Avery. The assignment is not to make a card for your dad. You will make one for your mother. I know you have one, I have met her several times." Avery did not respond. She did have a mother but now her mother looked different than she had before—more like her dad, actually—and wanted Avery to call her "Papa." Avery has a Papa and a Dad, but not a Mom.

In both of these situations, the children were making an attempt to navigate an educational system that supports an unrealistic hegemonic view that all children have only one parent who identifies as male and one who identifies as female. While some schools in the United States support inclusive views of family diversity, Kayden and Avery unfortunately attended a suburban school in Georgia where they were

part of a small minority of children (approximately 7) that have caregivers who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ). The experiences described here are common ones that many children with LGBTQ caregivers or children who identify as LGBTQ themselves face on a regular basis, ranging from exclusive language in curricular materials and activities to unwelcoming classroom environments

subconsciously designed for children in two-parent, heterosexual families.¹ With shifting demographics in the U.S. that include more children and families from diverse backgrounds, it is incumbent upon educators to create inclusive curricular experiences that take into account various forms of diversity, including children or caregivers who identify as LGBTQ.

According to analyses of U.S. Census data and targeted studies on the LGBTQ population, almost 6 million children and young adults in the United States have an LGBT caregiver, and over 210,000 children under the age of 18 live in households with same-sex couple caregivers.² These rainbow families live in 96% of the counties in the U.S., with the greatest concentration living in the southern U.S., rural areas, or suburban areas with relatively low numbers of LGBTQ individuals without children.³ Unfortunately, it may be difficult for educators to identify these families since some are not "out" about their family composition and others may not attend parent meetings, family nights, or other school events as a family unit. Additionally, an LGBTQ

caregiver might be a single parent and never have had a reason to share his or her sexual orientation with the teacher.

Since LGBTQ families are not always easy to identify, the best way for educators to be welcoming and inclusive is to regularly include books with diverse gender expressions and family compositions as well as those with LGBTQ characters in curricular materials and in classroom and school library collections. The subsequent sections describe where educators can find LGBTQ children's books, how to select and use these books, and considerations when using these books in the classroom.

Locating LGBTQ Children's Books

Since many educators and society at large erroneously equate LGBTQ content with sex, not many mainstream children's authors have attempted to

feature LGBTQ characters or rainbow families, leaving that coverage to authors of young adult books. Additionally, most teacher education programs do not cover LGBTQ children's books in children's literature courses, and the primary resources suggested for identifying quality children's books for classroom use are often exclusive of LGBTQ content. For many years, if a teacher could name any LGBTQ children's books, they were usually limited to controversial titles such as Lesléa Newman's *Heather Has Two Mommies*, Michael Willhoite's *Daddy's Roommate*, or Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell's *And Tango Makes Three*.⁴ As such, educators were often hesitant to incorporate these books, particularly the original version of *Heather Has Two Mommies*, which discussed artificial insemination.⁵ Over time, a rich and growing body of LGBTQ children's

books has been published on a variety of topics and themes such as bullying, living with LGBTQ parents or family members, celebrating gender diversity, highlighting the accomplishments of important LGBTQ figures, and exploring the lives of LGBTQ children. While a few of these books have been acquired by larger publishing houses, most LGBTQ children's titles are non-U.S. imports, self-published, or published by small presses. As a result, many of these books do not receive their due attention from review sources and are not brought to the attention of educators.

Other children's books may include LGBTQ content by way of background characters, secondary coverage, or circumstantial illustrations. In these instances, the LGBTQ content is not the focus and is often not included in reviews of these titles. An educator might

Locating LGBTQ Children's Books

Recommended Professional Resources

Human Rights Campaign Foundation. *Welcoming Schools Great Diverse Books for Your School*, www.welcomingschools.org/resources/books/.

Naidoo, Jamie Campbell. *Rainbow Family Collections: Selecting and Using Children's Books with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Content*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: Libraries Unlimited, 2012.

Sarles, Patricia. *Gay-Themed Picture Books for Children*, <http://booksforkidsingayfamilies.blogspot.com>.

Silverrod, Nancy. *Soldier Girls and Dancing Boys: Gender Transgression in Books for Children, Teens, and Caring Adults*, www.ala.org/rt/sites/ala.org/rt/files/content/professionaltools/Soldier_Girls_and_Dancing_Boys_April2014.pdf.

The San Francisco Public Library. *A Rainbow Celebration: Gays and Lesbians in Books for Children*, <https://sfpl.org/?pg=2000154901>.

