Tuesday, March 05, 2024

NATIONAL DAY of READING
A Celebration of Stories Supporting Transgender and Non-Binary Youth

Organizing Toolkit

INTRODUCING TEDDY
by Jessica Walton, illustrated by Dougal MacPherson

47,000 BEADS
translated by Davey Allogia, illustrated by Marie Petrucci

BLACK BOY JOY
written by Kwame Alexander, illustrated by illustrated by John E. Smith

HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN FOUNDATION
WELCOMING SCHOOLS

American Association of School Librarians
TRANSFORMING LEARNING

NEA
NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
Great Public Schools for Every Student
Why Is This Event Important?

While the current climate of our nation can make it difficult to instill positive change and provide the necessary support for our LGBTQ+ students, we want to focus and uplift the fact that there are many supportive organizations, places of worship, schools and people who continue to show up for our transgender and non-binary youth. Data shows that there are many ways for each and every one of us to stand up and affirm our youth. Supportive practices, such as using a person’s name and pronouns correctly, supporting their gender expression, and providing access to LGBTQ+ affirming spaces, increase feelings of safety and belonging and significantly reduce negative outcomes, including suicide ideation and attempts.

In this ninth year of the event, the Welcoming Schools National Day of Reading: A Celebration of Stories Supporting Transgender & Non-Binary Youth, our hope is that these readings will inspire caring community members to join together to advocate for the rights of transgender and non-binary youth and ensure that every child has the support needed to thrive and be their whole self in their school and community.

Whether you read one or all of the suggested stories to your child or grandchild, to a small group of people, to a classroom or facilitate a large organized event, whether it is in-person or virtual, every reading matters and can make a difference in the life of a transgender and/or non-binary youth.

HRC’s Welcoming Schools program thanks you for joining us in our aspiration to create safe and inclusive environments where all our youth feel seen, valued and respected.

Event History

In late 2015, an elementary school in Mount Horeb, Wisconsin, planned a reading and discussion of a children’s book as part of their efforts to support one of the school’s students — a six-year-old transgender child who had recently socially transitioned and was attending the school openly as the girl she knew herself to be. The book, *I Am Jazz*, is a picture book based on early experiences of transgender youth and advocate Jazz Jennings.

Prior to the reading, an anti-LGBTQ hate group learned of the event and threatened to sue the school, calling for the school to cancel the discussion but the Mount Horeb community rallied behind the school and their transgender student.

A parent in the community organized a reading of *I Am Jazz* at the local library. The audience — full of children, parents, grandparents and community members — put courage before fear and turned out to learn more about how they could support the full humanity of transgender children and youth in their own backyard.

In 2016, communities all across the nation hosted their own events — inspired by the Mount Horeb community. They were held in schools, libraries, churches, temples and bookstores. *I Am Jazz* was even read aloud on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives.

This event has evolved and changed names over time, beginning with *I Am Jazz*, broadening the stories with *Jazz and Friends*, and now, stories for youth of all ages in our National Day of Reading: A Celebration of Stories Supporting Transgender & Non-Binary Youth. Regardless of the name, the goal of the event has always stayed the same: for communities and schools to come together to show their support for transgender and non-binary youth. Throughout 2023, legislation in many states across the country has prevented gender expansive students from accessing health care, playing on sports teams, using the name/pronouns that reflect who they are and even having basic discussions about their identities at school. Today, more than ever, we must clearly communicate our values of love, respect and joy for our transgender and non-binary youth.
How to Use This Organizing Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to be a resource for community members, educators and youth-serving professionals interested in creating welcoming and affirming spaces for transgender and non-binary youth through the reading of inclusive literature, such as Introducing Teddy, 47,000 Beads and “The Gender Reveal.”

The toolkit provides information and recommendations for hosting a reading, collaborating with community partners, discussion guides for each of the selected texts and sample social media posts. We encourage you to use the resources to meet the needs of your group and community. For additional information and resources, please visit the Welcoming Schools website at welcomingschools.org.

Host a Reading

Classroom or School-Wide Reading. Sharing stories of transgender and non-binary youth is an essential part of creating welcoming and inclusive classrooms and schools. By guiding discussions about gender with students, educators, families and other caring adults, you can help to prevent bias-based bullying, harassment and gender stereotyping.

