

Homosexuality in Children's Literature

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History

As early as 1981, picture books began to be published with LGBT themes. These books were often quickly challenged. For instance, *Heather has Two Mommies*, written in 1989, was the 11th most challenged book of the 1990s according to ALA. While LGBT themed children's literature is becoming more and more prevalent, it is still a controversial issue, and these materials are still frequently challenged, especially in schools.

Awards like ALA's Stonewall Book award and the Lambda Literary Award for LGBT Children's or Young Adult books are now emerging to help identify and bring attention to exceptional children's literature with LGBT themes or characters. These awards can be found online at <http://www.ala.org/glbtrt/award> and <http://www.lambdaliterary.org/awards/> respectively.

Importance

"Children's literatures, including picture books, are ideological texts that typically ratify the social order and maintain hegemonic views of the world. As such, children's books are deeply implicated in the reproduction and perpetuation of social domination (Taxel, 1989) by creating a mythical norm—based on race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, national hierarchies, and materialism—through which all individuals and groups are measured (Lorde, 1990)."¹

Because children's literature helps teaches kids what society considers to be normal, appropriate, or acceptable, it is important that these books present an accurate view of our diverse society. It is also important that LGBT people, like members of other minority groups, are presented in a positive, non-stereotypical light.

Challenges

Discovery.com identifies "Homosexuality" as the sixth most common reason for challenging or banning books. LGBT themed literature is often challenged for religious reasons, and is labeled "Unsuitable" for a specific age group or for readers in general. In order to meet these challenges successfully, librarians should carefully select the materials for their libraries and ensure that each book in their collection is there for a reason.

Evaluation Criteria

ALA's GLBT Round Table has created some guidelines for evaluating LGBT literature. They can be found at <http://www.ala.org/glbtrt/popularresources/utopia>. Generally speaking, librarians should evaluate these books as they would other materials, but pay special attention to the way that gay characters, gay rights, and the LGBT experience is portrayed in the book.

Resources

<http://www.ala.org/glbtrt/> <http://booksforkidsingayfamilies.blogspot.com/>

¹ Shimanoff, Susan B., John P. Elia, and Gust A. Yep. "Queering the Politics of Lambda Picture Book Finalists: Challenging Creeping Neoliberalism Through Curricular Innovations." *Journal of Homosexuality*. Vol 57, Issue 12, 2012. 1005-1030.