

Mirrors and Windows in Your Preschool Classroom: Adding approachable LGBTQ+ representation to your program through your shared library

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As Early Childhood program leaders, we are always looking for ways to help our staff bring the “real world” into their classrooms. Teachers collect leaves and acorns for units on fall and seasons. They raise caterpillars for butterfly releases each spring. Programs take field trips out into the world and teachers ask children to bring their worlds to us by hanging family portraits or having “share day” every Friday. When they do these things, the goal is for the environments to be places that are “of” the children and “for” the children--places where they are included and represented, and safe places from which they can learn about the world around them.

In honor of Pride Month, we encourage all leaders to do more to ensure the real world we are helping our children and staff explore is inclusive of the many LGBTQ+ people and families who live in this world.

A phrase popularized by Rudine Sims Bishop in 1990 states that the books in classrooms can play a large part in this process of experiencing the world by functioning as “mirrors and windows.”

Books serve as mirrors when people are able to see themselves, their cultures, and their lives reflected back to them through the characters and story. Children who, for any reason, consistently do not see themselves reflected in books or other areas of the environment, or when the representation they do get is negative, might feel alone or that there is something wrong with them, even when this message is obviously not the intent. For underrepresented or marginalized groups, it is even more important; one source mentioned that “studies have shown that any mention of LGBTQ+ people or issues in the curriculum increased student safety and improved the climate for students.” (Robinson, 2021)

Any mention at all.

Simply having books that feature diverse family structures or gender representation available to children during story time and free reading can combat the impression that heterosexual families are the default and more accurately reflect the real world.

Books can also serve as windows when children are able to glimpse others, their cultures, and their lives that are different from their own in the pages of a book. This is an equally important experience, especially for preschool-aged children that belong to majority groups. Being exposed to cultural and familial differences through books in the safety of their early learning environment can help children understand and have a more open, tolerant approach to diversity in their lives.

We all know that we work with and for children at a very pivotal and special time in their lives. Making efforts like this in programs and classrooms now, as opposed to waiting until children are older, is so important because this is the age, developmentally, where preschoolers are learning how their world works and who is valued in it (Leung and Adams-Whittaker, 2022). They are actively developing empathy and other social-emotional skills right now, in front of our eyes. So, let's continue to help guide their teachers and caregivers to give them the tools to grow into empathetic people who can celebrate what they hold in common and what makes them unique.

Questions to ask when adding books to your program's library:

1. Does this book reflect the lives and experiences of the students in my program? (Mirror)
2. Does this book provide insight into different cultures/lifestyles/experiences for the children in my program? (Window)
3. Does this book represent the diversity we want to include in a positive, negative, or neutral light?

There are myriad books to select from and below are lists that you may add to your program library as mirrors and windows:

Recommendations for Infants and Toddlers

[Love Makes a Family by Sophie Beer](#)
[Rainbow: A First Book of Pride by Michael Genhart](#)
[Call Me Tree/Llamame Arbol by Maya Christina Gonzalez](#)
[Jacob's New Dress by Sarah Hoffman and Ian Hoffman](#)
[Plenty of Hugs by Fran Manushkin](#)
[Daddy, Papa, and Me by Leslea Newman](#)
[Mommy, Mama, and Me by Leslea Newman](#)
[And Tango Makes Three by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell](#)
[It's OK to Be Different by Todd Parr](#)
[The Family Book by Todd Parr](#)
[Families Can by Dan Saks](#)
[Pride Colors by Robin Stevenson](#)

Recommendations for Preschoolers

[Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress by Christine Baldacchino](#)
[Not Every Princess by Jeffrey Bone and Lisa Bone](#)
[The Different Dragon by Jennifer Bryan](#)
[Oliver Button Is a Sissy by Tomie dePaola](#)
[10,000 Dresses by Marcus Ewert](#)
[My Awesome Brother by Lise Frances](#)
[King and King by Linda de Haan](#)
[Red: A Crayon's Story by Michael Hall](#)
[I am Jazz by Jessica Herthel](#)
[My Princess Boy by Cheryl Kilodavis](#)
[What Are Your Words?: A Book About Pronouns by Katherine Locke](#)

[Julian Is a Mermaid by Jessica Love and Avi Roque](#)

[Donovan's Big Day by Leslea Newman](#)

[Sparkle Boy by Leslea Newman](#)

[A Tale of Two Daddies by Vanita Oelschlager](#)

[A Tale of Two Mommies by Vanita Oelschlager](#)

[Pink Is for Boys by Robb Pearlman and Eda Kaban](#)

[This Day in June by Gayle E. Pitman](#)

[When You Look Out the Window: How Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Build a Community by Gayle E. Pitman](#)

[In Our Mothers' House by Patricia Polacco](#)

[Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag by Rob Sanders](#)

[William's Doll by Charlotte Zolotow](#)

References:

Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives*, 6(3), ix-xi. Retrieved from: <https://scenicregional.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Mirrors-Windows-and-Sliding-Glass-Doors.pdf>

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