



Book of the Month

Presented by ADL's Education Department

About the Book of the Month: This collection of featured books is from Books Matter: The Best Kid Lit on Bias, Diversity and Social Justice. The books teach about bias and prejudice, promote respect for diversity, encourage social action and reinforce themes addressed in education programs of [A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute](#), ADL's international anti-bias education and diversity training provider. For educators, adult family members and other caregivers of children, reading the books listed on this site with your children and incorporating them into instruction are excellent ways to talk about these important concepts at home and in the classroom.

Ivy Aberdeen's Letter to the World

Ashley Herring Blake (Author)

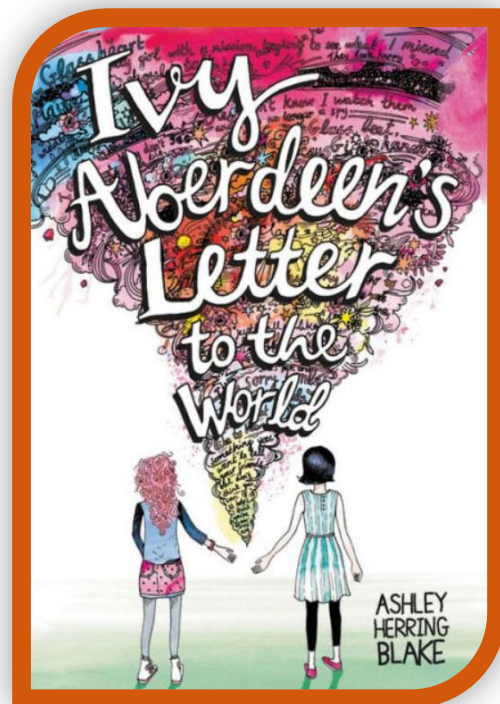
When a tornado rips through town, twelve-year-old Ivy Aberdeen's house is destroyed and her family of six is displaced. Ivy feels invisible and ignored in the aftermath of the storm—and what's worse, her notebook filled with secret drawings of girls holding hands has gone missing. Mysteriously, Ivy's drawings begin to reappear in her locker with notes from someone telling her to open up about her identity. Ivy thinks—and hopes—that this someone might be her classmate, another girl for whom Ivy has begun to develop a crush. Will Ivy find the strength and courage to follow her true feelings?

ISBN: 9780316515467

Publisher: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers

Year Published: 2018

Age Range: 8–12



Book Themes

LGBTQ People, Identity, Acting as an Ally, Being Yourself, Natural Disasters

Key Words

Discuss and define these words with students prior to reading the book and remind them of the meanings as they come up in the book. See also ADL's [Glossary of Education Terms](#).

- abandoned
- awkward
- awry
- bewildered

- | | | | |
|-----------------|---------------|----------------|------------------|
| ■ bisexual | ■ foe | ■ overreacting | ■ sturdy |
| ■ chaos | ■ frustrated | ■ panic | ■ tornado |
| ■ come out | ■ haphazard | ■ questioning | ■ transform |
| ■ debris | ■ hoarding | ■ resilient | ■ uncomfortable |
| ■ decomposition | ■ inspiration | ■ severe | ■ unrecognizable |
| ■ displaced | ■ jealousy | ■ smugness | |
| ■ eventually | ■ leukemia | ■ stress | |

Discussion Questions

If the students read the book in small groups or as a whole class, ask discussion questions throughout their reading in order to check comprehension and engage them on a deeper level. Some of these questions can also be used as writing prompts. When students have finished the book, choose from these questions to guide a group discussion:

