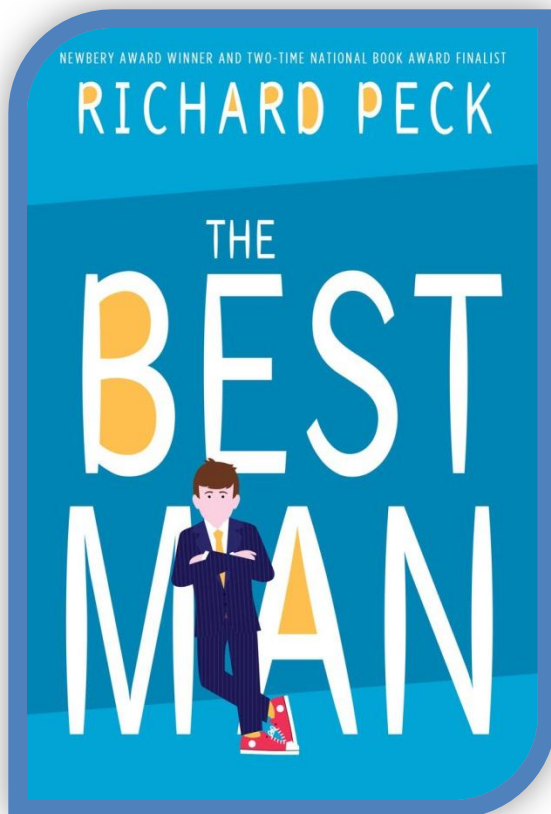




Book of the Month

Presented by ADL's Education Division

About the Book of the Month Parent/Family Discussion Guide: 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 parents, guardians and family members, reading the books listed on this site with your children and integrating the concepts into your interactions with them is an excellent way to help children grapple with and learn about these important principles.



The Best Man

Richard Peck (Author)

ISBN: 978-0803738393

Publisher: Dial Books for Young Readers

Year Published: 2016

Age Range: 9–12

Book Themes

LGBTQ people, Marriage equality, Bias, Bullying, Homophobia, Friendship

About the Book

Archer Magill has spent a lively five years of grade school in search of grown-up role models. Three of the best are his grandpa, the great architect; his dad, the great vintage car customizer; and his uncle Paul, who is just plain great. These are the three he wants to be like. Along the way he finds a fourth—Mr. McLeod, a military-based student teacher who both disrupts Archer's class and enriches it. In response to antigay bullying, Mr. McLeod gives the students a lecture in which he publicly outs himself, a particularly poignant moment. Outside school, Archer also shares daily adventures with his father, his grandfather, and his uncle Paul, whose romantic interest in Mr. McLeod might just well lead to a second wedding in which he has a starring role.

Conversation Starters

Whether you read the book aloud or your child reads it on their own and you discuss it later, use these open-ended questions to deepen the conversation. Remember not to judge their responses and to listen thoughtfully and engage in a give-and-take that helps them expand upon their understanding of the book and its themes.

- What happens in the story?
- How would you describe Archer as a character and how did he change and grow throughout the book?
- What was Archer and Lynette's friendship like? Have you ever had a friendship like that?
- What did you first think of Mr. McLeod when he came into the story? How did your thinking about him change?
- How did you feel while when you read the scene about what the sixth graders did to Russell in the restroom? What do you think you would have done in that situation?
- Why do you think Mr. McLeod confronted the sixth graders about what happened to Russell? Why did Mr. McLeod tell them he is gay?
- Has anything like that ever happened in your school?
- When the sixth graders were intimidated by the seventh graders in coming to the food court, what was Hilary's (the new student) solution to that and what did you think of that solution? What would you do in that situation?
- How did different people in the book act as allies to others?
- How did you feel when the story ended and what do you think will happen next?

Talking Points

Below are some important considerations to highlight in order to make this a learning opportunity for your child and your family.

1. Gender and Friendship

Remind your child about some of the observations Archer makes about his friendship with Lynette, especially around gender roles. He says things like: "how could I be friends with a girl?" and "In grade school, your best friend better never be a girl unless you are a girl." When Lynette has a fight with Natalie, Archer reaches out to help her and comments, "I took her by the hand to walk her out of this. Let people make comments if it made them feel better. By fifth grade can't you have the friends you want?" Ask your child why Archer feels uncomfortable being best friends with a girl, especially because of what other people may think and discuss the extent to which they think that rings true from their school experience. Talk with them about the importance of being friends with whoever they want, no matter the differences between them and how being friends with people who are different than we are (based on gender or other identity group categories) is an important part of life. Explain that sometimes people make stereotypes about boys who are friends with girls (and vice versa) and this limits our ability to make friends with whom we choose.

