



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.

Gracefully Grayson

Ami Polonsky (Author)

What if who you are on the outside doesn't match who you are on the inside? Grayson Sender has been holding onto a secret for what seems like forever: Grayson is a girl on the inside. The weight of this secret is crushing, but sharing it would mean facing ridicule, scorn, rejection or worse. Despite the risks, Grayson's true self itches to break free. Will new strength from an unexpected friendship and a caring teacher's wisdom be enough to help Grayson step into the spotlight she was born to inhabit?

ISBN: 978-1419712173

Publisher: Disney-Hyperion

Year Published: 2014

Age Range: 10-14



Book Themes

Self-esteem, Bullying, Transgender Identity, Being an ally, 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](#) and [Terminology Related to Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Identity](#).

- ally
- audition
- bullied
- bystander
- cautious
- debate
- elaborate
- examine

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|-----------------|------------|-----------------|---------------|
| ■ flatter | ■ jittery | ■ ramifications | ■ suffocates |
| ■ inappropriate | ■ LGBTQ | ■ resistance | ■ suspicious |
| ■ integrate | ■ majestic | ■ rumors | ■ transform |
| ■ isolate | ■ outcast | ■ sarcastic | ■ transgender |

[Note to Teacher: In the discussion questions and extension activities below, female pronouns (e.g. she, her) are used in reference to Grayson because she identifies as a girl. When you ask questions or use pronouns to describe Grayson, it will be helpful and educational to use female pronouns and explain why you are doing so.]

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?
- Why do you think Grayson figures out a way to draw princesses without anyone knowing?
- In the beginning of the book, Finn is discussing the Holocaust and the Resistance with the class and asks the students “How would you feel if you were going about your life, day to day, all the while hiding a dangerous secret?” How do different students respond to that question? What is the difference between isolating and integrating?
- Why do you think Grayson eats lunch in the library every day and has since she was in third grade?
- What is the significance of the different shopping trips Grayson and Amelia take to the second hand clothing stores? What happens during their different shopping trips (as well as the shopping Grayson does by herself) and why is it important?
- What do you think the symbolism is of the plastic bird in the birdcage (that Amelia and Grayson break by accident) and similarly, what is the symbolism of the bird charm necklace that Grayson buys later?
- What are some ways in which Grayson imagines being a girl?
- When Grayson says and thinks that she “is disappearing,” what do you think she means?
- Why do you think the author decided to focus the plot around the production of a school play?
- Why is the process of trying out for the play, *Myth of Persephone*, and specifically trying out for the role of Persephone, so important to Grayson?
- After Grayson finishes the audition, she says “I feel like it’s the first time my feet have touched the earth.” What do you think she means?
- What did Grayson discover about her mother’s point of view after reading the letters she sent to Grayson’s grandmother? How did Grayson feel after reading the letters?
- What is the symbolism of “darkness and light” that Grayson refers to throughout the book?

- How do Aunt Sally and Uncle Evan respond in different situations such as reading Grayson's mother's letters, Grayson's role in the play and when Grayson gets bullied? How does their different perspective impact their reactions?
- Have you ever experienced or witnessed bravery in the way Sebastian describes it at the end of the book ("To be brave means there's something important you have to do and you're scared, but you do it anyway.")? Is this concept of bravery different or similar to how you think of it?
- Why do you think Grayson's two cousins—Jack and Brett—react differently in hearing that Grayson will play Persephone?
- Are you surprised by how the other students in the play treat Grayson? Why or why not? How do they support Grayson?
- What roles do Ryan, Sebastian and Tyler play in the book? Why does Grayson tell Paige to not tell anyone that they are engaging in bullying behavior?
- What is the experience of rehearsing and being in the play like for Grayson?
- Why do you think Finn got in trouble for allowing Grayson to play the part of a female character in the play? What is Finn and Grayson's reaction to this and why do you think they have those responses?
- What does Finn mean when he says to Grayson, "I believe that you can do this without me"?
- Tyler and Ryan get suspended and threatened with expulsion because of their attack on Grayson. Is there something else you think the school could do to educate the community around bullying and transgender issues? If you were the principal, what would you do?
- From your experience, do you think the book portrays middle school and the reaction of students to Grayson's situation as realistic or not? Please explain.
- How would you describe Grayson's personality and how did her personality change over the course of the book?
- How does Sebastian change throughout the book? What roles does he play?
- What character do you relate to most and why?
- How does the book end? What do you think will happen when Grayson enters the classroom wearing the hair clips?
- How does Grayson feel in the end? Is he isolated, integrated, neither or both?
- What is the overall theme and message 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

This book explores ally behavior in a variety of ways. Ask students: *What is an ally?* Come to a definition of **ally** as *someone who speaks out on behalf of someone else or takes actions that are supportive of someone else*. Ask students: *What are some examples of ally behavior in the book?* Ask for examples and have students share which characters were allies and how. (A few examples include Finn, Paige, Uncle Evan). Distribute a copy of the handout [Be An Ally](#) to all students or

project it on the board/smart board. Read the handout aloud and have students reflect on the strategies in the handout with the examples they shared from the book. As a culmination, have students choose one character from the book who was an ally to Grayson. Then have students make posters that illustrate the character and their ally behavior. This will include drawing a portrait of the person and either writing a statement about their ally behavior (e.g. "Finn was an ally by.... ") or using a direct quote (and make a speech bubble) from that character that illustrates their ally behavior.