- What is the book about?
- When you first looked at the book's title and cover, what did you think it might be about?
- What did you think about Ivy's character when you first met her in the book, and how does she change and grow throughout the book?
- Why is Ivy's notebook so important to her?
- Why do you think the author uses a tornado in the town as a major part of the book's plot? What are some examples of how this metaphor is used in the book?
- How do Ivy and other members of her family react in the aftermath of the tornado? How do they feel when they realize their house is gone?
- How has Ivy been feeling about her place in the family since her twin brothers were born? How do the tornado and her family's displacement impact those feelings?
- How does Ivy feel when she is displaced and no longer has a home? Have you ever known someone in this situation and what was it like for them?
- Ivy's parents suggest that Ivy stay with Taryn for a little while. What do you think this passage in the book means: "And Ivy's part was to get out of the way. To get smaller and smaller."
- How does Ivy feel about June when she first talks with her at the elementary school (now a temporary shelter)? How do those feelings change throughout the book?
- What is Ivy and Taryn's relationship like? What happens in their friendship at different points in the book and how does their relationship change throughout the book?
- What is significant about the conversation Ivy overhears between Layla and her best friend Gigi? How does this impact how Ivy feels about telling Layla who she likes? What does she find out later about that conversation?
- How does Ivy feel when she realizes her notebook is missing?

- What happens when someone begins to place Ivy's pictures (from her lost notebook) in her locker, each one with a note to her? Why does she call that mystery person "Keeper?"
- What are some of the questions that Ivy asks Robin about being a lesbian and why do you think she asks those questions?
- How do the conversations between Ivy and Robin, an openly lesbian woman, impact and help Ivy?
- What does it mean to "come out?"
- How does Ivy and June's relationship develop over the course of the book?
- How does Ivy come to realize she has a crush on June and how does she feel about that realization?
- Why do you think Taryn encourages Ivy to go to the dance with June?
- How does Ivy feel when June says she wants to find a boy to dance with? How do you know?
- What happens when Ivy tells June how she feels about her?
- Why do you think Ivy's best friend (Taryn) and Gigi's best friend (Layla) are both upset that their friends didn't tell them they are gay? Why do you think Ivy and Gigi didn't tell them?
- What is the importance of the art exhibit, *Resilient Helenwood*, which takes place in the town? How are Ivy's My Letter to the World treehouse drawings seen by her and others?
- What are some examples of secrets that are kept by several characters in the book? Why do they choose to keep these parts of themselves private and what makes them eventually reveal them?
- What parts/passages of the book were most meaningful or important to you? Why?
- Why do you think the book is called *Ivy Aberdeen's Letter to the World*? What is Ivy's "letter to the world?"
- How did you feel when the book ended?
- What are the overall themes and messages of the book?

Extension Activities

Below are activities that can be done with students in order to extend the learning from the book.

1. Reader's Response and Writing Activities

- **Write the Next Chapter of the Book:** Remind students how the book ends by asking the following questions: *How do Ivy and her family like their new home? Why do you think Ivy was writing a graphic memoir about her life? What do you think will happen next in Ivy's life at home, in school and in her relationships?* Have students consider what might happen next in the book. Instruct them to write the next chapter of the book as they imagine it would continue, beginning with Ivy and her family moving to their new home.
- **Journal Entry of Character:** Have students select a character from the book, which could include: Ivy, June, Layla, Taryn, Robin, Drew, Gigi, Ivy's mother/father or Dr. Somerset (June's mother). Then have students write journal entries for their chosen character, writing 8–10 entries that the character might have kept before, during and/or after the book's events. Remind students that the character's thoughts and feelings are very important in a journal as well as their reaction to the day-to-day events and other activities that take place throughout

the book. You may choose to have students engage in pre-writing discussions with a partner about their character in order to get some of their ideas out. After they have completed the assignment, have them share their journal entries with the class and consider creating an online collection of all the diary entries.

- **Send the Author a Letter or Email:** Have students write a letter or email to the book's author, Ashley Herring Blake. Students should first consider what they want to say to the author, which should include their own personal reflections about the book. Their letters can also include how they felt about the book and characters, what they learned, what more they wanted to know. They could also write about what they wish had been included and ways in which the book did not meet their expectations. In addition, students can raise questions with the author such as how she got the idea for the book, how long it took her to write it, whether it is based on real experiences or not. Have students engage in conferencing with each other to write several drafts of their letters or emails, share them aloud with the rest of the class and finally mail or email them to the author. Ashley Herring Blake's [website](#) includes her contact information. If students receive responses from the author, those can be shared as well.

