



Book of the Month

Presented by ADL's Education Division

About the Book of the Month: This collection of featured books is from Books Matter: The Best Kid Lit on Bias, Diversity and Social Justice. The books teach about bias and prejudice, promote respect for diversity, encourage social action and reinforce themes addressed in education programs of [A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute](#), ADL's international anti-bias education and diversity training provider. For educators, adult family members and other caregivers of children, reading the books listed on this site with your children and incorporating them into instruction are excellent ways to talk about these important concepts at home and in the classroom.

The Best Man

Richard Peck (Author)

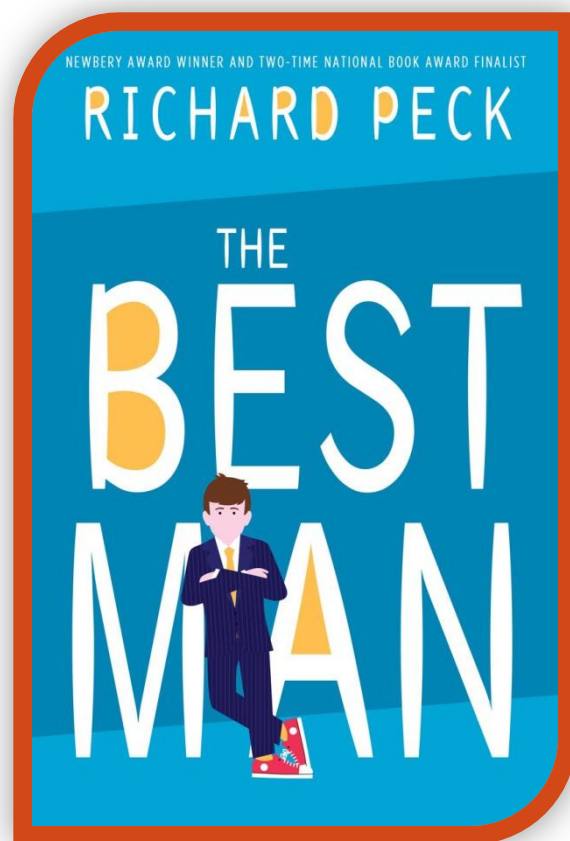
Archer Magill has spent a lively five years of grade school in search of grown-up role models. Three of the best are his grandpa, the great architect; his dad, the great vintage car customizer; and his uncle Paul, who is just plain great. These are the three he wants to be like. Along the way he finds a fourth—Mr. McLeod, a military-based student teacher who both disrupts Archer's class and enriches it. In response to antigay bullying, Mr. McLeod gives the students a lecture in which he publicly outs himself, a particularly poignant moment. Outside school, Archer also shares daily adventures with his father, his grandfather, and his uncle Paul, whose romantic interest in Mr. McLeod might just well lead to a second wedding in which he has a starring role.

ISBN: 978-0803738393

Publisher: Dial Books for Young Readers

Year Published: 2016

Age Range: 9–12



Book Themes

LGBTQ people, Marriage equality, Bias, Bullying, Homophobia, Friendship

Key Words

Discuss and define these words with students prior to reading the book and remind them of the meanings as they come up in the book. See ADL's [Glossary of Education Terms](#).

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|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| ■ acquainted | ■ conformity | ■ identity | ■ retract |
| ■ assaulted | ■ cremate | ■ irreconcilable | ■ shakedown |
| ■ authentic | ■ deploy | ■ lockdown | ■ standardized tests |
| ■ chaos | ■ differently-abled | ■ media | ■ stragglers |
| ■ compatible | ■ extraordinary | ■ multiculturalism | ■ typical |
| ■ complacent | ■ fostered | ■ panicking | ■ unauthorized |
| ■ complicated | ■ gay | ■ psychology | ■ valedictorian |
| ■ confidentiality | ■ gratuitous | ■ quirky | ■ vintage |

Discussion Questions

If the students read the book in small groups or as a whole class, ask discussion questions throughout their reading in order to check comprehension and engage them on a deeper level. Some of these questions can also be used as writing prompts. When students have finished the book, choose from these questions to guide a group discussion:

