

## The T\* in LGBT\*: Disrupting Gender Normative School Culture Through Young Adult Literature

*Katherine Mason Cramer and Jill Adams*

Queer Literacy Framework Principles:

6. Engage in ongoing critique of how gender norms are reinforced in literature, media, technology, art, history, science, math, and so on.

While popular TV shows such as *Glee*, *Orange Is the New Black*, and *Transparent* introduce audiences to “unique issues faced by trans people—like safe access to bathrooms and hormone therapy” (Morris 2015), most of our schools are not safe spaces for trans\*<sup>1</sup> and gender creative teens to come out (Kosciw et al. 2014). In *The Right to Be Out: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in America’s Public Schools*, Stuart Biegel (2010) explains that teachers and students must realize that unlike gays and lesbians, who may opt to come out over time and in different contexts of their lives, “transgender persons cannot come out gradually unless

---

K.M. Cramer (✉)  
Wichita State University in Kansas, Wichita, USA

J. Adams  
Metropolitan State University of Denver, Denver, USA

they change environments. Once they begin presenting differently as part of their transition process, they are immediately and abruptly out to those who knew them previously” (pp. 178–9). In addition, “as the most misunderstood of any identifiable group in existence today,” transgender people often cannot expect support from all members of their family, friends, and community (Biegel 2010, p. 180). When discussing transgender youth in K-12 public schools, Biegel also notes that “the great majority of Americans have never interacted knowingly with a transgender person, and even fewer have developed any sort of close personal relationship with one. Thus, educators seeking to move forward in this area would do well to identify memoirs, films, novels, poetry, and other works of art that document the experiences of those who identify under the transgender umbrella” (p. 185). In the English language arts classroom, the field of young adult literature (YAL) offers critical opportunities across a variety of subgenres for teens and teachers alike to learn more about trans\* and gender creative identities and/or to have their own experiences mirrored back to them. Drawing upon such recognizability within YAL that features trans\* and gender creative characters, teachers can help secondary students identify and critique gender normative practices in their school and home communities (Miller 2015), while helping them not only recognize the lived realities of all gender identities but become more knowledgeable about, welcoming toward, and appreciative of them as well.

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PORTRAYAL OF TRANS\* YOUTH IN SELECTED YAL

Children’s and young adult literature has seen a rapid increase in both the number and diversity of titles that feature trans\* and gender creative characters, with more than 50 published in the past decade and another half a dozen published in 2015 (Alter 2015). As Talya Sokoll (2013) notes, however, some of these titles “remain largely unknown ... due to the relatively small reach of the publishing houses making them available” (p. 24). Sokoll further recommends that readers in search of YAL with trans\* content consult reading lists on Goodreads.com as well as blogs like Lee Wind’s *I’m Here, I’m Queer, What the Hell Do I Read?* (pp. 25–26). In our own readings of such texts, we noted that some authors choose to write in third person or from the perspective of cisgender allies while others opt to allow trans\* characters to narrate the story, giving readers a range of perspectives from which to enter the text.

While Julie Anne Peters' 2004 novel *Luna* is usually considered to be the first young adult novel to feature a transgender character (Cart and Jenkins 2006, p. 138), we argue that Carol Plum-Ucci's 2002 novel *What Happened to Lani Garver* actually earns that distinction, with its thoughtful portrayal of Lani, who refuses to conform to gender expectations and doesn't want to be put in a box. While the narrator Claire accepts this ambiguity, the rest of the small New England island community does not, and Lani pays the ultimate price. This text raises questions about how we perceive, construct, and police gender expression. In Peters' *Luna* (2004), we meet Luna through her sister Regan's eyes, learning that while Luna's assigned sex is male (her birth name is Liam), she is confident in her female identity and anticipates the day when she can embody that identity. Peters' use of Regan to tell this story allows cisgender readers a way to empathize both with Regan and with Luna. This is also the case in the novel *I Am J* (2011) by Cris Beam, set in New York. This third-person narrative depicts J's struggles as he waits to wake up and become a "real boy." Initially, as his body betrays him, J strives to keep himself invisible, but later decides to embody his true identity, going stealth so that even his love interest Blue doesn't realize he is transgender. This text takes self-determination a step further than *Luna*, as Beam consistently refers to J with masculine pronouns, and J truly lives as a male.

