

## Locating Queer Community in Award-Winning LGBTQ-Themed Young Adult Literature (2005–2010)

“I tried to imagine what it would be like if people always reacted to Annie and me that way—being hurt by us, or pitying us; worrying about us, or feeling threatened—even laughing at us. It didn’t make any sense and it was unfair, but it was also awful.”

—*Annie on My Mind* (Garden, 1982, pp. 192–193)

In Nancy Garden’s seminal young adult novel *Annie on My Mind* (1982), high school seniors Liza Winthrop and Annie Kenyon establish a friendship that evolves into romantic love. While the book is one of the first young adult (YA) novels with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) content to actually depict the romantic aspects of a relationship (i.e., what it feels like to fall in love) and ends on a hopeful note as the young women make plans to reunite after their first semester in college, it also depicts the challenges Annie and Liza face from family, friends, and school administrators who disparage their identities. As they experience the exhilaration of falling in love, they also experience fear of being outed, which overshadows their relationship throughout the novel.

Twenty-four years after the publication of *Annie on My Mind*, in sharp contrast to the fear and isolation Annie and Liza face, David Levithan’s *Wide Awake* (2006) depicts a hopeful future, decades after 9/11: the United States has survived the Debt, Deficit, and Fuel Depression (a.k.a. the Greater Depression), the War to End All Wars, and the Reign of Fear, and it has

also witnessed the Supreme Court’s ruling to legalize gay marriage. In fact, the book begins the day after a presidential election in which a gay Jewish man named Stein has won the popular and electoral vote. When the governor of Kansas demands a recount, 16-year-old Duncan, his boyfriend Jimmy, and their circle of friends travel to Kansas to participate in a political rally on Stein’s behalf. Although they face some resistance to their relationship and their political views both at home and in Topeka, they also find support and inspiration from each other and the larger community of LGBTQ people and their many allies.

These two representative novels illustrate a trend in the field of young adult literature (YAL) that, with some exceptions (e.g., Lauren Myracle’s 2011 YA novel *Shine*), moves away from depictions of LGBTQ characters who are ostracized by their families, friends, and acquaintances. In fact, Cart & Jenkins (2006) argue that, although today’s LGBTQ teens continue to face homophobia and heterosexism, they are also more likely to embody their identities “without peril, often with the help of caring adults or peers in gay/straight alliances” (p. 166). And recent LGBTQ-

themed YAL is beginning to mirror this trend, depicting LGBTQ characters who are part of welcoming, supportive communities of LGBTQ people and their allies. As Banks (2009) argues, these evolving representations of LGBTQ experiences “render certain kinds of experiences possible: by viewing characters coming out to both resistant and accepting parents, friends, and teachers, young readers can see the possibilities available to them” (p. 34).

## A Framework for Analyzing YAL with LGBTQ Content

In *The Heart Has Its Reasons: Young Adult Literature with Gay/Lesbian/Queer Content, 1969–2004*, Cart and Jenkins (2006) analyze YAL with LGBTQ content published from 1969 to 2004 according to its representations of sexual identity, using the following categorizations: homosexual visibility (HV), gay assimilation (GA), and queer consciousness/community (QC). This framework is based on Jenkins’s research and builds on Rudine Sims Bishop’s model for analyzing representations of African American identity in children’s literature.

According to Cart and Jenkins (2006), homosexual visibility characterizes much of the YAL with LGBTQ content published in the 1970s and 1980s, like *Annie on My Mind*, and depicts a character who voluntarily or involuntarily comes out “with much of its dramatic tension arising from what *might* happen when the invisible is made visible” (p. xx). Cart and Jenkins include transgender identities within this categorization, noting that more recent titles that depict homosexual visibility include *Luna* (2004) by Julie Anne Peters and *So Hard to Say* (2004) by Alex Sanchez. Meanwhile, gay assimilation falls on the opposite end of the spectrum, depicting characters who “‘just happen to be gay’ in the same way that someone ‘just happens’ to be left-handed or have red hair” (p. xx), like, for example, Jacqueline Woodson’s *The Dear One* (1991).