2. Bias and Homophobia

There are several characters in the book who are gay (namely, two of Archer's role models) and at one point, Archer wonders if he may be gay. A disturbing scene in the book unfolds when Archer and Raymond go to the restroom to find Russell tied to the bathroom sink with the word "GAY" marked on his forehead. They untie him and wipe the word off his forehead. Mr. McLeod, their student teacher, comes looking for them and discovers what happened to Russell. Mr. McLeod then proceeds to speak to the sixth grade class because it was three sixth graders who did this to Russell. Ask your child what Mr. McLeod says to the sixth graders and why he decides to tell the students he is gay. Mr. McLeod says, "Stay away from people who don't know who they are but want you to be just like them. People who'll want to label you. People who'll try to write their fears on your face." Talk with your child about the meaning of this and the importance of being able to be who they are. Explain that sometimes people who fear differences or fear specific kinds of people are the ones who target those specific groups. Emphasize that this was a situation of bias and homophobia (defined as: prejudice and/or discrimination against people who are or who are perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer--LGBTQ) and also point out the importance of not being silent or a bystander when you see this taking place.

3. Being an Ally

Talk with your child about the different examples of bias and bullying throughout the book faced by Archer and his classmates (e.g. the incident in the bathroom, not being allowed to use the cafeteria by the seventh graders). Ask your child if anyone helped or acted as an ally. Define ally as: "someone who speaks out on behalf of someone else or takes actions that are supportive of someone else." It is important to emphasize that when bias and bullying take place, there are a variety of ways people can act as allies to those who are targeted. Reflect on those situations in the book where people acted as allies and ask your child whether they have ever seen anything like that in school or elsewhere. Have a discussion about the extent to which they have acted as an ally or someone has been an ally to them. Together, you can read [Be an Ally: Six Simple Ways](#) and talk about the different ways to be an ally.

Other Books You May Like

Confessions of a Former Bully by Trudy Ludwig, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/confessions-of-a-former-bully

Because of Mr. Terupt by Rob Buyea, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/because-of-mr-terupt

Totally Joe by James Howe, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/totally-joe

Wonder by R.J. Palacio, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/wonder

ADL Additional Resources

The following are curriculum and resources on LGBTQ people, bullying and marriage equality.

Curriculum Resources

"Identity-Based Bullying," *Current Events Classroom*, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/identity-based-bullying

“Understanding Homophobia/Heterosexism and How to be an Ally,” *Current Events Classroom*, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/understanding-homophobia-heterosexism-and-how-to-be-an

“What is Marriage Equality?,” *Current Events Classroom*, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/what-is-marriage-equality

“Words that Heal: Using Children’s Literature to Address Bullying,” *Curriculum Connections*, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/words-that-heal-using-childrens-literature-to-address

Websites

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 Bias, Injustice and Bullying: For Educators, Parents and Family Members of Elementary Age Children

www.adl.org/education/resources/glossary-terms/definitions-related-to-bias-injustice-and-bullying

Definitions for words relating to bias, diversity, bullying and social justice concepts written for elementary-age children.

Love Has No Labels

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/love-has-no-labels

An Ad Council public service advertising campaign that encourages people to examine and challenge their own implicit bias. This page includes PSAs and accompanying discussion guides for Educators, Family and Caregivers and Campus student leaders to help facilitate discussions about bias and discrimination.

Parent, Family and Caregiver Resources

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/parent-family-and-caregiver-resources

Strategies, tips, guiding principles and resources to help parents, family members and caregivers impart values and principles to the children in their lives.

Table Talk: What Bullying Is and Is Not

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/table-talk/islamophobia-being-an-ally

Provides strategies and advice for talking with youth about what bullying is and is not.

Children’s Books

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

Bullying Awareness & Prevention, www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid%5b165%5d=165&tid%5b166%5d=166&tid%5b167%5d=167&tid%5b168%5d=168&tid%5b169%5d=169

LGBTQ People and Homophobia/Heterosexism, www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid%5b194%5d=194&tid%5b195%5d=195&tid%5b196%5d=196&tid%5b197%5d=197&tid%5b198%5d=198