- What is the book about?
- What did you think about Archer when you are first introduced to him and how did your perception of him change throughout the book?
- When you first saw the book's title and cover, what did you think it might be about?
- In the first few pages, there are several generalizations made about what boys and girls like. What are they and how did you feel when you read them?
- When Archer was in first grade, what was his relationship with Lynette like when they first met? How does their friendship change and evolve over the five years of the book? Have you ever had a long friendship like that and if so, what was it like and how did it change?
- When Archer says, "When people began to notice we were best friends (Lynette and he), I might just as well put on a dress and throw myself backward off the monkey bars," what does Archer mean by this?
- What does Archer learn about Jackson Showalter when his Uncle Paul and he go to Jackson's house?
- When Grandpa's cat Cleo appears in Archer's window one night, how does Archer know that Grandpa is in trouble?
- What causes Lynette and Natalie to have a fight? Despite what others might think about his and Lynette's friendship, what does Archer do to support Lynette?
- How does Lynette feel about her parents getting a divorce? How do you know?
- What was the reaction of the fifth grade class when they get assigned a new student teacher, Mr. McLeod? Why do you think everyone reacts the way they do?

- How did the students in Archer's class feel about Mr. McLeod as a teacher? How do you know?
- On Mr. McLeod's last day, what do Archer and Raymond discover when they go to the restroom to find Russell? How would you describe what the sixth graders did to Russell? What did Archer and Raymond do?
- Why do you think Mr. McLeod reacted the way he did? What impact did his confrontation with the sixth graders have on them? What impact do you think it had on Archer, Raymond and Russell, who were also there?
- When Mr. McLeod says, "Stay away from people who don't know who they are but want you to be just like them. People who'll want to label you. People who'll try to write their fears on your face," what do you think he meant by this?
- Why do you think Mr. McLeod told the class that he is gay?
- When Grandpa passes away, how do Archer and Paul decide to memorialize him?
- How does Archer feel when he finds out that his uncle Paul is gay? Why do you think his parents never told him? Why do you think Archer asked Paul if he himself might be gay?
- When Archer and Lynette attend middle school, what do they discover about sixth graders using the school cafeteria ("food court")? How do they feel about what the seventh graders do to intimate them and what solutions do they have?
- Who was the new student in their class who came from England? What does differently-abled mean? What were some of the assumptions the students made about Hilary that turned out not to be true?
- What is Hilary's reaction when he discovers that the sixth graders never go to the food court for lunch?
- What happens when the foursome (Archer, Lynette, Hilary and Esther) go to eat lunch in the food court? What strategies does Hilary (and her security detail Reginald) use when they are confronted by Perry, Aidan and Jeff? Do you agree or disagree with what they did? Explain your thinking.
- How do other students feel when Perry gets barred from the food court?
- How does Archer feel about Paul and Mr. McLeod's relationship? How does Archer try to encourage their relationship?
- How do the sixth graders feel when they are excluded from the Halloween party? What do they do instead?
- Why do you think the book is called *The Best Man*? Does it have more than one meaning and if so, please explain.
- Who are Archer's four role models and why? Do you have role models? If so, why are they your role models?
- How did you feel when the book ended?
- What is the overall theme and message(s) of the book?

Extension Activities

Below are activities that you can do with students in order to extend the learning from the book.

1. Being an Ally

Ask students: *What is an ally?* Elicit a definition and define **ally** as someone who speaks out on behalf of someone else or takes actions that are supportive of someone else. Write the definition on the board/smart board. Then ask: *Which characters in the book acted as allies and how did they act as allies?* If they can't think of anything, remind students about what Archer did when Lynette and Natalie got into a physical fight and what Mr. McLeod did when three seventh graders tied Russell to a faucet and wrote the word "GAY" across his forehead. Ask: *How did those characters use ally behavior in those situations? What are other ways you have seen people act as allies or you have acted as an ally?* Then, distribute a copy of [Be an Ally: Six Simple Ways](#) and read the sheet aloud, asking for examples of each of the six ways. Emphasize that there are many ways to be an ally. Have students write a story about someone who acts as an ally, either a real-life situation or a fictional one. You can also have them make the story into a comic, having them draw storyboards and include illustrations and dialogue/thought bubbles.

2. Reading Response Writing Activities

■ Write the next chapter of the book

Have students discuss what might happen next in the book and write an additional chapter. Remind students how the book ends and ask the following questions: How do you think Archer's relationship with Mr. McLeod may change now that he is Archer's uncle? What is seventh grade like for Archer, Lynette and their other classmates? Have students write the next chapter of the book as they imagine it, beginning with the day after Paul and Mr. McLeod's wedding.