Children's Book Awards for LGBTQ & Gender Equality

Lambda Literary (Lammy) Awards: Awarded by the Lambda Literary Foundation, these awards celebrate the best in literary fiction and

nonfiction books that represent LGBTQ experiences. There are several categories of annual awards for adults and one for children's and young adult books. www.lambdaliterary.org/complete-list-of-award-recipients/.

Rainbow Book List: Presented annually by the American Library Association's Social Responsibility Roundtable (SRRT) and Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Roundtable (GLBTRT), this booklist includes fiction and nonfiction children's and teen titles that authentically portray LGBTQ topics and experiences. <http://glbtrt.ala.org/rainbowbooks/rainbow-books-lists>.

Stonewall Book Award—Mike Morgan and Larry Romans Children's and Young Adult Literature Award: Administered by the GLBTRT of the American Library Association, this award recognizes children's and young adult books that positively and accurately represent the experiences of LGBTQ youth and families. www.ala.org/rt/glbtrt/award/stonewall.

Amelia Bloomer List: Established by the Feminist Task Force of the SRRT of the American Library Association, this booklist identifies children's and young adult books that have strong feminist content. These books could be used with gender-creative or gender-nonconforming children. <https://ameliabloomer.wordpress.com/>.

be unaware of the LGBTQ content and miss the potential for using these books in the classroom. For example, Susan Meyers and Marla Frazee's *Everywhere Babies* depicts multiple types of family diversity in the illustrations including an interracial lesbian couple with a child. Since the family is never distinctly mentioned in the book's text and only observed via a close visual reading of the illustrations, educators may not be aware that this title captures a rainbow family.⁶

Fortunately, numerous booklists, curricular resources, and bibliographies are available to assist educators in locating the best children's books with LGBTQ content. Many of these resources divide recommended titles into age groups or by material type (picture book, nonfiction book, and children's novel). Book awards for LGBTQ children's literature offer educators recommended titles for classroom use. Collectively, books included in these resource lists introduce preschool and elementary students to children with two moms or two dads, children who have an LGBTQ family member, and transgender or gender nonconforming children. In a few instances, famous LGBTQ characters are introduced to provide role models and extend understanding about famous artists, inventors, and so on. See *Locating LGBTQ Children's Books: Recommended Professional Resources and Children's Book Awards* (p. 309).

Cultural Diversity in LGBTQ Children's Books

LGBTQ books presenting culturally diverse families and characters are crucial to normalizing the experiences of all children and caregivers. These books can reflect the lives of racially and ethnically diverse children and teens in rainbow families—as well as youth from different religious perspectives, linguistic backgrounds, and varying ability levels—offering validation of their existence while also providing windows of opportunity for their peers to encounter experiences beyond their own lives. Like other types of diverse children's books,

these books should be present within classroom and school libraries.

Although rainbow families are more likely to be racially and ethnically diverse than other families, with almost 40% of the caregivers and 50% of the children identifying as non-white, most of the books representing LGBTQ characters and families do not capture this diversity.⁷ Consistent with the predominantly all-white world of children's publishing, more than 85% of LGBTQ children's books focus on white protagonists, overlooking the vibrant diversity in the LGBTQ community. Teens have more opportunities to see reflections of racial and ethnic diversity in their young adult novels than their younger counterparts.

At the same time, certain cross-segments of the LGBTQ population are still largely nonexistent in children's and young adult literature. The representation of two-spirit characters, an identity associated with indigenous cultures in which an individual feels the embodiment of both a male and female spirit, is all but absent in children's books, with only a few instances available in young adult books. LGBTQ characters representing learning and physical disabilities are also very rare in children's books, limited to illustrations of a character in a wheelchair or using a cane. Similarly, bisexual individuals are not well represented in children's books, though more bisexual characters are appearing in young adult literature. Presently, the only English-language book with an identified bisexual character is the tween novel *Star-Crossed* by Barbara Dee, which is a contemporary reimagining of Romeo and Juliet with middle school female leads who identify as bisexual and lesbian.⁸