More recently, authors have depicted allies' romantic attractions to transgender characters, perhaps to allow cisgender readers a point of entry into the story. In Catherine Ryan Hyde's 2010 novel *Jumpstart the World*, 15-year-old Elle lives in New York City and is attracted to her neighbor Frank but initially rejects his friendship upon learning he is transgender. Honest and awkward, Elle sometimes regrets her words and actions, but as she learns to appreciate Frank for who he is, she also acknowledges the beauty in difference and practices capturing that beauty on film. While Elle and Frank's relationship never progresses beyond friendship, Brian Katcher's 2009 novel *Almost Perfect*, set in Missouri, depicts a romantic relationship. After breaking up with his girlfriend, high school senior Logan develops a friendship with quirky, beautiful Sage, who is new to the school. Although he initially rejects Sage when she reveals her assigned sex (male), their friendship survives and Logan confronts his own romantic attraction to Sage. Logan's choice to establish both a friendship and a romantic relationship with Sage allows the reader to envision the challenges faced by transgender people, as well as their allies and lovers, within

the novel's particular time and space. It also forces the reader to question how much our assigned gender truly matters when it comes to love and friendship.

While most of the previous novels are narrated by cisgender characters/allies, the following texts provide greater insight into trans\* experiences by allowing trans\* and gender creative characters to narrate the tale themselves. In Ellen Wittlinger's *Parrotfish* (2007), set in Massachusetts, Angela has decided it's time to confirm her true gender identity: Angela is Grady, and *he* wants everyone to refer to him as such. With allies like classmates Sebastian, Russ, and Kita, as well as P.E. teacher Ms. Unger, Grady poses questions—to himself and others—that critique gender norms and help friends and family members accept his new gender expression. Similarly, short stories “Trev” by Jacqueline Woodson, “My Virtual World” by Francesca Lia Block, and “The Missing Person” by Jennifer Finney Boylan (all published in Michael Cart's 2009 edited collection *How Beautiful the Ordinary*) are told from a transgender character's perspective. While “The Missing Person” is set in Pennsylvania, a specific setting is not revealed in “Trev” and “My Virtual World,” further indicating a universality of the trans\* experience. In addition, Boylan herself is transgender and in 2003 published her memoir, *She's Not There: A Life in Two Genders*, a national best-seller. In Kirstin Cronn-Mills's 2012 novel *Beautiful Music for Ugly Children*, set in Minnesota, 18-year-old Elizabeth has begun to live as Gabe as high school graduation approaches. Music serves as the backdrop for the novel, and Gabe relishes the opportunity to broadcast his true self into the night air: “When you think about it, I'm like a 45. Liz is my A side, the song everybody knows, and Gabe is my B side—not played as often but just as good ... it's time to let my B side play” (p. 10).

We anticipate that in the future more authors will construct their texts in such a way as to challenge readers' expectations of both the characters and the text itself. For example, in Steve Brezenoff's 2011 novel *Brooklyn Burning*, we meet 15-year-old Kid, who is homeless after being kicked out of the house because Kid's father can't cope with Kid's gender ambiguity and undefined sexual orientation. Unlike *What Happened to Lani Garver* in which the narrator Claire assigns a gender to Lani and refers to Lani using masculine pronouns, Brezenoff never reveals Kid's sexual orientation or gender, nor those of Kid's romantic partner Scout. As Billy Merrell discloses in the notes to the reader of his 2005 coedited collection *The Full Spectrum*, “I hadn't realized how much I relied on knowing how people categorized themselves as a way of better understanding them” (np).

*Brooklyn Burning* forces the reader to understand Kid as a human being who refuses to be labeled.

In addition to these narrative texts, nonfiction texts offer invaluable perspective on the lived experiences of trans\* and gender creative teens. Susan Kuklin's *Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out* (2014) offers six varying first-hand perspectives of being a trans\* teen. Readers have the opportunity to learn about transgender experiences not only from the six teenagers but also from some family members and significant others. As we transition into an age of more understanding of gender creativity, these individuals seem to acknowledge the transformation that is also going on in society. We also see such shifts in Arin Andrews (2015) and Katie Rain Hill (2015) who shared their transition experiences in their memoirs *Some Assembly Required: The Not-So-Secret Life of a Transgender Teen* and *Rethinking Normal: A Memoir in Transition*. Each of the memoirs details their life, from early childhood through their teenage years in the rural Bible Belt of Oklahoma. In addition to sharing their journeys as transgender youth, Andrews and Hill reflect on their first serious romantic relationship, which happened to be with each other. Both of the books are coming-of-age stories that depict self-acceptance, the heartache of first love, and confirmation and embodiment of one's true gender identity. Collectively, each of these texts adds to the corpus and depth of understanding and recognition of trans\* and gender creative youth and illustrates themes to which everyone can connect.