YAL that features queer consciousness/community depicts LGBTQ characters within supportive LGBTQ communities, as well as their families of choice and of origin (Cart & Jenkins, 2006, p. xx). One such book is Julia Watts’s 2001 Lambda Literary Award winner *Finding H. F.*, which depicts two closeted friends from the fictional Morgan, Kentucky, who embark on

a road trip through Atlanta where they find spiritual community and acceptance at the Metropolitan Community Church. Another YA text that features queer community is David Levithan’s *Boy Meets Boy* (2003), which Cart and Jenkins describe as “a story of a queer community as envisioned by GBLTQ teens who would just like to hold hands or attend a school dance without getting gay-bashed or facing peer rejection” (p. 150). Like Levithan’s *Wide*

*Awake* (2006), *Boy Meets Boy* features characters who find welcoming communities of both LGBTQ people and their allies.

Cart and Jenkins note that earlier YA books with LGBTQ content often depicted death (e.g., AIDS-related illnesses, suicide, murder) of the gay character (e.g., *When Heroes Die* [1992] by Penny Raife Durant), but their hope is that books will move away from this representation to depictions of LGBTQ people living healthy lives within supportive communities, since “many teens now make the transition from the closet to an out life without peril” (p. 166).

Drawing from Clark and Blackburn’s observation that Cart and Jenkins “emphasize community over consciousness” (2009, p. 29), we examined YAL with LGBTQ content published after 2005 for the ways in which it depicts (or does not depict) queer community. Although the use of the term “queer” is controversial, Ressler and Chase (2009) argue that it has been appropriated by members of the LGBTQ community as an inclusive term that “incorporates all identities,” including “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, perceived, and allies” (p. 17). Therefore, we have followed in Cart and Jenkins’s footsteps in our use of the term “queer community.”

We selected YAL that has been honored by several notable groups in the field of LGBT-themed literature: Lambda Literary, the American Library Association (ALA)’s Rainbow Books, and ALA’s Stonewall Book Awards (see Table 1). Of the 24 books we reviewed, the majority (20) depict homosexual visibility as characters choose or choose not to embody

---

**Themed YAL is beginning to mirror this trend, depicting LGBTQ characters who are part of welcoming, supportive communities of LGBTQ people and their allies.**