Luckily, with a little perseverance, educators need not look too far to find solid choices of culturally diverse LGBTQ children's books. The small press Flamingo Rampant (www.flamingorampant.com/) publishes children's picture books with racially diverse characters. Although these titles vary in quality, they can be a good starting

place. The sidebar "LGBTQ Children's Books Representing Ethnic and Racial Diversity and Global Perspectives" lists several recommended children's books with diverse LGBTQ characters. It also contains a few suggestions for non-U.S. children's books that help provide children with a perspective on how LGBTQ families and LGBTQ characters are presented around the world. The inclusion of international children's books along with culturally diverse U.S. children's books is crucial in preparing our children to be active citizens in our global society. International titles can be used by educators to normalize the experiences of children and caregivers in rainbow families. LGBTQ characters and topics are regularly included in an ordinary way in these books, and child protagonists are not necessarily struggling with the fact that they have LGBTQ caregivers or may be attracted to someone of the same gender. Rather, it is perfectly natural in picture books such as *Philomène m'aime [Philomena Loves Me]* by Jean Christophe Mazurie for a young girl to have an attraction to another girl and deliver her a love letter.⁹

It is important to incorporate culturally diverse LGBTQ children's books throughout the curriculum. Books such as Gayle Pitman's *This Day in June* highlight many different types of diversity within the LGBTQ community. This title could be used during a lesson on cultural celebrations or tied to a poetry unit. Sylvia Vardell and Janet Wong's *The Poetry Friday Anthology for Celebrations* professional book for teachers contains numerous poems about holidays with accompanying curricular suggestions. Included is the poem "Happy Pride," by Lesléa Newman, which could be used in a poetry lesson along with *This Day in June* to talk about types of parades and the many ways we celebrate diversity.¹⁰ Educators can use foreign-language titles such as the ones listed in the sidebar in activities like a picture-walk where upper elementary students examine the illustrations to predict what the book is about and to examine body language between

LGBTQ Children's Books Representing Ethnic and Racial Diversity and Global Perspectives

Bacelar, Manuela. *O Livro de Pedro (Maria dos 7 aos 8)*. Porto, Portugal: Edições Afrontamento, 2008. (Portuguese)

Published in Portugal, this delightful picture book follows a mother as she shares her happy, loving childhood with her young daughter via a photo album. The unique aspect of the book is that two men raised the mother, which is a non-issue.

González, Rigoberto. *Antonio's Card/La tarjeta de Antonio*. Illus. by Cecilia Concepción Álvarez. San Francisco, Calif.: Children's Book Press, 2005.

Mother's Day is fast approaching and a young Latino boy, Antonio, must weigh his love for his two mothers with his embarrassment at having a nontraditional family.

Bey-Clarke, Monica and Cheril Clarke. *Keesha and Her Two Moms Go Swimming*. Illus. by Aiswarya Mukherjee. Sicklerville, N.J.: Dodi Press, 2011.

Follows Keesha, a young African American girl, and her two mothers as they spend a day at the pool with other rainbow families.

Hoffman, Mary. *Welcome to the Family*. Illus. by Ros Asquith. London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 2014.

Depicting a myriad of diversity, this informational book describes the many ways that families are formed, featuring heterosexual, rainbow, blended, and single parent configurations.

Kushner, Elisabeth. *The Purim Superhero*. Illus. by Mike Byrne. Minneapolis, Minn.: Kar-Ben Publishing, 2013.

Nate is trying to decide what he wants to be for the Jewish celebration Purim. With the help of his two fathers, he comes up with the best costume.

Lambert, Megan. *Real Sisters Pretend*. Illus. by Nicole Tadgell. Thomaston, Maine: Tilbury House, 2016.

Mia and Tayja are sisters, despite the fact that they are racially diverse and have different biological parents. While some adults think they cannot be related, both girls know that they are real sisters, adopted by two loving mothers.

Leite, Marcia. *Olivia Tem Dois Papais*. Illus. by Taline Schubach. São Paulo, Brazil: Companhia Letrinhas, 2010. (Portuguese)

Published in Brazil, this longer, illustrated early reader features precocious young Olivia and the daily adventures she has with her two fathers.

Levy, Dana Alison. *The Misadventures of the Family Fletcher*. New York: Delacorte Books for Young Readers, 2014.

Featuring a culturally diverse family of boys, their two dads, and their zany cat, this humorous read-aloud follows the daily adven-

tures of Family Fletcher as they deal with new schools, bullying, mishaps, and a grouchy neighbor. Their adventures continue in *The Family Fletcher Takes Rock Island* (New York: Delacorte Books for Young Readers, 2016).

Mayeno, Laurin. *One of a Kind Like Me/Único como yo*. Illus. by Robert Liu-Trujillo. Trans. By Teresa Mlawer. Oakland, Calif.: Blood Orange Press, 2016.