When hosting a reading, consider the following:

+ Check out the ‘Resources That Guide Respectful Discussions’ section.
+ Be proactive! Communicate with families about the reading via classroom or school newsletters.
+ Use the discussion guides found in our organizing toolkit with your selected text.

Community Reading. Organize a reading from your home, library, bookstore, place of worship or neighborhood center.

When hosting an in-person reading, consider the following:

+ How many people do you have space for?
+ How are you inviting folks to join in the reading? Fliers, social media, emails, etc.
+ Who will read the selected text?
+ How will you engage the participants?

When hosting a virtual reading, consider the following:

+ What platform will you use?
+ How many people can you host with your virtual account?
+ Consider co-hosting with a local organization that can host more people on their virtual account.

Tips for Securing Virtual Readings

+ Have a co-host who can monitor the chat and remove any disrespectful participants.
+ Don’t use your personal meeting ID.
+ Have participants register for your event.
+ Use a password.
+ Use the waiting room feature.
+ Check your meeting settings. Turn off screen sharing and personal chat. Zoom has a great guide here.

Collaboration with Community Partners

+ Consider co-hosting with local LGBTQ+ organizations, libraries, places of worship and/or other affirming community organizations.
+ The reader or readers could be local LGBTQ+ leaders, school board members, LGBTQ+ allies, librarians, faith-based leaders, elected officials, students from local GSAs or family members who affirm their LGBTQ+ loved ones.
+ Partners can help you to publicize the event and may have the ability to provide financial support for copies of the books to mail to participants. Partners may also have a Zoom account that supports more participants than a personal account.

“This event is a much needed, uplifting, positive celebration to show support and love for transgender and non-binary youth.”

— Cheryl Greene (she/her)
Senior Director, Welcoming Schools
Discussion Prompts

We are so excited that our texts this year feature diverse representations of queer identities, including a two-spirit young person preparing to dance at pow wow with her family and a non-binary Black middle schooler coming out to their family.

Introducing Teddy: A gentle story about gender and friendship

By Jessica Walton and Dougal MacPherson

About the Story

Introducing Teddy introduces young readers to a foundational understanding of gender identity and transition in an accessible and heart-warming story about being true to yourself and being a good friend.

About the Author

Jessica Walton lives with her wife, son, and cats in Melbourne, Australia. She was inspired to write Introducing Teddy after her father transitioned into the woman she had always been on the inside, and Jess wanted to find a way to tell that story to her young son. A former secondary teacher, Jess is passionate about literature, board games, the ukulele and funky prosthetic legs (her current one features green dragon scales).

For Discussion

+ Errol and Tilly the teddy are friends. What are some of the things they do together as friends? What are some of the things you do with your friends?
+ Tilly was afraid that Errol would not be her friend if she told him about how she feels inside. Have you ever wanted to say something but you were afraid to speak your truth?
+ Have you ever heard the word gender? Do you know what it means?
+ What are pronouns? Is it important to you that people use the correct pronouns when they talk about you?
+ When Tilly tells Errol that she feels like a girl teddy and wants to be called Tilly, what is one thing she changes about the way she looks?
+ Tilly feels different on the inside from what she looks like on the outside so she asks Errol to use the name Tilly the teddy. Sometimes, when someone feels they are different on the inside from what they look like on the outside they are transgender. Have you ever heard this word before? Let’s talk about what transgender means.
+ Errol and Ava continue to be Tilly’s friend. Another word for that kind of friend is ally. Have you ever heard that word before? What do you think it means? Have you ever been an ally?
**About the Creators**

Koja Adeyoha’s an Oglala Lakota, two-spirit, activist, organizer, socialist, feminist, and native Californian. She’s a surfer with strong ties to the Mni (Water), the lessons it brings, and stories it tells. Koja believes the personal is political, and her work reflects that.

Angel Adeyoha is a two-spirit, queer, Indigenous activist who is dedicated to helping folks make their own complicated identities and lives understandable and just plain better by telling stories, listening to stories and making room for multiplicity for all of us.

Holly McGillis is a non-binary illustrator and story magician whose work focuses on the magical qualities of narrative and storytelling. Holly finds inspiration in nostalgia and detail in their work to create something reminiscent of a dream.

