



## ***Pride: Celebrating Diversity & Community***

Robin Stevenson

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Ages 9–13

[www.pridethebook.com](http://www.pridethebook.com)

### **About the Book**

For LGBTQ people and their supporters, Pride events are an opportunity to honor the past, protest injustice, and celebrate a diverse and vibrant community. The high point of Pride, the Pride Parade, is spectacular and colorful. But there is a whole lot more to Pride than rainbow flags and amazing outfits. How did Pride come to be? And what does Pride mean to the people who celebrate it? This nonfiction book explains the history of the LGBTQ rights movement, explores some of the diverse identities that make up the community that celebrates Pride, and looks at how Pride is celebrated—and fought for—around the world.

### **About the Author**

**Robin Stevenson** is the award-winning author of many novels for kids and teens. *Pride: Celebrating Diversity & Community* is her first nonfiction book. Robin has been part of the LGBTQ community since she was a young adult and has been taking part in Pride celebrations for thirty years. She lives on the west coast of Canada with her partner, Cheryl, and their twelve-year-old son. For more information, visit [www.robinstevenson.com](http://www.robinstevenson.com).

**A Note for Educators**

Statistically, it is highly likely that some of the kids in your classroom are LGBTQ or will grow up to identify as part of the LGBTQ community. It is also likely that some have parents or close relatives who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. You may already know who some of these kids are. Others may just be beginning to become aware of their own gender identity or sexual orientation, and some may not come out until much later in life. Talking about Pride in the classroom sends a very important message to these young people: it says that diversity is important, that all sexual orientations and gender identities are valid and normal, and that equality and human rights are of great importance. This is a message that can be incredibly powerful, and in some cases, even life-saving.

You are also teaching all your students about the importance of standing against injustice. When kids and teens learn about different identities, embrace diversity and become allies in the fight for equality, bullying is reduced and our schools—and our communities—become safer, more inclusive spaces for every child and teen.

Having these conversations in the classroom is not always easy, and some students may have pre-conceived ideas and misinformation about LGBTQ people. Others may be uncomfortable discussing these topics. For that reason, it may be helpful to establish some ground rules before beginning these classroom activities. You may already have guidelines for class discussion, but here are a few specific suggestions that you might like to consider:

- **Respect diversity:** It is important to remember that people in the group may differ in sexual orientation and/or gender identity or gender expression. Words can hurt, so remind students to choose them carefully. Always intervene whenever you hear homophobic, transphobic or otherwise discriminatory comments—if possible, use it as a “teachable moment.”
- **Respect that we are all learning:** It is okay to feel uncomfortable, it is okay not to know something, and it is okay to ask questions.
- **Respect other people’s privacy:** Don’t out other people without their permission. For example, a student could say “Someone I know is gay” rather than “My older brother is gay.”
- **Respect your own boundaries:** Students do not have to share any personal information unless they choose to.
- **Respect anonymity:** Consider having a suggestion box in the classroom that enables students to ask you a question or express a concern safely and anonymously.

Teachers and school administrators sometimes worry that parents may raise objections when LGBTQ issues are discussed in the classroom. Having read the book yourself will allow you to address any concerns based in lack of knowledge or misunderstanding, and enable you to provide assurance that the material is age-appropriate. Having a clear rationale about why the topic is relevant to the students is also helpful: you can explain how this learning works to combat prejudice, reduce bullying and create a safer and more inclusive school.

## Chapter 1: The History of Pride

### Life Before Stonewall

#### *Discussion*

Read the first chapter of the book. Discuss what life was like for LGBTQ people in North America in the years before the Stonewall riots.

- What rights and protections did LGBTQ people have then?
- What rights and protections do they have now, where you live? If you don't know, find out!
- Why do you think the Stonewall riots were so significant in helping bring about social change?

#### *Activity*

Imagine being a young LGBTQ person in the 1950s or 1960s. You might never have heard of the existence of other people like yourself, and if you had, you would have heard that people like you were mentally ill or criminal. You probably wouldn't know words like gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender, and you almost certainly wouldn't be aware that there were many other people like you out there. Close your eyes for a minute and imagine what that would be like. What might your fears be? Your hopes? Write a page in the diary of that imaginary person.

### The Role of Allies

#### *Discussion*

One group that has played an important role throughout the history of the LGBTQ rights movement is allies. Read the story of Jeanne Manford and the beginnings of PFLAG ("Parents Unite," page 30-31). Today, there are many social movements working towards greater equality for different groups—for example, fighting against racism, ableism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and more. As a group, discuss what it means to be an ally in these movements.

- What are the benefits of being an ally? (e.g. you learn accurate information about LGBTQ people; you have opportunities to be a role model and influence others to make positive change; you make a significant difference in the life of a friend who may be struggling)
- What discourages people from working as allies? (e.g. people may speculate about your own sexual orientation; you might experience conflict with people who are homophobic or transphobic; you might worry that you don't know enough about an issue to advocate effectively)
- What qualities would help someone to be a good ally?

**Activity**

Identify one of these movements where you are not part of the targeted group (for example, a white person fighting against racism, or a male student working to challenge sexism, or a cisgender person taking a stand against transphobia).

- Are there things that you are already doing as an ally?
- What else could you do? Make a list of ways that you could be an ally.

**School-based Activism****Discussion**

Read “Youth on the Front Lines” (page 21-22). The first high school activism began in the early 1970s, not long after the Stonewall Riots. Why do you think young people have been such an important part of movements for social change?

Today, many high schools and middle schools have GSAs, or Gay-Straight Alliances. Sometimes these are called QSAs (Queer-Straight Alliances), Gender and Sexuality Associations, or Rainbow Clubs. These clubs provide a safe space for LGBTQ youth and their allies, and work to make schools safer and more inclusive for everyone.