## RATIONALE

In designing our overall suggestions for lessons, we were inspired by C.J. Pascoe's stance that all students benefit when teachers design curriculum that depicts a range of experiences and identities. In her research on masculinity in high schools, Pascoe (2007) argues that "[i]ncluding a range of sexual and gender identities in school rituals and curricula will indicate to both GLBT and nonnormatively gendered students as well as straight and normatively gendered students that school authorities don't tolerate gender- and sexuality-based harassment and violence" (p. 169).

Building from Pascoe, in our own classrooms, we regularly choose social issues books that promote reflection and spark dialog among our students. According to Lewison et al.'s (2002) work on critical literacy, "these texts give voice and visibility to those who have traditionally been marginalized, while engaging both students and teachers in more active

and critical readings of texts” (p. 384). In the following lesson, we envision students and teachers engaging in critical literacy while simultaneously demonstrating both perspective and empathy (Wiggins and McTighe 2005, pp. 95–100).

These lessons seek to answer the question Miller (2015) poses in a recent *English Journal* article describing a Queer Literacy Framework: “... how can teachers move beyond discussions relegated to only gender and sexuality and toward an understanding of a continuum that also includes the (a)gendered and (a)sexuality complexities students embody?” (p. 37). By stepping up to this challenge, we hope to engage students in “ongoing critique of how gender norms are reinforced” (p. 42) in various texts, particularly YAL. This critique is particularly important in secondary schools in which heteronormative and gender normative practices often go unchecked (Pascoe 2007).

Prior to teaching these lessons, we recommend that teachers familiarize themselves with the following terms, the definitions of which can be found in the glossary of terms at the beginning of this book: *(a)gender, ally, assigned gender, assigned sex, cisgender, gender, gender expression, gender identity, gender role, label free, queer, self-determination, trans\*, transgender, and transition*. Teachers might consider teaching these terms as they come up in the context of selected texts or discussions, by perhaps creating a Word Wall (a collection of words on a bulletin board or classroom wall that are key terms in a unit or class) or having students engage in a Vocabulary Self-Awareness activity, in which students self-assess their own understanding of key vocabulary (Fisher et al. 2015).

## LESSON DESCRIPTIONS

Our lessons have the potential to fit into a larger unit on self-determination, which Miller (2015) defines as “the right to make choices to self-identify in a way that authenticates one’s self-expression, and which has potential for the embodiment of self-acceptance” while it simultaneously “presumes choice and rejects an imposition to be externally controlled, defined, or regulated” (p. 38). Essential questions for this larger unit might include the following prompts (see Appendix A):

- *In what ways do you find your personal, professional, and social choices being controlled, defined, or regulated by others (e.g., peers, family,*

- adults, institutions)? How do you feel about the control being exerted over you? In what ways do you attempt to subvert or reject that control?*
- *In what ways do you participate in controlling, defining, or regulating the choices of others? Is your participation in this control fair/just? How do you think the target of your control feels? If you don't know, how might you find out?*

In this unit, students will engage in reading and discussing YAL excerpts that feature trans\* and gender creative characters. In Appendix B, we offer a range of texts and suggested excerpts as well as writing and discussion prompts that teachers can mix and match depending on time, context, and intention. Just as we do in our own teaching, we have opted to recommend passages from novels that feature transgender characters who demonstrate first-hand accounts in order to prompt critical thinking and dialog. This approach, we feel, offers multiple benefits: (1) it provides a specific illustrative example for students to consider in their thinking, writing, speaking, and listening, (2) it allows us to explore multiple texts in a relatively short time, and (3) it introduces students to a variety of texts that they may choose to read in their entirety independently. These texts are presented and scaffolded on content to develop awareness and understanding in the order that we would recommend if teachers intend to use all or just a selected few. After reading and responding to these texts, students will engage in a final project of their choice that demonstrates their efforts to promote awareness of (a)gender self-determination (Miller 2015).

