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Table of Contents

“Save Our Children” Exhibit Introduction - 3
Art Corner - 4
Into the Archives - 5
Combatting Anti-LGBTQ Rhetoric - 6
Safety Zone - 8
“It’s Elementary” - 10
The Freedom of Self Expression: Implementing an LGBTQ+ Bill of Rights in the Classroom - 12
Julian is a Mermaid - 14
Advice for Parents & Guardians of LGBTQ+ Children - 16
LGBTQ+ Media Recommendations - 18
From Anita Bryant’s “Save Our Children” crusade in the 1970s to the current movement to ban queer literature in schools, there is a long conservative history of employing the rhetoric of child innocence to repress and erase the existence of queerness. However, these movements only aim to protect white, heterosexual, and cisgender children, which marginalizes and silences children outside of that identity structure. The restriction of information is an intentional tactic that aims to undermine the autonomy of the child, preventing them from making informed decisions about their own identities and views of the world. Through the model of a classroom, this exhibit provides a safe space for all children, as well as uplifts the voices of those who do not feel traditionally represented. We hope that as you enter our classroom, you are transported to a space in which you feel safe enough to freely express yourself and embark on a journey of self discovery through the power of literature.
“the future is loving” - AG - 2019

“when will I feel seen” - AG - 2020
A selection of objects pulled from Gerber/Hart LGBTQ Library & Archives in Chicago, IL and their relevance to the theme of “Save Our Children”
Combatting Anti-LGBTQ Rhetoric
Written by Anakalea Pederson

In many magazine interviews such as this one, Anita Bryant employs the image of childhood innocence to frame the existence of LGBTQ folks in opposition to that innocence. However, Bryant’s rhetoric, like that of many conservative politicians and book-banning figureheads today, erases the experiences of LGBTQ youth and other children who do not fit the white, heterosexual, and cisgender image it paints. In order to resist these narratives, we must have a full understanding of them, as well as be prepared to bravely counter them through daily actions.
By studying Anita Bryant as an example of anti-LGBTQ sentiment, we can identify patterns of fear-mongering, hateful messaging, and erasure. From the egregious lie that LGBTQ adults pass on their identity to vulnerable children, to associating queer and trans identities with deviance, these narratives have been utilized by conservative movements for decades.

One of the ways that this can be combated is by providing parents or guardians with ways to speak to their children, LGBTQ or otherwise. The most important lesson that can be passed down is that LGBTQ people and non-traditional families are not just to be acknowledged or tolerated, but loved and supported, particularly because of the marginalization and oppression they face.

Additionally, the erasure of anyone’s existence or their experience with marginalization or oppression does not protect children, but rather makes them ignorant of the world and more susceptible to the spread of misinformation. Through the provision of this knowledge, as well as the celebration of LGBTQ people, parents and guardians should hope to raise open-minded young people, as well as young people who are not afraid to be their most authentic selves. While this is just one piece of the puzzle, we must always remember that change starts at the micro-level, with our actions in the world about us.
A common theme amongst the “save our children” campaign was to protect children from the queer community. Anti-lgbtq+ activists intended to only protect those they deemed worth saving and left out any child who did not fit that norm.

Most children, especially those who are white and heteronormative go to school and feel safe in their classroom. While non-white and queer kids may not have that same sense of comfort. So how do we ensure that every child feels safe in their space? How do we create a space where every child can learn and create while knowing they are amongst those who will show them understanding and compassion?
While at Gerbert/Hart I came across a sign titled “Safety Zone.” This sign sends an important message to queer youth and adult allies which intends to let them know that the person displaying the sign is understanding, supportive, and trustworthy. Having this sign up lets queer youth know that if that sign is up it is a space where they can talk to someone if they need help, advice, or someone to confide in. It was highly suggested that this sign be placed in a conspicuous location anywhere that youth may be.

Although it is more common today to have some sort of indication that a space is safe for anyone apart of the LGBTQ+ community I still have not seen enough throughout spaces where young queers may be. This should be a priority for anyone in the education space to ensure that any child regardless of gender or sexuality knows that they have the ability to learn in a space that will treat them justly like any other student.
“It’s Elementary”: An Introduction to discussing queer issues in schools written by Abeline Glanzinski

The Child is given such a specific role in our society: they are innocent and helpless, yet they also are given the weight of the world and represent the future. It is the former mindset that supports the book bans, challenges, and curriculum restrictions that target stories of marginalized communities, such as those of queer people and people of color. Documentary director Debra Chaseoff’s “It’s Elementary” enters the classroom and gets on the student’s level to discuss queer issues, stereotypes, and more. The film also explores the ongoing debate about whether these discussions belong in a school curriculum or not.