Danny, a young Latino boy, really wants to be a purple princess in the school play but he doesn't have a costume. With the help of his mother and the local thrift store, he comes up with the perfect outfit that allows him to defy perceived gender norms.

Mazurie, Jean Christophe. *Philomène m'aime*. Grenoble, France: P'tit Glénat, 2011. (French)

Although all the boys love Philomène, the girl's heart belongs to someone else. Throughout this charming book, young readers follow Philomène as she cycles through the French countryside to deliver a love letter to her girlfriend Lili.

Pitman, Gayle. *This Day in June*. Illus. by Kristyna Litten. Washington, D.C.: Magination Press, 2014.

With rhyming text and colorful illustrations, this picture book introduces readers to a gay pride parade in San Francisco. Diversity within the LGBTQ community is evident and children in rainbow families are shown marching with family members.

Schiffer, Miriam. *Stella Brings the Family*. Illus. by Holly Clifton-Brown. San Francisco, Calif.: Chronicle, 2015.

Stella's class is planning a Mother's Day celebration and she's worried. Students are allowed to bring their mother and, while Stella does not have a mom, she has two dads and a host of other relatives that love her. Can she invite them all?

Shraya, Vivek. *The Boy & the Bindi*. Illus. by Rajni Perera. Vancouver, B.C.: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2016.

Based on the author's childhood and filled with cultural details, this picture book profiles a young Indian boy as he learns about his mother's bindi, the red dot traditionally worn by Hindu women, and his desire to have one too.

Tidholm, Anna-Clara. *Min Familj*. Linköping, Sweden: Olika, 2013. (Swedish)

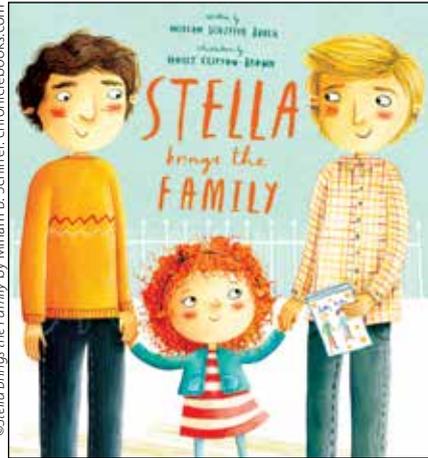
What makes a family? This straightforward picture book, from the publisher of predominantly LGBTQ-themed children's titles, follows children as they describe a diverse array of family compositions including single parent, rainbow, and heterosexual.

non-LGBTQ and LGBTQ characters, as well as visual representations of gender diversity and same-sex relationships. These can be compared and contrasted with U.S. picture books on similar topics to spark a discussion about what the illustrations say about cultural views on rainbow families around the world. Foreign language titles can also be used in creative writing activities where students create their own story to accompany the illustrations. This activity would require students to engage higher order thinking skills as they use visual cues to inform their story and ensure that their narrative complements the existing artwork. Either of these suggestions could be used to celebrate International Children's Book Day (April 2nd) to honor the ability of books to cross borders and build bridges of cultural understanding.

Using LGBTQ Children's Books to Address Student and Curricular Needs

Returning to the scenario described at the beginning of this article, what could the teachers have done differently to make their classrooms inclusive to children like Kayden and Avery who have LGBTQ caregivers? One of the first steps is to design flexible activities and instruction that allows children to embrace their realities rather than being confined to outdated views on gender and family composition. Instead of having children design cards for Mother's Day or Father's Day, educators can encourage children to create cards for a special relative or person in their lives. This takes the focus off the labels placed on caregivers as well as the gender roles assigned to these labels. Young children are concrete in their thinking. If they are told to create a card for their mother, then they must have a mother to receive the card. Children who live in single-caregiver households, are raised by grandparents, or have same-sex or gender nonconforming caregivers can become distressed when they are faced with instructional activities that support a hegemonic view of a heterosexual, two-parent, two-gender house-

hold. If a child's family does not meet the prescribed notion of a family, then she may experience cognitive dissonance, believing that something is wrong with her family, or may undergo uncomfortable classroom situations. It is important for educators to design a curriculum that welcomes family and gender diversity.