Prior to reviewing any of the texts, engage students in thinking about and discussing the following questions: *What do you (think you) know about what it means to be a man or woman, a boy or girl? How did you learn this? What are the implications of these learnings?* Encourage students to consider different facets of gender performance (e.g., appearance, behavior, verbal and nonverbal language, perceived skills/attributes, and strengths/weaknesses). Then, based on students' responses, and prior to selecting the recommended texts in Appendix B, ascertain what students understand about trans\* and gender creative identities.

### *Text Choices and Learning Activities*

Embodying (a)gender identity is a key concept in David Levithan's *Every Day* (2012–2013 is the paperback). In this text, the protagonist, A, who

is agender and asexual, wakes up in a different body each day and resides in that body until the stroke of midnight. Because of this, A must consider physical and personal traits of the inhabited body in order to successfully get through the day, and readers are forced to contemplate the meaning and impact of skin color, sexual orientation, and gender through A's daily journeys. After reading the initial passage in Levithan's book (see Appendix B), have students explore the following prompt: *When babies are born, they are often immediately given items that are pink or blue. Additionally, gender expectations are displayed throughout childhood. What are some of these gender norms? What is the impact of these expectations?* After the students compile responses to these queries, have them explore traits that define their own lives, including the impact if those traits changed (as A experiences in *Every Day*). End the activity by connecting the conversation to gender identity: *Why does gender matter—to you in your life?*

*Parrotfish* also provides opportunities for students to contemplate (a) gender expression. First, read aloud Chap. 1 (pp. 1–9), which raises questions about assigned gender, naming conventions, the importance we place on knowing gender, and what it means to “look and act” like a boy or girl. After the read aloud, ask students to review Grady's questions regarding babies' genders on pp. 3–4 as well as his thoughts on gendered appearance and behavior on pp. 8–9. Do a quick write in response to the questions posed in the text (e.g., *In your opinion, how important is it to know a baby's—or any human being's—gender? Why? What does it mean to look or act like a girl/boy?*). Excerpts from this novel can also be used to critique the culture of school sports (Cramer [forthcoming](#)).

*Beautiful Music for Ugly Children* features a transgender protagonist but is essentially a book about music. Gabe gets a job at a local radio station and talks explicitly about having more than one side to yourself. The “A” side is one that everyone knows (as in hit singles), but the “B” side can be just as powerful. There are numerous songs that illustrate this point: The Beach Boys' (A) “I Get Around” and (B) “Don't Worry, Baby” as well as the Beatles' (A) “I Want to Hold Your Hand” and (B) “I Saw Her Standing There.” Gabe asks, “Are you a Top Forty hit, or an equally good yet potentially undiscovered gem?” Have students then contemplate what their Top 40 hit and undiscovered gem sides might be and why. After the reflection, guide the students in the following questions: *Why would Gabe ask this question? Why might he have kept his part B hidden? What are the consequences of his actions?* We would recommend using this activity as part of a book talk.

(A)gender expression is a topic for discussion in *What Happened to Lani Garver*. Read aloud pp. 12–14 in which the protagonist Claire and her friends are trying to determine the gender of Lani who is new to the school. Ask students to write about and discuss their responses to the text before reading aloud Chap. 2 (pp. 18–23) in which Claire’s friend Macy confronts Lani regarding gender identity, and then cautions Claire against befriending Lani. Ask students to respond to these questions and discuss in small groups: *What kind of friend is Macy to Claire? Do you think Macy had a right to ask about Lani’s gender? Do you think she has a right to criticize how Lani expresses gender? In what ways have you (or someone you know) acted in similar ways to Macy? Do you think Claire should stand up to Macy? Why or why not?*

Pairing two texts together such as *Some Assembly Required* by Arin Andrews and *Rethinking Normal* by Katie Rain Hill offers the possibility of exploring male-to-female and female-to-male transgender experiences. *Some Assembly Required* directly addresses the notion of having to work in order to make yourself whole. Andrews accomplishes this and shares his journey in the text. Have students respond in writing to the following prompts: *What assembly may still be required for you—in what ways are you not yet complete? What pieces do you need to gather? Are there mentors/guides that may help you along the way?* Comparatively, Hill’s book challenges the reader to contemplate what is “normal” for a teen. Hill herself has to think through this as she examines her own gender identity. Pre-reading prompts for written reflection include *Describe a “normal” teenager. How did you arrive at your description? What are the consequences as not being “normal” in our society? What are the benefits of not being “normal” in our society?* Then, read Chap. 1 and encourage students to consider Hill’s perspective on “normal” before returning to their written reflection and rethinking their own concept of “normal.”