---

**Table 1.** Analysis of selected YAL with LGBTQ content published since 2005

Year	Title and Author	Award/Honor <sup>1</sup>	HV	GA	QC
2005	<i>Swimming in the Monsoon Sea</i> by Shyam Selvadurai	2006 Lambda Winner	X		
2006	<i>Between Mom and Jo</i> by Julie Anne Peters	2007 Lambda Winner	X		X
2007	<i>Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You</i> by Peter Cameron	2008 Rainbow Starred Book		X	X
	<i>Hero</i> by Perry Moore	2008 Lambda Winner	X	X	X
	<i>grl2grl</i> by Julie Anne Peters	2008 Rainbow Starred Book	X	X	X
	<i>Freak Show</i> by James St. James	2008 Rainbow Starred Book	X		X
	<i>Breathing Underwater</i> by Lu Vickers	2008 Rainbow Starred Book	X		
	<i>Parrotfish</i> by Ellen Wittlinger	2008 Lambda Finalist	X		X
2008	<i>Down to the Bone</i> by Mayra Lazara Dole	2009 Rainbow Starred Book			X
	<i>How They Met and Other Stories</i> by David Levithan	2009 Lambda Finalist	X	X	X
	<i>Out of the Pocket</i> by Bill Konigsberg	2009 Lambda Winner	X		X
	<i>Finlater</i> by Shawn Stewart Ruff	2010 Rainbow Starred Book	X		
	<i>Skim</i> by Mariko Tamaki and Jillian Tamaki	2009 Rainbow Starred Book	X		
	<i>What They Always Tell Us</i> by Martin Wilson	2009 Lambda Finalist	X		X
2009	<i>How Beautiful the Ordinary</i> , edited by Michael Cart	2010 Rainbow Starred Book	X		X
	<i>The Vast Fields of Ordinary</i> by Nick Burd	2010 Stonewall Winner	X		X
	<i>Almost Perfect</i> by Brian Katcher	2011 Stonewall Winner	X		X
	<i>Ash</i> by Malindo Lo	2010 Rainbow Starred Book	X		
	<i>Sprout</i> by Dale Peck	2010 Lambda Winner and Stonewall Honoree	X		X
	<i>Wildthorn</i> by Jane Eagland	2011 Lambda Winner and Rainbow Starred Book	X		
	<i>Into the Beautiful North</i> by Luis Alberto Urrea	2010 Rainbow Starred Book		X	
2010	<i>Jumpstart the World</i> by Catherine Ryan Hyde	2011 Lambda Finalist			X
	<i>Will Grayson, Will Grayson</i> by John Green and David Levithan	2011 Stonewall Honoree and Rainbow Starred Book	X		X
	<i>A Love Story Starring My Dead Best Friend</i> by Emily Horner	2011 Rainbow Starred Book	X		X

<sup>1</sup> All awards/honors are in the children's/young adult category, and all are fiction. ALA's Stonewall Children's Young Adult category was added in 2010, and ALA's Rainbow Books began honoring books in 2008.

their sexual identity. Yet the majority of these 20 texts (14) also depict queer community, as characters discover a supportive community of friends and family after they come out. Overall, we found that 17 (over 70%) of the books depict queer community, and just

5 of the books depict gay assimilation. Clearly, these texts portray a range of LGBTQ and ally experiences, reminding readers that “there is no unitary experience of gayness” (Mitchell, 2000, p. 119).

## Celebration of Difference in terms of Sexual Orientation and Gender Variance in ELA

The March 2009 issue of *English Journal* featured several articles from classroom teachers who include LGBTQ themes in their curricula. For example, when teaching literature, Kristin M. Comment (2009) illuminates the gay subtext found in Dickinson and Whitman and includes biographical information on authors' sexuality. David Blazar (2009) uses performance pedagogy as he guides students through *Angels in America*, and Joel M. Freedman (2009) describes his writing activities surrounding the 2008 National Day of Silence, which was dedicated to Lawrence King, a 15-year-old who was killed by a classmate because he was gay. Freedman's students wrote in the voices of the people involved in the hate crime and in so doing, demonstrated empathy. These are admirable approaches that demonstrate a deliberate effort to include a range of human experiences in the classroom. If literature is to serve both as a window and a mirror into the human experience, it is important to position readers in a way that allows it to be both.

In their work with adolescent readers, Clark and Blackburn (2009) found that if we, as educators, assume that students approach texts from a homophobic perspective, or if we discuss only heterosexual relationships when it comes to romantic love, then we marginalize LGBTQ students and reinscribe heteronormative thinking. In addition, they found that young people in their book groups preferred LGBT-themed literature that depicts LGBT youth participating in queer communities and argue that "teachers must make a deliberate effort to include literature that falls into the QC category" (p. 30). We agree.

Knowing that English language arts teachers have a proud history of teaching for social justice (Bomer & Bomer, 2001; Bomer, 2007; Kutz & Rosekelly, 1991; Lewis-Bernstein Young, 2009) and that contemporary YAL is a powerful tool, both in its potential for creating lifelong readers (Blasingame, 2010; Cole, 2009) and in its ability to teach about LGBTQ topics (Kenney, 2010), we share descriptions of three LGBTQ-themed YA texts that depict queer community and that were published after 2005. In addition, we each describe possibilities for teaching our selected texts: essential questions for Catherine Ryan Hyde's

*Jumpstart the World* (2010), emotion logs and Venn diagrams for David Levithan's *How They Met* (2008), and points of discussion for Peter Cameron's *Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You* (2007).