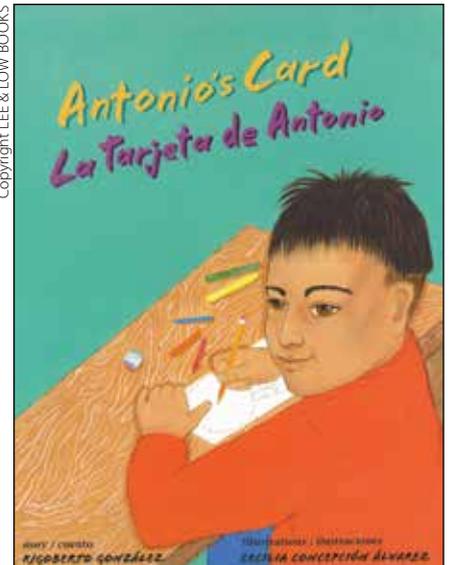


©Stella Brings the Family by Miriam B. Schiffer, chroniclebooks.com

When covering a topic such as Mother's Day, educators can include books celebrating single mothers such as *Jonathan and His Mommy* by Irene Smalls and Michael Hays or books normalizing families with two moms like *A Tale of Two Mommies* by Vanita Oelschlagel and Mike Blanc.¹¹ If a child feels left out on Mother's Day because she has two fathers, then *Stella Brings the Family* by Miriam Schiffer and Holly Clifton-Brown would be an appropriate book to share one-on-one or have available in the classroom library. For a child who is upset or uncomfortable with having two mothers, Rigoberto González and Cecilia Concepción's *Antonio's Card/La tarjeta de Antonio* could serve as a form of bibliotherapy, exploring how it feels to have a family slightly different from other classmates. For younger children, Todd Parr's *The Mommy Book* provides a glimpse of diverse mothers.¹² Books that explore diverse family compositions such as *Families, Families, Families* by Suzanne and Max Lang can also be used in instruction and made available in the classroom library.¹³ Collectively, all of these books have the potential to normalize the experiences of

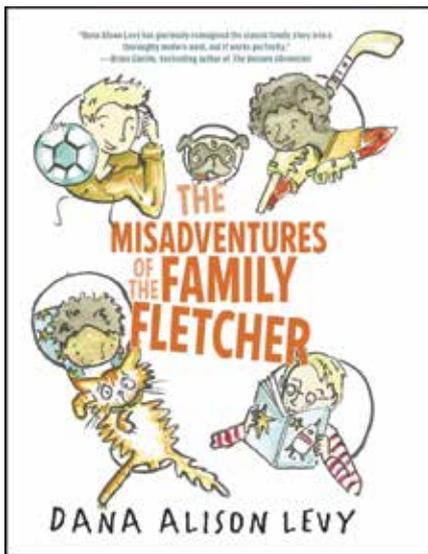
children with LGBTQ caregivers during a Mother's Day lesson.

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Naturally, the topic of family diversity should be integrated throughout the year, not only at Mother's Day. Books with rainbow families cover a variety of topics that allow them to be incorporated across the curriculum. Titles such as Dana Alison Levy's *The Misadventures of the Family Fletcher* are perfect daily read-alouds that can be used to introduce the entire class to a zany family with two dads, four culturally diverse sons, and one crazy cat. The two-dad aspect of the book is never an issue for the characters, taking a backseat to topics such as bullying, community service projects, new schools, friendships, and so on. Elisabeth Kushner and Mike Byrne's *The Purim Superhero* can be shared along with other ethnic books to introduce students to Jewish culture and children who just happen to have two dads. Similarly, Megan Lambert's *Real Sisters Pretend*, which features two racially diverse adopted sisters, can be incorporated with other books about adoption to prompt discussion about how families are formed, family diversity, and children with two mothers.

Since gender diversity is a topic that invariably influences children's lives during group play, cooperative learning centers, and formalized instructional activities, it is important that educators incorporate books highlighting diverse



gender roles and gender identities in the curriculum and classroom libraries. All children need distinct opportunities to encounter males and females engaged in cross-gender activities that demonstrate males in caregiver and nurturing roles and females in active roles related to science, technology, engineering, and math as in Meghan McCarthy's *Daredevil: The Daring Life of Betty Skelton*.¹⁴ Books such as Charlotte Zolotow's classic *William's Doll* or Sharon Wyeth's *Tomboy Trouble*, featuring boys and girls playing with cross-gender toys, are equally important.¹⁵ Children who identify as transgender, gender creative, or

gender nonconforming—not following the traditional male and female gender roles based upon birth sex—also need occasions to meet children or characters like themselves in books.