In *Jumpstart the World*, students can explore challenges faced by trans and gender creative people. Before reading, invite students to respond to this question in writing or in small groups: *Based on prior reading and/or your own prior knowledge, what challenges do you think trans and gender creative people might face in their everyday lives?* Read aloud pp. 14–17 in Chap. 2 wherein Elle cuts off all of her hair and then is both harassed and befriended at school. Ask students to respond in writing and then in small groups: *In what ways do you notice your peers (and yourself) policing (a)gender expression and reinforcing gender norms (and perhaps punishing those who don’t conform to those norms)?* Also read aloud pp. 119–128 in

Chap. 11 in which Elle learns that hospitals have the potential to be unsafe spaces for transgender people, which leads her to sneak in to watch over Frank when visiting hours end. Ask students to respond to this prompt: *In addition to hospitals, what other spaces might be unsafe for trans\* and gender creative people? Are there spaces in our school and community that might be considered unsafe? What can you do to combat this injustice?* The full text of this novel is also an ideal choice for a unit of study on beauty, language and power, or finding community (Mason et al. 2012, pp. 15–17).

### *Assessment of Student Learning*

As you wrap up readings, quick writes, and discussions of these texts, ask students to consider the following questions—in writing and in discussion with peers:

- *In what ways are gender norms constructed and enforced in our school and in the texts (both print and nonprint) we read?*
- *In what spaces and contexts have you observed people, texts, etc. challenge or disrupt gender norms?*
- *In what ways do you question (and help others to question) gender norms and demonstrate appreciation for all gender identities and expressions?*

In their responses to these questions, students may note, for example, the ways in which the language of school sports culture is often permeated by sexist, homophobic, and transphobic assumptions and insults (Cramer forthcoming). After students have had the opportunity to reflect on, write about, and discuss these questions, provide several assessment options that encourage them to demonstrate their understanding of (a)gender self-determination and how they can raise awareness of possibilities for disrupting gender normative school culture. Students might select from the following assessment options (see Appendix C):

1. Share and discuss with a particular audience a picture book with a trans\* character. Lukoff (2015) has provided critiques of recent picture books, and an extensive list of picture books with trans\* characters can be found on Goodreads.com.
2. Develop and carry out a plan to publicly challenge a gender normative school practice.

3. Conduct a social experiment by changing something significant about your appearance and document others' reactions.

In each of these assessment options, students should reflect on, analyze, and share their experience in writing or an oral presentation, allowing their peers to gain new insights and providing opportunities for the teacher to assess their understanding of (a)gender self-determination. This reflection should include analysis of the intended audience's reaction as well as "next steps" in critiquing and disrupting gender normative school culture.

### SUGGESTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Although the lessons that comprise this unit align with Common Core State Standards and National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association Standards for English Language Arts (see Appendix A), we also recommend that teachers prepare a strong rationale that articulates clear learning objectives, as well as how the texts and activities help achieve those objectives (NCTE). In order to strive to create both internal and external safety for all students (Miller, this volume, Chapter 1), which motivates their willingness to discuss these topics, teachers should not assume heteronormative, gender normative, cisgender, and/or transphobic stances; nor should they assume any of their students maintain these stances. Whether students are or aren't "out" to teachers, it is likely that one or more students per class identifies as LGBT\*IAGCQ or as an ally, or has friends or family who identify LGBT\*IAGCQ. We also encourage teachers to be prepared for questions, while also recognizing that this may be a learning process for themselves. The assessment options are offered to support teachers to learn alongside students in order to model their own learning processes and challenges.

Within these lessons, young adult texts act as both windows and mirrors for all students to understand and recognize trans\* and gender creative identities, and for trans\* teens specifically to see themselves depicted within the pages. It is our responsibility as educators to create a culture of support and appreciation for all gender identities within our classroom and school communities, whose reach may extend far beyond what we can anticipate. In fact, MacGillivray (2000) argues that the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) identities in the curriculum "can help to destigmatize nonheterosexual identities and can deconstruct gender role stereotypes that limit all students" (p. 305). This content doesn't just benefit our LGBT\* students, it benefits *all* of our students since

“[t]he fear of being perceived as gay restricts boys to making choices that will affirm what it means to be a man in our society and restricts girls to making choices that will affirm what it means to be a woman” (MacGillivray 2000, p. 305). Designing curriculum that appreciates, affirms, and recognizes all differences not only empowers classroom environments but also manifests into everyday life.