## Reading *Jumpstart the World* with Preservice and Inservice English Teachers

In Kansas, where it's sometimes hard to be heard over the hatred espoused by Fred Phelps,<sup>1</sup> I (Katie) have been eager to introduce quality YAL with LGBTQ content to the preservice and inservice English teachers in my English methods courses. Catherine Ryan Hyde's *Jumpstart the World* (2010) is an ideal selection.

Fifteen-year-old Elle lives in New York City in her own apartment because her mom's boyfriend doesn't want Elle around. A loner who doesn't trust people very easily, Elle opens up to her new neighbors Molly and Frank, who invite her over for homemade chicken noodle soup and Scrabble. Elle feels an immediate attraction to Frank, who is gentle and who listens in a way that no one else ever has. Although their relationship never moves beyond friendship, Elle isn't prepared when she learns that Frank is transgender. She initially pulls away from him as well as her new friends at school—all members and/or allies of the LGBTQ community who identify and accept Frank's gender identity immediately. Although Elle herself often does not say/do the "politically correct" thing—she's honest and awkward, and sometimes regrets her words and actions, allowing the reader to learn alongside her—she eventually becomes both a friend and ally within her community, providing a space in her home and in front of her camera where her school friends can fully embody their identities. When Frank is injured in a car accident, Elle takes on an activist role, sneaking into Frank's hospital room to stand guard overnight after Molly is forced to leave at the end of visiting hours.

My students (all future and current English teachers) spent portions of five class meetings in a course

---

**If literature is to serve both as a window and a mirror into the human experience, it is important to position readers in a way that allows it to be both.**

---

called Literature for Adolescents responding to and discussing *Jumpstart the World*, returning to these essential questions throughout our reading:

1. What labels do I use to describe myself and the people around me?
2. In what ways do I embody/enact my gender? What assumptions do we make about people based on how they express their gender?
3. In what ways do these assumptions/stereotypes restrict or enhance what we do and what we achieve?
4. In what ways do my words, actions, and the way I treat other people and the world around me shape my identity and self-perception?

Prior to reading this text, students engaged in a value line, placing themselves on an imaginary line based on whether they agreed or disagreed with (or fell somewhere in between) the following value statements that connect to themes in *Jumpstart*:

- It's easy not to care about what other people think of me.
- Words do not have the power to hurt people, if they choose to ignore them.
- People who fit in have an easier time in life.
- Fitting in is important.

Students reviewed each statement individually, taking a few moments to think/reflect before placing themselves on the line. They discussed their perspectives in small groups and then as a whole class, physically moving up or down the line as their perspectives shifted. By this time in the semester, most students had acquired a copy of the text, read the cover blurb, and knew that it features a transgender character. I purposefully composed value statements that apply to people all along the spectrums of sexual orientation and gender identity in the hope that my students (all of whom self-identified as heterosexual and gender normative) would begin to make connections to their own lives and experiences. These statements also introduce the idea of community and the potential benefits and drawbacks of membership within communities.

Students then engaged in several quick-writes and subsequent pair-shares in response to the following prompts, which connect to themes in *Jumpstart* and are applicable to people of all gender and sexual identities:

- What does it mean to be beautiful?
- What criteria does society and/or media use to judge someone's beauty?
- Think of someone who is beautiful (it could be you!). What makes this person beautiful?

Since Elle is often witness to or the target of her mother's judgments regarding physical beauty, these statements help the reader establish a context for understanding Elle's strained relationship with her mom, as well as her evolving understanding of beauty. Ultimately, as she explores activism through photography, Elle reminds the reader that it's okay (and even desirable) to notice what makes us different/unique, but that we needn't disparage one another for those differences—that, in fact, there is beauty in our differences.

