

## A Very Short List: An LGBT Bibliography for High School Teachers

### Literature

Included here are books typically already included in the high school curriculum. *Am I Blue?* and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* are the two exceptions.

Allison, Dorothy. *Bastard Out of Carolina*.

*Bastard Out of Carolina* is Dorothy Allison's coming-of-age narrative about Bone, who deals with explicit physical and sexual abuse at the hands of her stepfather, and the emotional turmoil that she feels when her mother remains loyal to the perpetrator of the violence she endures. In addition to child abuse, Allison deals with the themes of poverty and gender inequality in the rural south. Lesbianism is not a major theme but rather an undercurrent that runs throughout the novel. If approaching this novel from the viewpoint of poverty (or hunger), then Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* may be an ideal pairing. Since *Bastard Out of Carolina* is a female coming-of-age novel, any of the following may be suitable pairings: Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Judith Ortiz Cofer's *Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John*, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Esmeralda Santiago's *When I Was Puerto Rican*, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*.

Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*.

*The Handmaid's Tale* is Canadian author Margaret Atwood's dystopian story about citizens of a not-so-future theocracy potentially near collapse. This society's hope lies in an underground movement represented above ground in the spirit of the lesbian character Moira. Her dissident spirit, a motif threaded throughout the tale, remains indomitable in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. It is Moira's insistence upon thinking and acting independently that will undermine and ultimately topple the repressive governing regime. Pairing this novel with Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* is an invitation to examine the effects of a repressive society. Kurt Vonnegut's short story "Harrison Bergeron" and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* would be promising pairings.

Baldwin, James. *Go Tell It on the Mountain*.

James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* depicts the life of 14-year-old John Grimes as he grapples with questions of sexuality and morality. The reader follows the inner toils and hardships of John and three other characters, Florence, Elizabeth, and Gabriel. Written in three parts and set in Harlem during the period following the Great Migration,

*Go Tell It on the Mountain* deals with the issues of race, immorality, domestic violence, and religion. Possible discussions and explorations include biblical allusions, race relations, personal choice versus familial and societal expectations, domestic violence, sin, and sexuality. Coupled with readings about Baldwin's own life, as well as literary criticism of the book, this text makes the perfect fit for literary response and analysis.

Bauer, Marion Dane, ed. *Am I Blue? Coming Out from the Silence*.

*Am I Blue? Coming Out from the Silence*, an anthology of sixteen stories written by prominent writers of young adult literature, tackles issues such as "coming out," and growing up with LGBT parents or friends. Interwoven within the main LGBT theme of this book are other issues such as family love, friendship, losing a parent, and acceptance. Unlike other titles on this list, *Am I Blue* focuses entirely on LGBT topics. The stories range from the humorous "Am I Blue"—a story about a young gay boy who makes a wish to a fairy to turn gay people blue and is amazed to see how many people (including the town bully) change color—to the heart-rending "Winnie & Tommy"—a story about a young couple whose relationship is interrupted when Tommy confesses to his girlfriend Winnie that he is gay. Some other books that tackle delicate teen issues are Sara Shandler's *Ophelia Speaks*, Francesca Lia Block's *Weetzie Bat* and Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*.

Chbosky, Stephen. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*.

Charlie is a sweet, sensitive, detached boy beginning his freshman year of high school. Luckily he is adopted by a group of seniors who are also outsiders. They introduce him to friendship, intimacy, drugs, and sex. Charlie's friendship with Patrick, who is gay, leads to his own exploration of his sexuality. This book has an extraordinary hold over teenage readers, who all—jock, rocker, gay, straight, male, female—seem to feel a kinship with Charlie. This coming-of-age novel explores questions of identity, alienation, and relationships. It could work well in classroom units on identity, the nature of groups, and internal conflict. Some suggestions for pairings: *Catcher in the Rye*—alienation—*Of Mice and Men*—qualities of friendship—or *House on Mango Street*—questions of identity and writing to make sense of the world.

Knowles, John. *A Separate Peace*.

Subsequent to his book's success, John Knowles came out as gay and stated that his characters, Finny and Gene, are indeed in love. This, however, is not explicit in the novel. Rather the story focuses on deep friendship, on not necessarily knowing oneself, and on the struggle that is self-discovery. "Paul's Case" by lesbian author Willa Cather is akin to *A Separate Peace* in that the protagonist Paul struggles to realize his true self.

Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*.

*The Color Purple*, Alice Walker's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, deals with themes of sexism, racism, and sexual abuse seen through the eyes of Celie, who is raped (and impregnated twice) by her father, separated from her sister, and forced to marry a physically abusive man. Alice Walker, who is bisexual, depicts lesbianism in the love affair between Celie and Shug as natural and freeing a pathway to self-love for a woman who has only known sex to be a brutal and painful endeavor. Some ideal pairings for this novel include Dorothy Allison's *Bastard out of Carolina* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*.

## Videos

*I Just Want to Say*. Gay, Lesbian and Straight Educational Network, Publications Dept., 122 W. 26<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 1100, New York, NY 10001. [GLSEN@glsen.org](mailto:GLSEN@glsen.org)

*It's Elementary—Talking About Gay Issues in School*. Women's Educational Media, 2180 Bryant Street, Suite 203, San Francisco, CA 94110. <http://www.womedia.org>

*Live to Tell: The First Gay & Lesbian Prom in America*. Charley Lang, producer. [DakotaFileworks@aol.com](mailto:DakotaFileworks@aol.com)

*Trevor*. A film by Peggy Rajski. <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/thefilm.aspx>

## Websites

<http://www.glsen.org>

GLSEN, a national organization fighting to end antigay bias in K–12 schools, offers resource guides and workshops for safe schools and professional development, curricula, and law and policy guides.

<http://www.matthewshepard.org>

This is the official site of the Matthew Shepard Foundation, whose purpose is to erase hate and offer support to LGBT youth and adults. The site offers some excellent links, bibliographies, and resources.

<http://www.pflag.org>

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) is a national nonprofit organization. Their website offers resources for family, friends, and educators of LGBTQ (LGBT and questioning) people.

<http://www.project10.org>

The official website of Friends of Project 10, Inc.—the nonprofit arm of Los Angeles Unified School District’s Project 10 program, which provides educational support services to LGBTQ youth attending public school—contains a wealth of information.