

Chapter 7

LGBTQ+ Literature in the Elementary and Secondary Classroom as Windows and Mirrors for Young Readers

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ABSTRACT

Educators looking for books to offer to children and young adult readers with LGBTQ+-inclusive themes can use these results to review award winning books and the themes found in the texts. This critical content study includes children's and young adult books winning the Stonewall Award from the American Library Association. The selected books are reviewed for themes applicable to mirrors and windows that are provided to readers in the text. Windows provide a way for readers to see an experience unlike their own while mirrors offer a reflection of experiences the reader has experienced. Both offer a way for readers to connect with the text.

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INTRODUCTION

Classroom exposure to LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) literature in the K-12 environment has historically been pretty limited, but as social policies and laws transform to be more inclusive, teachers are seeking out diversity in their reading selections to share with their students. The inclusion of diverse books in classrooms will help students develop their self-worth and understand how to participate in a society with all types of people. Diversity in literature can provide the role of a “mirror” for some students and provide a “window” through which students can view experiences other than their own. The idea of windows and mirrors (Bishop, 1990) is only helpful if the literature does contain issues and characters that can provide such an experience. That ability to see through a window or into a mirror because of a text should strengthen positive identities of LGBTQ+ readers (“mirrors”) and give insight to heterosexual readers (“windows”).

When choosing LGBTQ+ texts to include in classroom curricula, books should be reviewed for content and themes that require acknowledgement and conversation about LGBTQ+ issues. The books chosen for this study are award winners from 2010-2019; they have each won the prestigious Stonewall Award from the American Library Association. In order to provide mirrors and windows, quality texts must be chosen and evaluated to determine their ability to provide such a view for young readers; this critical content study explores the connection between themes presented in the books to the theory of windows and mirrors.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What common themes are present in award-winning LGBTQ+ children’s and adolescent literature?
2. How do the themes presented in the Stonewall Award winning books demonstrate connections to the theory of mirrors and windows in literature?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reasons for Reading

Four reasons for reading developed by Hade (1993) include teaching reading, developing literary knowledge, developing self-understanding, and developing social responsibility. These are important goals for teachers to set and use as a focus for curriculum, but two of those reasons (developing self-understanding and developing

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