**About the Story**

Peyton loves to dance, and especially at pow wow, but her Auntie notices that she’s been dancing less and less. When Peyton shares that she isn’t comfortable wearing a dress anymore, Auntie Eyota asks some friends for help to get Peyton what she needs.

**What Does Two-Spirit Mean?**

Traditionally, Native American two-spirit people were male, female, and sometimes intersex individuals who combined the activities of both men and women with traits unique to their status as two-spirit people. In most tribes, they were considered neither men nor women; they occupied a distinct, alternative gender status. In tribes where two-spirit males and females were referred to with the same term, this status amounted to a third gender. In other cases, two-spirit females were referred to with a distinct term and, therefore, constituted a fourth gender. Although there are important variations in two-spirit roles across North America, they share many common traits. Find out more here.

**For Discussion**

- Why is Peyton hesitant to dance in the upcoming pow wow, even though she likes to dance?
- Why do you think Eyota calls L “grandparent” instead of grandmother or grandfather?
- How does the regalia that Peyton wants to wear differ from what she is expected to wear?
- Many important people in Peyton’s community made the pieces of her regalia for the pow wow. Do you think Peyton would have felt differently if only her Auntie made the regalia? Why or why not? What made some of the different pieces of regalia special?
- How will L teach Peyton about how to find her two-spirit path?

**For Writing**

- Explain to a classmate or family member what it means to be two-spirit in the First Nations community.
- Using Peyton’s voice, write a letter thanking the extended family and friends who created their regalia for the pow wow.
- Is there a moment when you wore a piece of clothing, or participated in an activity, that made you feel great about being “you”? Write about that moment with as many details as you can remember.

**Lakota Pow Wow** entrance showing regalia
“The Gender Reveal”
by George M. Johnson

About the Book
In this affecting collection from *Shelf Awareness*, author/editor Kwame Mbalia (*Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky*) brings together the stories of 16 Black male and non-binary authors. *Black Boy Joy* allows Black boys to see other young Black individuals be fully themselves: vulnerable, happy and free.

About the Story
"The Gender Reveal" by George M. Johnson introduces readers to 13-year-old Malcolm, who struggles with telling the world who they really are.

About the Author
George M. Johnson is an award-winning Black non-binary writer, author and executive producer located in the LA area. They are the New York Times bestselling author of the young adult memoir *All Boys Aren’t Blue*, discussing their adolescence growing up as a young Black queer boy in New Jersey through a series of powerful essays. The book was optioned for television by Gabrielle Union. As a former journalist, George has written for major outlets including Teen Vogue, Entertainment Tonight, NBC and Buzzfeed. In 2019 they were awarded the Salute to Excellence Award by the National Association of Black Journalists for their article “When Racism Anchors Your Health” in Vice Magazine.

George was listed on The Root 100 Most Influential African Americans in 2020, Out 100 Most Influential LGBTQ People in 2021 and in 2022 was honored as one of the TIME 100 Next Most Influential People in the World.

For Discussion
+ What does it mean to have a non-binary identity?
+ Malcolm is hesitant to come out as non-binary. What could be some of the reasons for their hesitation?
+ In the story, what are some examples of Janet’s ally-ship?
+ What did Big Nanny reveal about Malcolm’s Uncle Frank that showed Malcolm another side of their father?
+ Notice the use of pronouns in the story. When does the author change the pronouns that refer to Malcolm?
+ Malcolm’s family and friends encourage them to come out at the party. What are some factors that made the party a safe place for Malcolm to share about their non-binary identity and new pronouns? Who should decide the timeline for when someone decides to come out as LGBTQ+?

For Writing
+ Using the voice of any of Malcolm’s allies – Big Nanny, Janet, Jimmy or Paul – write a note of encouragement to Malcolm to help them prepare to come out as non-binary.
+ Write a school policy that protects the students’ right to affirm their gender expression. This policy will protect students who are gender diverse from harassment and bullying.
Organizing Tips

How Will You Promote Your Event?

☐ Publicize on Social Media.
  • Create an Event Page to encourage people to RSVP.
  • Add images to your posts to make them more engaging and fun.
  • Hashtag #ReadForTransKids to build awareness of your event.

☐ Invite local leaders (e.g. elected officials, school board members, supportive community members, local leaders of LGBTQ+ organizations, etc.) and ask them to help promote your event.

☐ Share information about your event on a listserv, on Instagram, or in relevant Facebook groups. Are you part of a listserv of parents or a listserv for your congregation, school or community?