## APPENDIX A

### *Essential Questions and Standards*

#### *Lesson Essential Questions*

Throughout this lesson, consider the following essential questions. We will return to them as we discuss different texts and share our responses and experiences. Note how your stance shifts or is strengthened as you consider multiple perspectives—those featured in the texts and those of your classmates.

- In what ways do you find your personal, professional, and social choices being controlled, defined, or regulated by others (e.g., peers, family, adults, institutions)? How do you feel about the control being exerted over you? In what ways do you attempt to subvert or reject that control?
- In what ways do you participate in controlling, defining, or regulating the choices of others? Is your participation in this control fair/just? How do you think the target of your control feels? If you don't know, how might you find out?

#### *Pre-reading Questions*

As you respond to these questions, consider different facets of gender performance (e.g., appearance, behavior, verbal and non-verbal language, perceived skills/attributes and strengths/weaknesses).

- What do you (think you) know about what it means to be a man or woman, a boy or girl? How did you learn this?
- What are the implications of these learnings?

*Common Core State Standards Addressed*

## Reading: Key Ideas and Details

1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

## Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration

1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

*National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Standards Addressed*

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of text, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g. conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

## APPENDIX B

*Text Choices and Learning Activities*

*Every Day* by David Levithan

“I wake up. Immediately I have to figure out who I am. It’s not just the body—opening my eyes and discovering whether the skin on my arm is light or dark, whether my hair is long or short, whether I’m fat or thin, boy or girl, scarred or smooth. The body is the easiest thing to adjust to, if you’re used to waking up in a new one each morning. It’s the life, the context of the body, that can be hard to grasp” (p. 1).

1. When babies are born, they are often immediately given items that are pink or blue. Throughout early childhood, gender expectations are taught and reinforced. What are some gender norms that you experienced as a young child?
2. What defines who you are? In the chart below, list specific traits that define you in the first column, and describe how each trait defines you in the second column. In the third column, consider this: What might it feel like if you would change one of the attributes, as A must do in *Every Day*?

---

Traits	How does it define you?	Impact of change
--------	-------------------------	------------------

---

3. Why does gender matter—to you in your life?

*Parrotfish* by Ellen Wittlinger

1. Read Chap. 1.
2. Carefully review Grady's questions regarding babies' genders on pp. 3–4 as well as his thoughts on gendered appearance and behavior on pp. 8–9.
3. Do a quick-write in response to the questions posed in the text
  - (a) In your opinion, how important is it to know a baby's—or any human being's—gender? Why?
  - (b) What does it mean to look or act like a girl/boy?

*Beautiful Music for Ugly Children* by Kirstin Cronn-Mills

At his job at a local radio station, Gabe talks explicitly about having more than one side to yourself. The “A” Side is one that everyone knows (as in

hit singles), but the “B” side can be just as powerful. Gabe asks, “Are you a Top Forty hit, or an equally good yet potentially undiscovered gem?”

- Why would Gabe ask this question?
- What might he have been keeping his part B hidden?
- What are the consequences of his actions?
- In the chart below, list and briefly describe some of your own Top 40 Hits and undiscovered gems.

---

*Top 40 Hit    Undiscovered gem*

---



---

*What Happened to Lani Garver* by Carol Plum-Ucci

1. Read pp. 12–14 in which the protagonist Claire and her friends are trying to determine Lani’s gender.
2. Write about and discuss your responses to the text.
  - (a) Why do you think Claire and her friends are so intent on determining Lani’s gender?
  - (b) Is it important that we categorize people by gender? Why or why not?
3. Then read Chap. 2 (pp. 18–23) in which Claire’s friend Macy confronts Lani regarding gender identity, and then cautions Claire against befriending Lani.
4. Respond to these questions and discuss in small groups:
  - (a) What kind of friend is Macy to Claire?
  - (b) Do you think Macy had a right to ask about Lani’s gender?
  - (c) Do you think she has a right to criticize how Lani expresses gender?

- (d) In what ways have you (or someone you know) acted in similar ways to Macy?
- (e) Do you think Claire should stand up to Macy? Why or why not?