Over the course of four class meetings, students engaged in several small-group interactions that involved speaking, listening, reading, and writing—namely, literature circles (Daniels, 2002) and silent discussions (Blasingame, 2009, pp. 613–614). As students participated in these learning activities, I was surprised at how little direct instruction related to LGBTQ issues I needed to provide alongside the novel. In my undergraduate students' final English methods course, which they will take later, I spend at least one three-hour class meeting on sexual orientation and gender variance, discussing terminology, readings, statistics, language, etc. But I didn't do any *teaching* of LGBTQ topics for the reading of *Jumpstart*; my students didn't need it. This book led them through some of the most productive learning that I've ever seen in my methods classes. In their end-of-semester writing and discussions, students who, at the start of the semester, identified as conservative in terms of their beliefs on the rights of LGBTQ people, questioned the fairness of laws that prohibit same-sex couples from marrying one another (and enjoying the privileges associated with that status). One student wrote the following response during our silent discussion:

This book has made me look at the idea of equality in a new way. I've always believed that marriage should be between a man and woman; however, now I see that since we live in America, we should all have the same rights. If I can get married, then why can't someone who is gay? If we look at the issue as separate from religious teaching, which is what we are supposed to do in this country, the answer becomes more clear.

Many students acknowledged their own heterosexual privilege as citizens whose lives are not personally affected by anti-LGBTQ policies and laws. And they articulated a need to “jumpstart” their own worlds—in particular, their classroom libraries and curricula—rather than sitting idly by because, as one student put it, “what goes around [eventually] comes around.”

### **Looking at Love through David Levithan’s *How They Met***

While the reading of novels and plays holds an important place in contemporary classrooms, reading themed short stories allows for multiple glimpses into a topic in a relatively short period of time, making it a useful way to examine a subject from a variety of viewpoints. Moreover, as Kimberly Hill Campbell (2007) argues in her book, *Less Is More*, short stories hold students’ attention, they are just plain fun to read, and teachers can easily monitor students’ reading with short texts.

With these thoughts in mind, I (April) have created a love-themed short-story unit based on 2009 Lambda Award finalist David Levithan’s collection of short stories, *How They Met* (2008). What makes this collection noteworthy is not its romantic theme: there are many literary collections about love. What makes this collection so groundbreaking are the types of stories found inside. Next to the story about a gay teenage boy’s crush is the story of a lesbian girl’s betrayal, which is followed by the story of a young girl who is in love with a boy much too old for her. Levithan’s collection shines a spotlight on human relationships—not gay, not lesbian, not straight, not bi, and not transgender—but human relationships in all of their complexity. He offers the following by way of introduction: “These stories aren’t connected . . . but of course they are, in a way. They don’t share characters, but they share many other things. . . . Together these stories say much more than they would apart” (p. ii). It is my belief that the placing of these stories in a single collection *creates* queer community as they speak to one another in theme and content, and while many of them depict queer community outright, together they create a rich tapestry of human experience.

This unit is designed to allow students the opportunity to see what these stories say together and

to find both mirrors and windows into their experiences, regardless of their sexual orientations. The unit contains four stories grouped together into two pairs—unrealized love and set-ups—and the accompanying activities are relatively simple:

students create Venn diagrams for each pair of stories. While students could certainly create diagrams related to plot, setting, character traits, etc. for each pair of stories, the focus of their reading will be on characters’ emotions. Emotions are an appropriate lens in a unit on love since, by definition,

love *is* emotion. Therefore, by examining characters’ emotional states as an essential part of students’ readings, students focus on the human experience of love in the context of specific experiences.