☐ Submit to your local community calendar. Most outlets allow you to do this via a website.

Final Preparations for the Reading

☐ Send a reminder about the event the day before and the day of the reading to encourage people to prioritize attending the reading.

☐ Plan for the event’s flow:
  • Develop a time and content outline.
  • Decide who will introduce the reader.
  • Decide who will lead a discussion based on the guides for each story.

Resources that Guide Respectful Discussions

+ Invite participants to customize their Zoom profile to include their name and pronouns (if they use them).

+ Before the reader begins to read, make sure to introduce them and say what pronouns they use.

+ Remember that you cannot know how someone identifies based on how they look (their gender expression). Be mindful at your event to model how to respectfully ask people their names and pronouns.

+ Pronoun Resources from the Human Rights Campaign
  • Welcoming Schools Pronouns 101
  • Understanding Neopronouns
  • Talking About Pronouns in the Workplace

+ Learn basic vocabulary before hosting your event. Welcoming Schools has a helpful resource for defining LGBTQ+ Words for Children.

+ Know that gender identity, who you love or are attracted to (sexual orientation) and assignment at birth (sex assigned at birth) are different. Welcoming Schools has a helpful lesson plan, The Gender Snowperson, that highlights important terminology about the differences between sexual orientation and gender identity that you will want to understand before hosting.

+ If someone asks you a question and you’re unsure of the answer, it is perfectly OK to say that you don’t know.

+ Transgender and non-binary bodies are private! It is not appropriate for someone to ask questions about surgeries or physical bodies at a book reading for youth.

Welcoming Schools is highlighting The Advocate Educator’s Handbook: Creating Schools Where Transgender and Non-Binary Students Thrive and this accompanying guide as critical resources for educators to use in their efforts to create inclusive classrooms for transgender and non-binary students.
Sample Social Media

Using social media tools like Facebook and Instagram can boost attendance at your reading. Here are some sample posts you can use on your own social media accounts!

Facebook:

Support transgender and non-binary youth by joining me for the National Day of Reading: A Celebration of Stories Supporting Transgender & Non-Binary Youth on March 5 at [LOCATION]. [EVENT LINK]

Join me and HRC’s Welcoming Schools on March 5 for National Day of Reading: A Celebration of Stories Supporting Transgender & Non-Binary Youth. Let’s come together to show our support for trans and non-binary youth in our community. [EVENT LINK]

How to create a Facebook event:

Click "Events" in the left menu of your Facebook News Feed and click "Create Event".

+ Decide if you would like to make the event public or private.
+ Fill in the event name, details, location and time.
+ Consider adding a photo to make your event stand out.
+ You’ll then be taken to the event page where you can invite guests by clicking on “Share”, upload photos, share posts and edit event details.
+ As the big day approaches, don’t forget to post on the event page to remind people to attend!

Instagram:

TIP: On Instagram, links are not clickable in your captions; the only clickable place is in your bio. If you want to promote your event on Instagram, we suggest you include your event link in your bio. To do so, click “edit profile” on your profile and drop in your website link.

Don’t forget to join me and support transgender and non-binary youth on March 5! RSVP at the link in my bio.

SAVE THE DATE: On March 5, join me and HRC’s Welcoming Schools to support trans and non-binary youth by reading inclusive books in our community.

Possible hashtags to add into your caption:

#ProtectTransYouth #AffirmTransYouth
#ReadForTransKids #WelcomingSchools
#NationalDayofReading

Instagram Stories:

TIP: This is a fun and different way to promote your event! When on your newsfeed, swipe right to create a series of “stories” that will be viewable to your followers for 24 hours.

Upload a photo of a flier, book or piece of promotional material. Then you can add text and include gifs, tag your location or get creative with things like music and countdown stickers.

Across the country, people, schools and organizations will be hosting readings with HRC’s Welcoming Schools program and I’m hosting one at [LOCATION].

Other Social Tips and Tricks:

Remember to post about your event more than once and more often as it gets closer to the big day. Also link it to your Facebook event (if you have one).

If you’d like your posts and photos to be shared by HRC, please:

+ Tag us on Instagram and use the hashtag #ReadForTransKids
  • Instagram: @HumanRightsCampaign
+ Send any event photos you take to photos@hrc.org.