2. Be Yourself

In the book, at one point the author writes, "There were dozens of pictures, drawings of the things that made Ivy happy, self-portraits, all the colors of her world, all the things that made her feel like her. Liking girls was part of that, but it wasn't everything." Have students consider the different aspects of who they are, the things that make them "me." This can include social identity groups to which they belong (race, ethnicity, gender/gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, religion, etc.); interests, hobbies and skills; their community and/or neighborhood; their family composition and family life; and their hopes and dreams. As a class, brainstorm these different categories and come up with a long list of what makes them who they are. Then have them identify the social identity groups and other characteristics that are important to them right now in their lives and explain that what's most important now can change over time and may be different at other points in their lives. As a culmination, have students illustrate the different identity groups and characteristics to which they identify in one of the following ways: poem, essay, photo/Snapchat story, video, drawing or collage or something other type of art project.

3. LGBTQ People and Acting as an Ally

Talk with students about what the term LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning) means. As you discuss this, be sensitive and thoughtful about whether you have students (or parents) in your class who may be LGBTQ. Highlight related vocabulary from the book (e.g., bisexual, come out, questioning) and help define those terms with students. Ask students to identify some of the challenges for the gay, lesbian and bisexual characters (Ivy, Robin, Gigi, Jessa) in the book, reminding them about how it can be difficult to share your sexual orientation with others ("coming out") because you may worry about gaining acceptance from family, friends and community. At one point Ivy expresses anger that she had to intentionally reveal this part of herself "that she couldn't just be and let that be okay and enough." Define "**coming out**" as to publicly declare one's identity, sometimes to one person in conversation, sometimes to a group or in a public setting. Coming out is a lifelong process. In each situation, a person must decide where they are at that point in time with their identity. In each new situation, a person must decide whether or not to come out.

Talk with students about Ivy's coming out process—the parts that were both joyful and upsetting. Also, talk with students about what it means to act as an ally ("someone who helps or stands up for

someone who is being bullied or the target of prejudice”). Explain that while Ivy wasn’t bullied or targeted yet because she hadn’t told that many people, it is important that she has people around her who are supportive to her. Ask students: *Have you ever been an ally to someone who was targeted based on an aspect of their identity? What happened and how did you feel?* You can use the [Be an Ally: 6 Simple Ways](#) to discuss the variety of ways you can act as an ally.

ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and resources on LGBTQ people, natural disasters, identity and acting as an ally.

Curriculum Resources

Boy Scouts of America Lifts Ban on Gay Leaders, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/boy-scouts-of-america-lifts-ban-on-gay-leaders

How Natural Disasters Discriminate, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/how-natural-disasters-discriminate

Understanding Homophobia/Heterosexism and How to Be an Ally, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/understanding-homophobia-heterosexism-and-how-to-be-an

What is Marriage Equality, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/what-is-marriage-equality

Who Am I? Identity Poems, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/who-am-i-identity-poems

Websites

Anti-Bias Education

www.adl.org/what-we-do/promote-respect/anti-bias

Provides training program offerings for pre-K through 12th grade school communities—educators, administrators, youth and families—which focus on the development of an inclusive culture and respectful school climate by addressing issues of bias and bullying.

Be an Ally: Six Simple Ways

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/be-an-ally-six-simple-ways

Some simple things a student can do to be an ally to targets of name-calling and bullying.

Definitions Related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/definitions-related-to-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity.pdf

Terms and definitions related to sexual orientation and gender identity in association with ADL's anti-bias programs and resources.

Safe and Inclusive Schools for All

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/question-corner

This resource provides information about how to promote a safe, respectful and inclusive school community.

The Time is Now: Bringing LGBTQ Topics into the Classroom

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/question-corner

An ADL blog on the legalization of same-sex marriage and bringing LGBTQ related topics in the classroom for discussion.

Children's Books

Below are links to lists of recommended anti-bias and multicultural books for the indicated category.

LGBTQ People & Homophobia/Heterosexism, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?childrens-lit-select-all-6=1&tid\[194\]=194&tid\[195\]=195&tid\[196\]=196&tid\[197\]=197&tid\[198\]=198&tid\[199\]=199](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?childrens-lit-select-all-6=1&tid[194]=194&tid[195]=195&tid[196]=196&tid[197]=197&tid[198]=198&tid[199]=199)