This film is an important artifact as it centers the child’s voice. All too often when discussing queer issues and whether children should be taught about them, children themselves are left completely out of the conversation. “It’s Elementary” shows how easy it is to include them. The teachers and classrooms featured in the documentary participate in activities where elementary and middle grade students are invited to share their current associations, assumptions, and understandings of the words “lesbian” and “gay”. In each classroom featured, there is a range of answers spanning from literal definitions to stereotypes. Students then engage in a conversation that looks at why they think what they do about queer issues. Many of the students cite movies, news channels, and talk shows as sources for their understanding of “gay” and “lesbian” showing that the media children consume play a part in their understanding of these issues. One student expresses that “if kids are too young to learn about homosexuality, then they’re too young to learn about heterosexuality.” Another student asks for schools to “give us all the facts so we can decide on our own” (Prettyman 95). These two quotes demonstrate how aware and intelligent
students are when it comes to these topics. They know what is going on and want to be included in the conversations.

After seeing the activities in the classrooms, a few teachers are interviewed as to why they believe it is important to address queer issues within the classroom at a young age. They all explain that the goal of these lessons is to address student’s prior knowledge on the subjects and to engage them in an open conversation where the kids are allowed to ask questions and think about why they have the thoughts that have on queer issues.

The conservative movements that restrict knowledge and ban schools from facilitating these kinds of conversations are leaving out the most important voices, the children. "It's Elementary" is an example of what can happen when you do include the kids. It also acts as an example of how to facilitate these conversations in an age-appropriate way; one that does not discuss sex, but focuses on compassion and understanding of those with different perspectives and life experiences. Implementing conversations that encourage compassion and respect will overall be beneficial for our society as the tools used to navigate queer issues can also be applied to other difficult and controversial issues.
The Freedom of Self Expression: Implementing an LGBTQ+ Bill of Rights in the Classroom
Written by Claudia Nieves

Upon looking through the vast archives of Gerber/Heart, a classmate of mine pulled a file of different classroom materials, one of those being a "bill of rights" for LGBTQ+ students in the classroom. I was initially drawn to this artifact for a number of reasons, one in particular being how this reflects the classroom that I wish to foster in the future. I am currently studying to eventually become a High School English educator. In the last two years of my studies, I am further articulating the ways in which I can make my students feel further connected to the literature and class themes at hand. One way in which I can do this is by having an inclusive approach to my teaching style and classroom dynamic, many of which align with the presented artifact.

The pillars for the classroom posted on the sign align deeply with what we know as "Culturally Responsive Teaching" (CRT). CRT is essentially a set of standards and practices that can help educators to better align their classrooms to the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of students.

When I was looking at the poster, I was initially drawn to pillar number two, which states that students should have the "right to attend schools where respect and dignity for all is a standard set by boards of education and enforced by every school principal".

This may seem like a given, that schools should be spaces where students feel respected and safe in the classroom. However, this isn’t necessarily the case.
for all students, especially those who are in school districts that are actively banning literature that discusses the lived experiences of others who may have a similar background to them or to a loved one.

Book bans on texts that focus on themes of sexuality and gender identity continue to reinforce the harmful rhetoric that being queer or trans is “abnormal”. However, this is far from the truth. Reading banned literature, specifically texts that focus on topics of the intersectionality of identity, allows students to learn more about themselves and others in a way that is uniquely profound. This is because students are able to start to develop their own perspectives by learning about the potential perspectives of others.

As we reflect upon the “Bill of Rights” and reading of the pillars presented, we can surely agree that these should be given in the classroom and that every student deserves the right to freely learn in a respected and caring environment. Students should feel safe enough to take risks and in turn, grow as people and learners. However, when students see themselves through the literature actively being banned in classrooms across the United States, it sends a completely different message. As you view our mini classroom, take note of the “Bill of Rights for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual School Age Youth” and reflect upon how this would look today. Reflect upon whether or not the policies presented were honored in your classrooms growing up. If so, how has that impacted you from your childhood into your adulthood? If not, how could the rights presented impacted your learning as a student and person in the world?
Adults are constantly speaking about ways to protect children. They are always making decisions for minds they think they are saving but are really just trying to control. If we truly cared about "saving the children" we would give them a voice. We would give them a chance to talk about their thoughts on books that are deemed "inappropriate" or "harmful." They'd be given more opportunities to share their wants and needs and how they can be made to feel safe and seen.

A book that has come to my attention recently is Julián is a Mermaid. It is a colorful and heartfelt story of a young boy who wants to be a mermaid. It shares Julián’s journey in creativity and imaginative play as well as looking for acceptance from his grandmother. This book is a lovely story that showcases beautiful illustrations and being met with love and understanding from a family member. While this book does not explicitly talk about gender or sexuality it can be inferred that the character Julián is gender fluid or gender non-conforming. It has been deemed by some schools as inappropriate and not something that children should see.