*Some Assembly Required* by Arin Andrews

“You know how some toys come in a box that reads SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED? I can relate to those toys...It captures this sense that I’ve had for a long time, that if I were going to be who I wanted to be, I was going to have to literally put myself together piece by piece” (p. 237). As you consider this quote, respond to the following prompts:

- What pieces and what assembly do you think is still required for you--in which ways are you not yet complete?
- What are the pieces you need to gather/obtain?
- Are there any mentors/guides that may help you along the way?

*Rethinking Normal* by Katie Rain Hill

Before reading Chap. 1 of Hill’s book with its challenge to the reader, contemplate what is “normal” for a teen, respond to these prompts in writing:

- Describe a “normal” teenager.
- How did you arrive at your description?
- What are the consequences as not being “normal” in our society?
- What are the benefits of not being “normal” in our society?

Read Chap. 1, and begin to rethink your concept of normal through Hill’s own words. Now, return to your written reflection and rethink your concept of normal as you consider Hill’s perspective.

*Jumpstart the World* by Catherine Ryan Hyde

1. Before reading, respond to this question in writing or in small groups: Based on prior reading and/or your own prior knowledge, what challenges do you think trans\* and gender creative people might face in their everyday lives?
2. Read aloud pp. 14–17 in Chap. 2 in which Elle cuts off all of her hair and then is both harassed and befriended at school.

3. Respond in writing and then in small groups to the following prompts: In what ways do you notice your peers (and yourself) policing (a)gender expression and reinforcing gender norms (and perhaps punishing those who don't conform to those norms)?
4. Then read aloud pp. 119–128 in Chap. 11 in which Elle learns that hospitals have the potential to be unsafe spaces for transgender people, so she sneaks in to watch over Frank when visiting hours end.
5. Respond to this prompt: In addition to hospitals, what other spaces might be unsafe for trans\* and gender creative people? Are there spaces in our school and community that might be considered unsafe? What can you do to combat this injustice?

## APPENDIX C

### *Summative Assessment Options*

As we wrap up our reading, writing, and discussions of these texts, consider the following questions—in writing and in discussion with peers:

- In what ways are gender norms constructed and enforced in our school and in the texts (both print and non-print) we read?
- In what ways have you observed people, texts, etc. challenge or disrupt gender norms?
- In what ways do you question (and help others to question) gender norms and demonstrate appreciation for all gender identities and expressions?

After you have had the opportunity to reflect on, write about, and discuss these questions, select one of the following assessment options. Each of these options encourages you to demonstrate your understanding of (a) gender self-determination and how you can raise awareness of possibilities for disrupting gender normative school culture:

*Option 1: Picture Book Read Aloud* Select a picture book with a trans\* or gender creative character. An extensive list of picture books with trans\* characters can be found on Goodreads.com. Select an audience (peers, younger students, siblings or other family members). Then read the picture book aloud and facilitate a discussion with that audience. Write about the experience, including your rationale for your text and audience selection,

the reaction of your audience, how you facilitated the discussion, and any challenges you faced, as well as surprises and successes.

*CCSS Addressed:*

Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration

1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Writing: Range of Writing

10. Write routinely over extended time frame (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

*NCTE Standards Addressed:*

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., their sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

12. Students use spoken, written and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

*Grading Considerations:*

Selection and justification for text selection, preparation of discussion, effectiveness of discussion, depth of written reflection

*Option 2: Challenge Gender Normative Practices* Select a gender normative school practice, and develop a plan to question or challenge it. Create an argument (print or non-print text) for a specific audience, and present it to that audience. In writing or in a presentation to the class, reflect on your experience and analyze both your performance as well as the reactions of your audience. Articulate your "next steps."

*CCSS Addressed:*

Writing: Text Types and Purposes:

1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Writing: Production and Distribution of Writing

4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Speaking and Listening: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

4. Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

*NCTE Standards Addressed:*

5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

12. Students use spoken, written and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

*Grading Considerations:* Selection of topic, argument development, depth of analysis, viability and relevance of next step possibilities, quality of presentation (written or oral).

*Option 3: Conduct a Social Experiment* Similar to Elle's haircut in *Jumpstart the World*, conduct a social experiment. With your parent/guardian's permission, change something about your appearance (e.g., your clothing, your accessories, your hair, your non-verbal language). Make it something significant, ideally something you have wanted to change, and perhaps something you have been afraid to change. Observe other people's reactions to this change. Write about the experience (or share it in a presentation). What did you change and why did you wait until now to do it (what previously held you back)? In what ways do you find yourself supported or challenged as a result of this change? Compare and contrast your experience with those of characters we encountered in our reading.