While the topic of transgender identity is just now becoming more common in children's books, two noteworthy titles stand out: *I am Jazz* by Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings and *Red: A Crayon's Story* by Michael Hall.¹⁶ In the former picture book, readers are introduced to a young child named Jazz who was born a boy but identifies as a girl. Based upon the true-life experience of the teen co-author, Jazz Jennings, the book gently

Resources for Integrating LGBTQ Children's Books

Around the Rainbow: Developed by the Family Services Ottawa/ Services à la famille Ottawa, this resource includes an educator guide, resource guide, and several booklists to help make the classroom curriculum inclusive of rainbow families. <http://familyservicesottawa.org/children-youth-and-families/around-the-rainbow/>.

COLAGE: People with a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender Parent: Offers educators booklists, brochures, and online resources to support children in rainbow families such as "Tips for Making Classrooms Safer for Students with LGBTQ Parents." Also includes the KidSafe blog for children in Rainbow Families. www.colage.org/resources/.

GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network): Provides suggestions to educators for making schools inclusive for LGBTQ children and families and offers curricular guides and lesson plans related to bullying, diversity, and bias. <http://glsen.org/educate/resources/curriculum>.

"Missing! Picture Books Reflecting Gay and Lesbian Families: Make the Curriculum Inclusive for All Children," Elizabeth Rowell, *Young Children* 62, no. 3 (2007): 24-30. www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/200705/Missing-Rowell.pdf.

Out for Our Children: UK-based community organization that offers extensive free lesson plans, classroom activities, booklists, and more to help teachers make their lesson plans inclusive of rainbow families. www.outforourchildren.org.uk/teachers-area/.

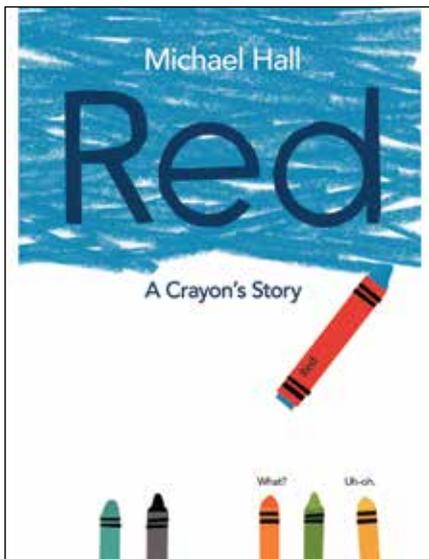
Rainbow Families Council: Australian volunteer community orga-

nization, which provides information to LGBT adults interested in adopting and starting families. The particularly useful parts of the website are the "Who's in your family?" information sheets and posters. These attractive, full-color posters and information sheets can be downloaded and used in libraries and classrooms. www.rainbowfamilies.org.au/resources/whos-in-your-family/.

Safe@School: Funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education and led by the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) and the Centre ontarien de prévention des agressions (COPA) this online resource offers educators lesson plans, training tools, and more to welcome rainbow families in the classroom. www.safeatschool.ca/resources.

Understanding LGBTQ+ Identity: A Toolkit for Educators Collection: Created by a New York public television station and supported by the NYC Department of Education, this K-12 resource contains lesson plans, handouts, and digital content such as online videos to help teachers create an environment supportive of students in rainbow families. <https://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/lgbtq-identity/>.

Welcoming Schools: Sponsored by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, this website is filled with lesson plans, teaching points, librarian and teacher tips, extensive bibliographies (of books for all ages covering a broad spectrum of LGBTQ topics), and other resources for creating welcoming environments for rainbow families. www.welcomingschools.org/.



describes how she transitioned from being a boy to being a girl. The second book follows a blue crayon with a red label as he tries to do everything that red crayons are supposed to do, such as create a fire engine and make other fantastically red objects. After he fails time and again, the crayon is encouraged to try being blue instead of red, thereby ignoring his label. The message of both of these books is the same, although educators may find that the second book has more universal appeal to discuss labeling and bullying. Nonetheless, each book has an important place in the elementary classroom for the increasing numbers of children who identify as transgender or who completely defy gender labels. Other books such as *The Day Joanie Frankenhauser Became a Boy* by Frances Lantz, *One of a Kind Like Me/Único como yo* by Laurin Mayeno, or *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress* by Christine Baldacchino and Isabelle Malenfant, also approach the topic of gender diversity through the guise of gender-nonconforming clothing.¹⁷ Each of these books presents a well-adjusted child who dresses up in clothing outside of his/her perceived gender and describes the ramifications for not following gender-defined behaviors. The books could be used to stimulate class discussions about what it means to be a particular gender and the limitations of this label. Another particularly useful

resource that educators can use with any of these books is The Gender Unicorn (www.transstudent.org/gender), a child-friendly infographic created by the youth-led organization Trans Student Educational Resources, which explains terminology related to gender identity and expression.