2. Reading Response Essay

- **Character Analysis:** Have students write character analysis essays that focus on one character from the book. The person can be one of the main characters including Grayson, Mr. Finnegan/Finn, Amelia, Uncle Evan, Aunt Sally, Jack, Ryan, Paige or Sebastian. You may choose to have students engage in pre-writing discussions with a partner about their character in order to get some of their ideas out. In the essay, students should respond to the following questions: (a) What are the characters' strengths/virtues and weaknesses/faults? (b) Does the character change throughout the course of the book and if so, how and why? (c) What does the character do and say that reveals something about who they are? (d) Was there an important scene in which the character had a realization about something or changed in some way? What was the scene and what happened? (e) Do you empathize with the character and, if so, in what ways? (f) Describe at least three character traits of the person and include evidence and quotes from the book that illustrate these characteristics.
- **Book Review:** Have students write a book review of *Gracefully Grayson*. 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) characters you loved or disliked and (5) why it is worth reading or not. Consider sharing the reviews on a class blog, use [GoodReads](#) for online reviews or have students include their reviews in letters they send to the author Ami Polonsky through her [website](#).
- **Write a Sequel:** Ask students: *What is a sequel?* Explain that a sequel is a novel, movie, play, etc. that continues a previously related story. Ask if anyone has ever read a sequel to a book or seen a sequel for a movie and have students talk about those experiences. Tell students that they are going to write a sequel chapter to *Gracefully Grayson* which means they will imagine what will happen in the beginning of a new book if the author wrote one. Remind students how the book ended and ask the following questions: (1) What do you think happens when Grayson enters the classroom with clips in her hair? How is school for Grayson for the rest of the year? Does Grayson continue the transition to being a girl? Do Finn and Grayson continue to communicate? What happens at home with Uncle Evan, Aunt Sally, Jack and Brett? The sequel should continue to be written from Grayson's point of view and can include multiple characters. Students will write the first chapter for the sequel and give the book a title.

3. Learn More About Being Transgender

Engage students in a discussion about what it means to be transgender. Be sensitive and thoughtful about whether you have students in your class who may be gender non-conforming or transgender. Ask students: *What does it mean to be transgender?* Elicit and define **transgender** as *an umbrella term for people whose gender identify differs from the sex they were assigned at birth and/or whose gender expression do not match society's expectations with regard to gender roles*. Briefly explain

the difference between (1) sex, (2) gender identity, (3) gender expression and (4) sexual orientation using the [Transgender Identity and Issues](#) lesson that has a clear explanation.

Ask if students know any famous people or movie/TV characters who are transgender such as Bruce Jenner, Laverne Cox, Janet Mock, the character of Coach Beiste and Unique Adams on *Glee* and the character of Cole on *The Fosters*. Ask students what they think some of the challenges are for people who are transgender and explain that even though transgender people have been more visible lately, they still face bias and discrimination in every aspect of their lives including higher rates of bullying, discrimination, ridicule and violence. Talk about the rules/policies some schools have put into place to make schools safer and more inclusive for transgender students such as: gender-neutral bathrooms, use of names and preferred pronouns, access to sports and physical education, dress codes and bullying and harassment policies. If time permits, show the video [Becoming Me](#), a 27-minute video in which eight families with transgender and gender non-conforming children (ages 5–25) share their stories. Each story is 3–5 minutes long, so you may choose to watch one story if you don't have time to watch the entire video.

ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and resources on anti-bias teaching strategies and transgender identity and issues.

Curriculum Resources

"Identity-Based Bullying," *Current Events Classroom*, www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/identity-based-bullying.html.

"Unheard Voices: Stories of LGBT History," *Curriculum Connections*, www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/unheard-voices-stories-of-lgbt-history.html.

"Transgender Identity and Issues," *Current Events Classroom*, www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/transgender-identity-and-issues.html.

"Caitlyn Jenner and the Power of Coming Out," *Current Events Classroom*, www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/caitlyn-jenner-and-the-power-of-coming-out.html.

Websites

Anti-Bias Education

www.adl.org/education-outreach/anti-bias-education

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.

Creating an Anti-Bias Learning Environment

www.adl.org/education-outreach/curriculum-resources/c/creating-an-anti-bias-learning-environment.html

Suggested practices are provided to help prepare for successfully raising issues of diversity and bias in the classroom.

Definitions Related to Name-Calling, Bullying and Bias

www.adl.org/education-outreach/bullying-cyberbullying/c/definitions-bullying-and-bias.html

A List of definitions for terms related to name-calling, bullying and bias.

Discussing Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Identity and Issues

www.adl.org/education-outreach/curriculum-resources/c/discussing-transgender-and-gender-non-conforming-identity-and-issues.html

This site includes suggestions and resources for K-12 teachers on how to bias, prejudice and bullying related to transgender and gender non-conforming issues and identity.

Terminology Related to Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Identity

www.adl.org/assets/pdf/education-outreach/terminology-related-to-transgender-and-gender-non-conforming-identity.pdf

Definitions for terms related to transgender and gender non-conforming issues and identity.

Children's Books

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

Being an Ally, www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/bullying-books.html?bullying_sub=being-an-ally

Bullying Awareness and Prevention, www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/bullying.html

Gender Norms, www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/gender-books.html?gendersub=gender-norms

LGBTQ People and Homophobia/Heterosexism, www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/lgbtq-people.html

Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming, www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/LGBTQ-books.html?sublgbtq=transgender-and-gender-non-conforming-identity