To do this, students keep an emotion log during their readings of the stories. As they make their way through each pair of stories, they stop several times and list a few feelings (e.g., confused, anxious, thrilled, etc.) that the narrators might be experiencing at that point in the story, perhaps reflecting on how they themselves felt in particular situations. Once they have read both stories, they should have two lists of emotions to be transcribed into a single Venn diagram of emotions surrounding the pairing. (See Table 2 for a model emotion log that is ready to be transcribed into a Venn diagram.)

By the end of the unit, students will have two Venn diagrams and will be able to quite literally see the emotional intersections of the stories. Listed below are the paired stories from *How They Met* that I’ve selected for this unit.

#### *Unrealized Love*

“The Good Witch”: Damon asks Sally to the prom because he is bored in biology class, and she says yes. When he picks her up and Sally is interested in more than a date of convenience, he tells her he is gay, realizing it for the first time for himself.

“Flirting with Waiters”: Rebecca develops a crush on Seth, the guy who works at the pizza shop by her

---

**The placing of these stories in a single collection *creates* queer community as they speak to one another in theme and content.**

---

Table 2. Emotion log: Set-ups

Gabriel	Roger
Attraction	Intrigue
Disappointment	Attraction
Hope	Hope
Admiration	Contentedness
Nervousness	Gratitude
Joy	Excitement
Curiosity	Relief
Gratitude	

house. Because she isn't even in high school and he is in his senior year, she is doomed to admire him from a distance. Despite their age difference, the two become friends while Rebecca learns about love.

#### Set-Ups

"Starbucks Boy": Gabriel gets stuck spending his summer babysitting a precocious six-year-old girl named Arabella. Arabella insists on maintaining a strict schedule that includes morning reading, followed by a trip to Starbucks for "a vanilla mocha decaf latte, hold the mocha" (p. 8). When Gabriel meets a boy he likes behind the counter, he discovers Arabella's routine was about more than her love of lattes; she was setting him up for love.

"The Number of People Who Meet on Airplanes": Rory and Roger sat next to each other on the airplane and noticed that they were reading the same book. They thought it was destiny, but when a guest at their 10-year anniversary party reveals that they might have been set up, Roger investigates. He discovers Al Schwartz, a retired ticket agent, who made it his life's work to set people up on their flights across the country.

## Understanding Others and Ourselves through *Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You*

The book *Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You* (2007) by Peter Cameron offers the ideal opportunity for readers to know a homosexual teen. Eighteen-year-old James Sveck is the highly intelligent son of well-intentioned but dysfunctional divorced parents living in post-9/11 Manhattan. While James has been accepted to Brown University, he would prefer to use his college fund to buy a home in a small town in the Midwest where he can live alone, completely isolated from the world. Since the book is written in first person, readers have a direct and immediate connection with James as he comes to grips with the complexities of growing up, with acceptance of self and others, and with allowing himself to forge meaningful relationships.

This book is valuable for many reasons, but what stands out most to me (Elle) as a teacher is that it presents a story that is highly relatable because James is an extremely human protagonist. The story does not hinge on James's sexuality but rather incorporates this aspect of his personality as only one of the many facets of his complex character. Readers will identify with James and his experiences. Ultimately, this book invites readers to experience compassion for James, not as a gay person, but as a human being.

When thinking about how to teach this novel, it was important to me to be mindful of how readers in my class were positioned in relation to the text. I didn't want to assume students were homophobic and turn this into a lesson on tolerance, nor did I want to assume they were all heterosexual, thereby marginalizing homosexual students' experiences. Rather, I wanted their readings to be focused not just on James's sexuality, but on important human experiences such as isolation, loneliness, and sadness. Therefore, I framed my teaching of this book as I would any text, around discussion. In the section below, I've provided key moments in the text that allow students to examine important ideas. By providing these points of discussion here, my hope is that readers of this article will gain a sense of this novel's potential for classroom discussions.