- What do you think the climate at your school is like for LGBTQ students, or students from LGBTQ families?
- Do you ever hear negative attitudes or comments about LGBTQ people in the hallways or school yard? How do you think these comments affect students who are LGBTQ or who are questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity?
- What efforts do you see students and staff at your school making to combat homophobia and transphobia and to be more inclusive? (e.g. anti-bullying days, LGBTQ-inclusive books displayed, posters that celebrate diversity, homophobia remarks being challenged, gender-inclusive toilets)

**Activity**

Find out if your school has a GSA. If not, do you think your school needs one? Why or why not?

Find out how to start a GSA by reading more at.

- In Canada: [www.MyGSA.ca](http://www.MyGSA.ca)
- In the US: [www.gsanetwork.org](http://www.gsanetwork.org)

If your school does not have a GSA, draft an action plan to form one. Begin by articulating a rationale as to why you think this is important. What challenges might you encounter? How could you respond to these?

If your school already has a GSA, learn more about it by speaking with members or by inviting someone (member or teacher representative) to speak to your class about the group and what it does.

**Chapter 2: Identity and Community****Identity***Discussion*

This chapter of the book explores the diverse identities of the community of people who celebrate Pride.

- Which identities were you already familiar with? Did you learn more about these?
- Were some of the identities discussed in this chapter new to you?
- What questions do you still have?

*Activity*

Our identities are complicated! Your personal identity might include your age, your cultural background, your religion and beliefs, your interests and passions, your family relationships, your gender, your abilities and disabilities, your sexual orientation, your ethnicity and more. Make a list of some of the aspects of your own personal identity.

- Which ones are visible to others?
- Which are you comfortable sharing?
- Which ones place you as part of the majority in your school and which ones place you as part of a minority?
- Which parts of your identity do you have in common with your family?
- Which ones feel important to you?
- Have you ever been teased because of some aspect of your identity?

**Pride***Discussion*

The book includes some personal stories about coming out, and about what Pride means to different LGBTQ young people. “Pride is celebrating who you are and being true to who you are,” says Harriette Cunningham, a young transgender girl (page 51). Duncan, a gay teen, says “Pride means that you are happy about who you are and feel comfortable in your own skin.” He adds, “When you can accept yourself, you can accept others more easily.” After reading this part of the book, did your understanding of Pride change at all?

*Activity*

October 11 is National Coming Out Day in Canada and the US, a day to celebrate the LGBTQ members of our communities. Everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, can celebrate National Coming Out Day. Start by learning more about the day at:

- In Canada: <http://egale.ca/come-out-canada>
- In the US: [www.hrc.org/resources/national-coming-out-day](http://www.hrc.org/resources/national-coming-out-day)

Then, in pairs or small groups, make National Coming Out Day posters that convey a message of support to the LGBTQ students and staff at your school. Display them in a hallway, school library or other visible location on October 11.

## Coming Out

### *Discussion*

The author writes, "Because we live in a culture that tends to assume people are heterosexual unless they say otherwise, heterosexual or 'straight' people don't have to come out." Do you agree? Why or why not?

### *Activity*

In small groups, try to come up with a list of examples of the above assumption from your own lives, from the music, movies, advertising and other media.

- What message is conveyed by the items on your list?
- What effect might this assumption of heterosexuality have on straight people? On LGBTQ people?
- Can you think of at least three ways to challenge this assumption?

**Chapter 3: Celebrating Pride Today****Celebrating Pride*****Discussion***

The author writes, “Pride Day is a celebration, and sometimes it feels like a great big party...but its roots are strongly political” (“The Politics of Pride”, page 59). What do you think this means? Before you read this book, what was your view of Pride celebrations? Did learning more about Pride and its history change that view in any way?

***Activities***

June is Pride month! But some communities have Pride celebrations as early as May or as late as September. Find out if your community has a Pride Parade or celebration. When does it take place? Discuss how—and when—you could celebrate Pride in your school. Brainstorm a list of ideas! Here are a couple to get you started:

- Create a Pride display for your classroom or for the school hallway. Make posters and art work that celebrates diversity and supports LGBTQ pride. There are a number of symbols and flags discussed in book that you might want to consider including in your art work (“Symbols of Pride,” pages 62 and 66). What messages do you want to convey with your poster or art piece?
- Read a novel with an LGBTQ character, and discuss as a class. For younger students, consider *George*, by Alex Gino. For grade seven or eight, consider *Saving Montgomery Sole*, by Mariko Tamaki. Additional suggestions for teens and for middle grade students are available here: <http://robinstevenson.com/lgbtq-novels-teens>.

**Chapter 4: Pride Around the World****International Issues***Discussion*

Although there has been great progress towards LGBTQ equality over the past fifty years, in some parts of the world, LGBTQ people are still fighting for the most basic of human rights: the right to be who they are without the risk of violence or imprisonment. Same-sex relationships are illegal in 75 countries. United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, says, "It is an outrage that in our modern world, so many countries continue to criminalize people simply for loving another human being of the same sex...Laws rooted in nineteenth century prejudices are fueling twenty-first century hate." What do you think this means? How can LGBTQ people and their allies work together to address human rights on an international level?

*Activity*

There are nearly 200 countries in the world, and only a handful of them are discussed in this book! Pick one that isn't featured and find out whether Pride is celebrated there.

- If it is, what does that celebration look like?
- When did it begin?
- What kind of events take place and how many people attend?
- If Pride is not celebrated there, why not?
- What is the current status of LGBTQ rights in that country? (There is a resource mentioned on page 103 that might help you find out the answer to this last question.)

Make a poster display of what you learned and/or present your findings to the class.