■ Video Diary Entry of Character

Have students select a character from the book from one of the following main characters: Archer, Lynette, Holly, Paul, Mr. McLeod, Mrs. Stanley (their fifth grade teacher and Lynette's mother), Archer's mother or father. Then have them construct a video diary about that person. They should first write some notes about the person which includes some background about their life, who they are in the story, the other characters to whom they relate and some of their thoughts and feelings about the main events that take place in the book. They should also include at least 3–5 specific reactions to the day-to-day events and other activities that take place throughout the book. You may choose to have students engage in conferencing with a partner about their character in order to get some of their ideas out. They should then create an outline and "script" of what they are going to say and then will record their video diary on a phone or other recording device in which they "act" or pretend that they are the person. They can use props, signs and use different locations for their recording.

■ Book Review or Book Talk

Have students write a book review of *The Best Man*. The elements of a book review should include: (1) title, author, genre and theme; (2) personal reflections about the book—how it made you feel, what you learned and your thoughts about it; (3) plot summary—describe what happened without giving away spoilers; (4) people/characters you loved or disliked; (5) a theme or message that resonated with you and why; and (6) why it is worth reading or not. Consider sharing the reviews on a class blog, using [GoodReads](#) for online reviews. In addition, students can do a "book talk" with the class in which they discuss the elements of their book review based on the categories above, or read it aloud and answer questions.

3. Bullying in School and What We Can Do About It

Talk with students about the different incidences of bias and bullying that took place in school in the book, specifically pointing out the incident that targeted Russell in the restroom and the way that the seventh graders intimidated sixth graders so they would never eat lunch in the food court. Look at [this](#) article and talk with students about it, identifying the places in schools where bullying most likely occurs (you can print out a copy of the school map to show students as well). You can also look at this [infographic with bullying statistics](#) and point out the statistic about reporting, highlighting that only 39% of young people who are bullied report it to an adult. Have students work in small groups to discuss what their school can do to decrease and/or prevent incidences of bullying. You can assign each group an area in the school to focus on (i.e. hallways and stairwells, bathroom, school cafeteria, on bus, or in the classroom) or each group may want to consider the school as a whole. The resource, [Bullying Prevention and Intervention Tips for Schools](#), may also be a helpful resource. As a culmination, have the small groups create infographics or PowerPoint presentations to share their results. Consider sharing their recommendations with school administrators or a school team that addresses bullying issues in the school, if there is one.

ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and resources on LGBTQ people, bullying and marriage equality.

Curriculum Resources

“Identity-Based Bullying,” *Current Events Classroom*, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/identity-based-bullying

“Understanding Homophobia/Heterosexism and How to be an Ally,” *Current Events Classroom*, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/understanding-homophobia-heterosexism-and-how-to-be-an

“What is Marriage Equality?,” *Current Events Classroom*, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/what-is-marriage-equality

“Words that Heal: Using Children’s Literature to Address Bullying,” *Curriculum Connections*, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/words-that-heal-using-childrens-literature-to-address

Websites

Anti-Bias Education

www.adl.org/what-we-do/promote-respect/anti-bias

Provides training program offerings for pre-K through 12th grade school communities—educators, administrators, youth and families—which focus on the development of an inclusive culture and respectful school climate by addressing issues of bias and bullying.

Be an Ally: Six Simple Ways

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/be-an-ally-six-simple-ways

Some simple things a student can do to be an ally to targets of name-calling and bullying.

Bullying and Cyberbullying Prevention Strategies and Resources

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/bullying-and-cyberbullying-prevention-strategies

Provides a collection of ADL resources on bullying and cyberbullying for educators, administrators, students and families and caregivers.

Creating an Anti-Bias Learning Environment

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/creating-an-anti-bias-learning-environment

Provides tips for the classroom educator to create an anti-bias learning environment.

Empowering Young People in the Aftermath of Hate

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/empowering-young-people-in-the-aftermath-of-hate

A guide for educators and families that provide the tools they need to help young people confront hate effectively in the aftermath of hate violence or terrorism in their community.

Children's Books

Below are links to lists of recommended anti-bias and multicultural books for the indicated category.

Bullying Awareness & Prevention, www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid%5b165%5d=165&tid%5b166%5d=166&tid%5b167%5d=167&tid%5b168%5d=168&tid%5b169%5d=169

LGBTQ People and Homophobia/Heterosexism, www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid%5b194%5d=194&tid%5b195%5d=195&tid%5b196%5d=196&tid%5b197%5d=197&tid%5b198%5d=198