*Point of Discussion # 1:* Throughout the novel, we recognize James’s focus on the basic human need to be seen and noticed. When James runs away from home but returns the next morning, his mother and sister remark that they weren’t aware that he had disappeared. His mother even comments that eventually they would have noticed, but that next time he will “just have to stay away a bit longer” (p. 221) if he wants them to notice that he is gone. In a candid moment with his therapist, James mentions that he is thinking “about the woman who died on September 11 who no one knew was missing” (p. 174). Using this theme as a motif, find and quote five key instances from the book that depict this idea. Then explain how the motif functions within the text. How does James’s need to be noticed change throughout the story? What is your response to this basic human need?

*Point of Discussion # 2:* This story touches on the universal theme of isolation and alienation from others in an entirely human and moving way. James’s isolation is the result of a lack of community, much less queer community. How important is community? What communities are you a part of? How do these communities support and define you? How does James’s lack of community impact him throughout the book?

*Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You* invites serious and thoughtful classroom discussion about what it means to be a part of a community. Students discuss their own difficulties with being a part of a community and, through close readings of James and the self-imposed isolation that he experiences, students are able to identify times that they have alienated themselves from others both intentionally and unintentionally. Classroom discussions surrounding this text are often frank and intense as students ultimately recognize that James’s lack of community is the result of his actions and attitude.

When I was preparing to teach this text, I expected that James’s sexuality would be the focus of many class discussions due to the somewhat conservative nature of the community where I was teaching. I was surprised to find that, while students did comment on this aspect of the text, it was primarily in regards to the role that sexuality plays in finding community and self-acceptance. This book, and James’s character, provided an excellent entry point into literature with

an LGBTQ protagonist precisely because James is so much more than his sexuality. *Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You* provides students with the opportunity to reflect on their actions, attitudes, and choices, as well as their chosen communities.

## Locating and Teaching Queer Community in YAL

As Cart and Jenkins (2006) hoped and predicted, YAL with LGBTQ content continues to expand our notions of what it means to come out or be out within a supportive community of LGBTQ people and allies. Garden gave us a glimpse of this hopeful future in *Annie on My Mind* (1982) when Liza mentions that she experiences a small sense of community among some of her peers at school after coming out: “I guess if I add it all up, though, I’d have to say that for every kid who was rotten—and there were really only a few—there were at least two, like Valerie and all the kids who just said hi to me in an ordinary friendly way, who counteracted it” (pp. 218–219).

While the decision to come out remains an important consideration for characters in many YA novels, these texts no longer depict only negative consequences of embodying an LGBTQ identity in a homophobic society. In fact, depending on the reader’s lived experience, YAL that depicts queer community can serve as a mirror of the reader’s own experiences/observations, or it can serve as a window into the kind of world the reader wants (or should strive) to create. By integrating texts with queer community into our curricula, we can show students what the world can and should look like in terms of how we demonstrate respect and appreciation for all facets of our own and others’ identities.

---

**YAL that depicts queer community can serve as a mirror of the reader’s own experiences/observations, or it can serve as a window into the kind of world the reader wants (or should strive) to create.**

---

### Endnote

<sup>1</sup> Fred Phelps is pastor of the Westboro Baptist Church of Topeka, Kansas, which is known for its anti-gay demonstrations at US military funerals, LGBTQ pride celebra-



tions, and any other event the group perceives to be in support of LGBTQ people.

**Katherine Mason** is an assistant professor of English Education at Wichita State University and coeditor of SIGNAL Journal. She can be reached at [katherine.mason@wichita.edu](mailto:katherine.mason@wichita.edu).

**April Brannon** is an assistant professor of English and the director of English Education at California State University, Fullerton. She can be reached at [abrannon@exchange.fullerton.edu](mailto:abrannon@exchange.fullerton.edu).

**Elle Yarborough** is an associate professor of English at Northern Essex Community College. She can be reached at [eyarborough@necc.mass.edu](mailto:eyarborough@necc.mass.edu).