The U.S. Supreme Court decision on June 26, 2015, supporting same-sex marriage provides an opportunity for educators to introduce the topic of same-sex marriage via high-quality picture books. While numerous children's books are available on the topic, many have poorly written narratives or are didactic. One of the best books to capture a child's perspective is *Donovan's Big Day*, by Lesléa Newman and Mike Dutton.¹⁸ Readers follow Donovan, as he gets dressed, navigates a sea of relatives, and prepares for the important job of ring bearer for his two mothers' wedding. The narrative successfully focuses on Donovan's excitement about participating in the wedding. The two-mom aspect of his family is not revealed until the end. Educators could read this story to young children as a way to introduce the topic of same-sex marriage while also normalizing the experiences of children in rainbow families. The book could be accompanied by other quality books that focus on the child's perspective, such as the Canadian picture book *Mom and Mum are Getting Married*, by Ken Setterington and Alice Priestley.¹⁹

Educators can also select books such as Daniel Kirk's *Ten Things I Love About You* or Petr Horáček's *Puffin Peter* that depict same-sex friendships to use in lessons throughout the year. Both of these books describe the platonic love between two male characters.²⁰ Although the characters are not meant to be gay, children who are beginning to have same-sex attractions or who live in same-sex caregiver families might be able to "read in" their life experiences while engaging with these books and feel a sense of validation. See Resources for Integrating LGBTQ Children's Books to find projects, organizations, and materi-

als that will help educators incorporate LGBTQ children's books across the curriculum.

Considerations When Using LGBTQ Books in the Classroom

It would be extremely naïve to assume that every educator in every school across the United States could incorporate LGBTQ children's books into their curriculum without objections from their administration or parents. Invariably, there will be public concern or uncomfortable situations when an educator introduces rainbow families to the curriculum or classroom library. Educators should be cognizant of their community dynamics and local school culture when planning any lesson. If a teacher works in a socially conservative school, he or she might first decide to include books with same-sex friendships or gender diversity in his curriculum as a way to facilitate student learning about different types of relationships and identities. He can then create open-ended activities that would allow children to explore the friendships and other relationships they have with peers and family members, or to discuss the social construction of what is acceptable in terms of boy toys and girl toys. Each of these activities could lay the groundwork for future lessons that include a look at family diversity. Although the teacher might not initially share a book on family diversity that includes LGBTQ families in the text, he might include books with rainbow families in the illustrations as background characters or provide opportunities for children to create projects based upon their family dynamics inclusive of LGBTQ family members.

If an educator does feel comfortable using LGBTQ children's books immediately in the classroom, then she should discern how she will respond to children's questions and comments about LGBTQ families and relationships. Similarly, she will also need to have an idea of how she will interact with parents or other adults who might find the content objectionable. Another concern is how to introduce the topic

of rainbow families or LGBTQ characters without making students from these families uncomfortable. Purposeful versus targeted inclusion in the classroom is crucial. It is important to naturally, purposefully include LGBTQ content into lessons and not single out children who live in rainbow families. A sensitive educator would never approach an African American student and say, “Here is a great book with a character like you.” The same holds for books representing LGBTQ characters and families. Children can make their own connections to the characters and situations, as they are emotionally ready and able. Having books available in a classroom or school library where students can find them on their own is an effective way of providing opportunities for children to see mirrors and windows of experiences.

Concluding Thoughts

Children and caregivers in LGBTQ families deserve to have their experiences reflected in the classroom. Providing instructional materials that mirror their lives not only validates children in LGBTQ families but also creates prospective teachable moments for their classmates. The resources suggested here provide a solid foundation for any educator interested in locating and using LGBTQ children’s books in the early childhood or elementary classroom. In some instances, suggested activities are for “out and proud” lessons that overtly celebrate the life-experiences of rainbow families. In other cases, recommendations are provided for educators seeking to meet the needs of children and caregivers in LGBTQ families via inclusive or “under the radar” educational activities. Regardless of which method is chosen, educators have ample opportunity and guidance to open wide the school doors and welcome rainbow family books into the classroom. 🌈

Notes

1. The main focus of this article is on children’s books with LGBTQ themes that can be used in grades PreK-6. The term “LGBTQ families” is used interchangeably with “rainbow families” throughout the

article to represent LGBTQ caregivers with children as well as children who identify as LGBTQ.