*CCSS Addressed:*

Writing: Text Types and Purposes:

1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

*NCTE Standards Addressed:*

5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

12. Students use spoken, written and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

*Grading Considerations:* Choice task selection/completion, observational notes, experience reflection, accurate and meaningful comparison to *Jumpstart* characters.

## NOTES

1. We intentionally move back and forth between trans\* and transgender based on how it is used by an author or us.

## REFERENCES

- Alter, A. (2015, June 6). Transgender children's books fill a void and break a taboo. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com>
- Andrews, A. (2015). *Some assembly required: The not-so-secret life of a transgender teen*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Beam, C. (2011). *I am J*. New York: Little, Brown and Co.
- Biegel, S. (2010). *The right to be out: Sexual orientation and gender identity in America's public schools*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press.
- Boylan, J. F. (2003). *She's not there: A life in two genders*. New York: Broadway Books.
- Cart, M. (Ed.). (2009). *How beautiful the ordinary: Twelve stories of identity*. New York: Harper Teen.
- Cart, M., & Jenkins, C. A. (2006). *The heart has its reasons: Young adult literature with Gay/Lesbian/Queer Content, 1969–2004*. Latham: The Scarecrow Press.
- Cramer, K. M. (forthcoming). Using YAL to interrogate the heteronormative, transphobic culture of school sports. In A. Brown & L. Rodesiler (Eds.), *Developing contemporary literacies through sports: A guide for the English classroom*. NCTE.
- Cronn-Mills, K. (2012). *Beautiful music for ugly children*. Minnesota: Flux.
- Fisher, D., Brozo, W. G., Frey, N., & Ivey, G. (2015). *50 instructional routines to develop content literacy*. Boston: Pearson.
- Hill, K. R. (2015). *Rethinking normal: A memoir in transition*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Hyde, C. R. (2010). *Jumpstart the world*. New York: Knopf.
- Katcher, B. (2009). *Almost perfect*. New York: Delacorte.

- Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Palmer, N. A., & Boesen, M. J. (2014). *The 2013 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools*. New York: GLSEN.
- Kuklin, S. (2014). *Beyond magenta: Transgender teens speak out*. Boston: Candlewick.
- Levithan, D. (2012). *Every day*. New York: Ember.
- Levithan, D., & Merrill, B. (Eds.). (2005). *The full spectrum: A new generation of writing about gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, questioning, and other identities*. New York: Knopf.
- Lewisohn, M., Flint, A. S., & Van Sluys, K. (2002). Taking on critical literacy: The journey of newcomers and novices. *Language Arts*, 79(5), 382–392.
- Lukoff, K. (2015, May 8). Evaluating transgender picture books; Calling for better ones. *School Library Journal*. Retrieved from <http://www.slj.com/>
- MacGillivray, I. K. (2000). Educational equity for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and queer/questioning students: The demands of democracy and social justice for America's schools. *Education and Urban Society*, 32(3), 303–323.
- Mason, K., Brannon, A., & Yarborough, E. (2012). Locating queer community in award-winning LGBTQ-themed young adult literature (2005–2010). *The ALAN Review*, 39(3), 12–20.
- Miller, s. (2015). A queer literacy framework promoting (a)gender and (a)sexuality self-determination and justice. *English Journal*, 104(5), 37–44.
- Morris, R. (2015, January 12). Transgender 13-year-old Zoey having therapy. *BBC News US & Canada*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com>
- NCTE. Rationales for teaching challenged books. Retrieved from <http://www.ncte.org/action/anti-censorship/rationales>
- Pascoe, C. J. (2007). *Dude, you're a fag: Masculinity and sexuality in high school*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Peters, J. A. (2004). *Luna*. New York: Little, Brown and Co.
- Plum-Ucci, C. (2002). *What happened to Lani Garver*. Orlando: Harcourt.
- Sokoll, T. (2013). Representations of trans\* youth in young adult literature: A report and a suggestion. *Young Adult Library Services*, 11(4), 23–26.
- Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River: Pearson.
- Wittlinger, E. (2007). *Parrotfish*. New York: Simon & Schuster.