## References

- Banks, W. P. (2009). Literacy, sexuality, and the value(s) of queer young adult literatures. *English Journal*, 98(4), 33–36.
- Blasingame, J. (2009). YA literature and writing: Motivating young writers in the real world. In P. B. Cole (Ed.), *Young adult literature in the 21st century* (pp. 597–621). Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Blasingame, J. (2010). *Books that don't bore 'em: Young adult books that speak to this generation*. New York: Scholastic.
- Blazar, D. (2009). Self-discovery through character connections: Opening up to gayness in *Angels in America*. *English Journal* 98(4), 77–84.
- Bomer, R. (2007). The role of handover in teaching for democratic participation. In K. Beers, R. E. Probst, & L. Rief, *Adolescent literacy: Turning promise into practice* (pp. 303–310). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Bomer, R., & Bomer, K. (2001). *For a better world: Reading and writing for social action*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Cameron, P. (2007). *Someday this pain will be useful to you*. New York, NY: Picador.
- Campbell, K. H. (2007). *Less is more: Teaching literature with short texts*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Cart, M., & Jenkins, C. A. (2006). *The heart has its reasons: Young adult literature with gay/lesbian/queer content, 1969–2004*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow.
- Clark, C. T., & Blackburn, M. V. (2009). Reading LGBT-themed literature with young people: What's possible? *English Journal*, 98(4), 25–32.
- Cole, P. B. (2009). *Young adult literature in the 21st century*. Boston, MA: McGraw Hill.
- Comment, K. M. (2009). Wasn't she a lesbian? Teaching homoerotic themes in Dickinson and Whitman. *English Journal* 98(4), 61–66.
- Daniels, H. (2002). *Literature circles: Voice and choice in book clubs and reading groups*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Durant, P. R. (1992). *When heroes die*. New York, NY: Atheneum.
- Freedman, J. M. (2009). Echoes of silence: Empathy and making connections through the writing process. *English Journal* 98(4), 92–96.
- Garden, N. (1982). *Annie on my mind*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Hyde, C. R. (2010). *Jumpstart the world*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Kenney, L. M. (2010). Being out and reading queer-inclusive texts in a high school English classroom. In M. V. Blackburn, C. T. Clark, L. M. Kenney, & J. M. Smith, *Acting out!: Combating homophobia through teacher activism* (pp. 56–73). New York, NY: Teachers College.
- Kutz, E., & Rosekelly, H. (1991). *An unquiet pedagogy: Transforming practice in the English classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Lambda Literary Awards. Lambda Literary. Retrieved from <http://www.lambdaliterary.org/awards>.
- Levithan, D. (2003). *Boy meets boy*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Levithan, D. (2006). *Wide awake*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Levithan, D. (2008). *How they met*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Lewis-Bernstein Young, S. (2009). Breaking the silence: Critical literacy and social action. *English Journal*, 98(4), 109–115.
- Mitchell, C. (2000). "What's out there?" Gay and lesbian literature for children and young adults. In W. J. Spurlin (Ed.), *Lesbian and gay studies and the teaching of English: Positions, pedagogies, and cultural politics* (pp. 112–130). Urbana, IL: NCTE.
- Myracle, L. (2011). *Shine*. New York, NY: Amulet Books.
- Peters, J. A. (2004). *Luna*. New York, NY: Little, Brown.
- Rainbow Books. American Library Association. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/rts/glbtrt/rainbow/index.cfm>.
- Ressler, P., & Chase, B. (2009). Sexual identity and gender variance: Meeting the educational challenges. *English Journal*, 98(4), 15–22.
- Sanchez, A. (2004). *So hard to say*. New York, NY: Simon Pulse.
- Stonewall Book Awards List. American Library Association. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/glbtrt/rainbow/bibliographies>.
- Watts, J. (2001). *Finding H. F.* Los Angeles, CA: Alyson Books.
- Woodson, J. (1991). *The dear one*. New York, NY: Delacorte.