Recently a family member, who is a teacher, read this book to her class and got some of their reactions during an activity. This gave the students an opportunity to express their uniqueness and how they perceived Julián. They showed that no harm was done in reading this book but rather allowed them the opportunity to celebrate their differences.
3rd Grade's Responses to Julian is a Mermaid

“I am unique because I am helpful, I am unique because I am mischievous, I am unique because I am creative.”
“Julian is unique because he is brave, creative, and likes mermaids.”

“I am unique because I like the springtime.”
“Julian is unique because he is a mermaid.”

“I am unique because I like different things than other people. I look different.”
“Julian wanted to be different and look more different.”

“I am unique because I like to build legos and use my scooter.”
“Julian is unique because he likes mermaid, water, and swimming.”
Advice for Parents and Guardians of LGBTQ+ Children

Written by Annabelle Pedderson

As a group, we decided to reach out to classmates and friends to encourage them to share what they think parents, guardians, and teachers of LGBTQ youth should know, as well as things that their parents, guardians, and/or teachers did when they were young that did or did not help them. While this is by no means a comprehensive list, this article is an attempt at centering the voices of LGBTQ folks and providing allies with many ways to consciously practice their allyship on a daily basis.

What is important for guardians/family of LGBTQ+ children to know?

"Their orientation or identity is not an extension of you. They are their own people."

"Raising kids in an environment of love and acceptance does more than you could ever imagine."

"Please be excited. Please be normal about it. Please be kind."

"Nothing is ever set in stone, be open and let them explore safely. Sexuality and gender expression are not a distraction, it’s a journey and a part of life."

"Just looking for love, acceptance, and attempts for understanding. Child just wants to be happy."

"Never single your kids out, make them feel included and represented, not like they are different."

"I feel like it’s so important to make it clear to youth that you’re a safe person to talk to. Talking to kids about it openly and doing so in ways that invite questions and show care and acceptance."

"Don’t just educate yourself through your child. Read research and participate in community events (be mindful of your presence)."
"My mother would frequently openly talk about her support of the LGBTQ+ community and exposed me to media and spaces where being different was accepted. She never pressured me to come out, but always made it known that it was okay and normal."

"Yes! My mom emphasized that no matter what, as long as I treated myself and everyone else with genuine kindness and respect, everything would be ok. She also gave me so many opportunities to connect with older queer women she knew so that I could have more adult figures that I related to rather than only relying on her for support. She couldn’t always give me because she didn’t understand."

"Once I demanded my pronouns be respected and my sexuality acknowledged and my gender identity be seen, people stepped up. Professors stepped up specifically."

"I didn’t have big reactions to coming out, talking about things instead of ignoring when queer topics/issues came up."

"Growing up in a family where queerness wasn’t really ever talked about became a bit nerve wracking when I was starting to come out—because I didn’t know anything about their feelings. I had no baseline for what their reaction might be, and that lack of knowledge made it even more difficult."
Queer media can be read, watched, or listened to at any age! Here are some recommendations that are suitable for a wide variety of ages and interests. You may see some of these featured in our Classroom library, throughout the exhibition, or even on the shelves at Gerber/Hart.

**Picture Books**

- *And Tango Makes Three* - Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell
- *Julían Is a Mermaid* - Jessica Love (Featured on page ___ of our Zine!)
- *Mama and Mommy and Me in the Middle* - Nina LaCour
- *Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag* - Rob Sanders
- *The GayBCs* - M. L. Webb (Find some of the letters posted on our alphabet wall!)
- *My Shadow is Purple* - Scott Stuart
- *Marley’s Pride* - Joëlle Retener

**Middle Grades Books**

- *Drama* - Raina Telgemeier
- *Hurricane Child* - Kacen Callender
- *Too Bright to See* - Kyle Lukoff
- *Ivy Aberdeen's Letter to the World* - Ashley Herring Blake
- *Pepper's Rules for Secret Sleuthing* - Briana McDonald
- *Melissa* - Alex Gino
- *The Insiders* - Mark Oshiro
**Young Adult Books**

- *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* - Benjamin Alire Sáenz
- *Juliet Takes a Breath* - Gabby Rivera
- *Felix Ever After* - Kacen Callender
- *Gender Queer* - Maia Kobabe
- *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* - Becky Albertalli
- *Heartstopper Series* - Alice Oseman
- *The Lesbian’s Guide to Catholic School* - Sonora Reyes

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**TV Shows and Movies**

- *The Owl House* (2020)
- *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* (2018)
- *Glee* (2009)
- *One Day at a Time* (2017)
- *The Half of It* (2020) PG-13
- *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2023)
- *Willow* (2022)
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Created by Adriana Glencross, Claudia Nieves, Annabella Puddicombe, & Mya Ruiz

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