



Black & LGBTQIA+: An Intersection Missing in the Classroom

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Students need to see themselves in the curriculum. Students need to be exposed to diverse texts from authors of a variety of backgrounds. All teachers should believe this. However, actions speak louder than words. Based on actions, it is not clear if teachers really believe this.

Maybe it is not about the belief. It could be fear or a lack of know-how when it comes to developing inclusive lesson plans especially when teachers worry about how some parents might react.

Our identities include a variety of aspects, factors, and traits that come together to make us who we are. At times, this is referred to as intersectionality. Where is the intersectionality in our lesson plans? We might be comfortable with intentionally including Black authors in our lesson plans because most of the students in our class are Black. But, are we comfortable with including Black authors who do not identify as being heterosexual? If we do, are we okay with letting students know that not only is the author Black but the author is also part of the LGBTQIA+ community? If the answer is no, then there is work to do.

For most of my career, I have been an English teacher. Regardless of who the author was of a short story or novel was, I wanted students to know who the person was. We read the author's biography. I did not cut out any part that may make someone uncomfortable. Stating that an author is Black, is a female, and married to another female, should not be an issue. How many times have we read an author's biography where the author is heterosexual, and we also read about the author's spouse of the opposite gender, their kids, and even their pets? Taking some time to read about who the person is should not be seen as indoctrination or as being controversial. Homosexuality is not contagious. Kids will not switch their sexuality just because they learn an author is gay or a lesbian.

When teachers ask how they can share this information. I tell them to follow the same procedures they would with heterosexual authors. We are making this too complicated!

In the name of intersectionality, and in an effort to provide a resource, here are some Black authors who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community that I believe teachers should include in their curriculum.

James Baldwin

Baldwin was a prolific writer who wrote plays, novels, and essays. His second novel was "Giovanni's Room." This novel was about an American character named David who lives in Paris. He proposed to a woman but falls in love with a man. It is a novel about love and shame. Baldwin uses many literary elements in his work that teachers can easily connect to academic standards. Also, this is not an explicit book about sex. Sex is not the focus. If this text, which centers love and shame, is too big of a leap I also suggest "The Fire Next Time." This novel

focuses on the impact of racism and challenges readers to take a hard look at the role of race and racism in America. At one point in the novel, Baldwin says, "Do I really want to be integrated into a burning house?" This would be a good opportunity to tie in social studies standards and have students look at integration and the intended impact as well as the unintended impact.

Angela Davis

Davis, a prominent figure in the Black Panther Party movement, is an activist and writer. There is really no reason to create a book list when there is a good one already posted on Oprah Daily. In the article, "[9 Essential Angela Davis Books to Add to Your Shelf](#)," secondary teachers should be able to find at least one book to use. For consideration, I suggest "Angela Davis, An Autobiography." We know students are asked to read autobiographies and biographies, so why not this one?

Countee Cullen

Although I like all the authors on this list, I remember Cullen the most. When people think of the Harlem Renaissance, they probably think about Langston Hughes who is great in his own right. However, people should also think about Cullen who created many great works. He is most known for his poetry even though he also wrote novels and plays and later became a high school teacher. I read a poem he wrote when I was in high school. That poem was "[Incident](#)." In three stanzas, Cullen drove home the impact of the n-word on a child. In addition to including "Incident" in poetry units, I also suggest the poem "[Heritage](#)" where Cullen ponders the role of Africa for African Americans.

Alice Walker

Walker is most known for her novel "The Color Purple." The book won a Pulitzer Prize and has been made into a movie and a musical. This article has been heavy on texts for the secondary setting. However, Walker does write for a younger audience, too. Her book "[Sweet People are Everywhere](#)" was published last year and helps children celebrate diversity.

Angela Davis once said, "We have to talk about liberating minds as well as liberating society." We cannot liberate anyone's minds with a closed-off curriculum or a fixed view of what should be included. Hopefully, among these writers, educators can find at least one to include in their classrooms.