2. Gary Gates, *LGBT Parenting in the United States* (Research Brief) (Los Angeles, Calif.: The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, 2013), <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGBT-Parenting.pdf>; Pew Research Center, *A Survey of LGBT Americans: Attitudes, Experiences and Values in Changing Times* (Report) (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2013), www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2013/06/SDT_LGBT-Americans_06-2013.pdf.
3. Pew Research Center (2013); Abbie E. Goldberg, Nanette K. Gartrell, and Gary Gates, *Research Report on LGB-Parent Families* (Los Angeles, Calif.: The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, 2014), <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/lgb-parent-families-july-2014.pdf>.
4. Lesléa Newman and Diana Souza, *Heather Has Two Mommies* (Los Angeles, Calif.: Alyson Wonderland, 1990); Michael Willhoite, *Daddy’s Roommate* (Los Angeles, Calif.: Alyson Wonderland, 1990); Justin Richardson, Peter Parnell, and Henry Cole, *And Tango Makes Three* (New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers).
5. Newman and Souza (1990); Lesléa Newman, *Heather Has Two Mommies* (Somerville, Mass.: Candlewick, 2015). In 2015, Newman published an updated version of *Heather Has Two Mommies* with text that is very child-friendly and new, vibrant illustrations by Laura Cornell, who often illustrates the kids’ books by Jamie Lee Curtis. This edition is highly recommended for early childhood classroom settings.
6. Susan Meyers and Marla Frazee, *Everywhere Babies* (New York: Harcourt, 2001).
7. Gates, *LGBT Parenting in the United States*.
8. Barbara Dee, *Star-Crossed* (New York: Aladdin, 2017).
9. Jean Christophe Mazurie, *Philomène m’aime* (Grenoble, France: P’tit Glénat, 2011).
10. Sylvia Vardell and Janet Wong, *The Poetry Friday Anthology for Celebrations* (Princeton, N.J.: Pomelo Books, 2015). A link to the “Happy Pride” poem can be found on this book’s website under the month of June (www.poetrycelebrations.com/june/) as well as on Sylvia Vardell’s Poetry for Children blog (<http://poetryforchildren.blogspot.com/2015/06/celebrate-pride.html>).
11. Irene Smalls and Michael Hays, *Jonathan and His Mommy* (New York: Little Brown, 1992); Vanita Oelschlager and Mike Blanc, *A Tale of Two Mommies* (Akron, OH: VanitaBooks, 2011).
12. Todd Parr, *The Mommy Book* (New York: Little Brown, 2002).
13. Suzanne Lang and Max Lang, *Families, Families, Families* (New York: Random House Children’s Books, 2015).
14. Meghan McCarthy, *Daredevil: The Daring Life of Betty Skelton* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013).
15. Charlotte Zolotow and William Pene du Bois, *William’s Doll* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972); Sharon Wyeth and Lynne Cravath, *Tomboy Trouble* (New York: Random House Books for Young Readers, 1998).
16. Jessica Herthel, Jazz Jennings, and Shelagh McNicholas, *I am Jazz* (New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 2014); Michael Hall, *Red: A Crayon’s Story* (New York: Greenwillow, 2015).
17. Frances Lantz, *The Day Joanie Frankenhauser Became a Boy* (New York: Dutton Children’s Books, 2005); Laurin Mayeno and Robert Liu-Trujillo

One of a Kind Like Me/Único como yo (Oakland, Calif.: Blood Orange Press, 2016); Christine Baldacchino and Isabelle Malenfant, *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress* (Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2014).

18. Lesléa Newman and Mike Dutton, *Donovan’s Big Day* (Berkeley: Tricycle Press, 2011).
19. Ken Setterington and Alice Priestley, *Mom and Mum are Getting Married* (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2004); The book *Wishful Wedding: A Pocketful of Pride* (Amy S. Chung and Paula Bossio; Pigeon Hole Books, 2015) directly addresses the inability of two gay dads to marry from a child’s perspective and might be a useful discussion starter. However, the didactic text contains forced rhymes that may be off-putting to children. Educators could consider having students create their own story about gay marriage to accompany the lush, child-appealing illustrations.
20. Daniel Kirk, *Ten Things I Love About You* (New York: Nancy Paulsen Books, 2012); Petr Horáček, *Puffin Peter* (Somerville, MA: Candlewick, 2013).

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