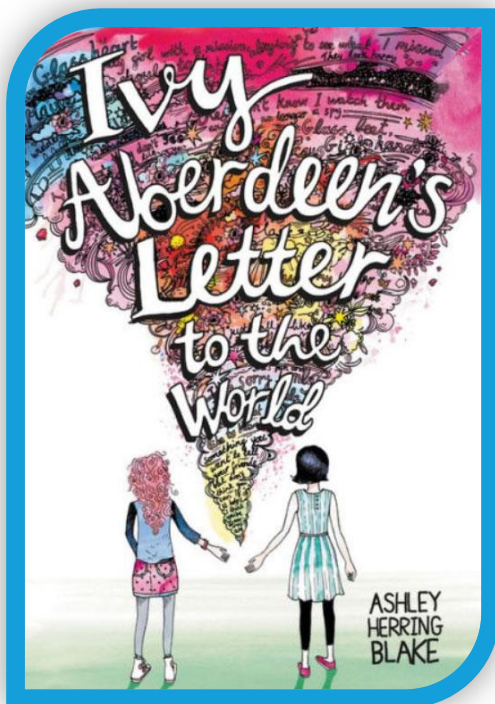




Book of the Month

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.



Ivy Aberdeen's Letter to the World

Ashley Herring Blake (Author)

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

About the Book

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?

Conversation Starters

Whether you read the book along with your child 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?
- What is in Ivy's notebook and why is it so special and important to her?
- 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?
- What is Ivy and Taryn's (her best friend) relationship like? Have you ever had a friendship like that?
- How does Ivy come to the realization that she likes girls (i.e. is gay)? What do you think that's like for her?
- Why do you think Robin talked with Ivy about her own coming out and her relationship with Jessa? What impact do you think this had on Ivy?
- 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?
- Why do you think the book is called *Ivy Aberdeen's Letter to the World*? What is Ivy's letter to the world?
- What did you learn while reading this book?
- What do you think is the overall message of the book?

Talking Points

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

1. Being Yourself

Talk with your child about the many aspects of who Ivy is (e.g., she likes girls/is gay, artist, friend, temporarily displaced, sister). In the book, 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."

Ask your child what that passage means to them and explore the different aspects of Ivy's identity. Then talk with them about the different aspects of who they are. You can start with social identity groups (e.g. race, ethnicity, gender/gender identity, ability, religion, etc.); if you share any of these identity groups as a family, you can describe what those are. You can also discuss your child's interests, hobbies, skills, neighborhood/community, family composition and family life, and their hopes and dreams and explain that all of these together make up who you are. Affirm who they are in the variety of ways and talk with them about the importance of social identity groups as well as other identity characteristics. You can also explain that some of those identity groups and characteristics change over time and some do not.

2. LGBTQ People and Coming Out

Talk with your child about Ivy and her realization that she likes girls and identifies as gay/lesbian. Explain to your child that throughout the book, Ivy comes to an understanding and acceptance of her sexual orientation. Define sexual orientation as “determined by one’s emotional, physical and/or romantic attractions” (explain in your own words if necessary). In your discussion, you can highlight and define related vocabulary from the book such as *bisexual*, *come out* and *questioning*. Explain that in the book, while Ivy feels good and hopeful about her awareness that she likes girls, she also struggles to come to terms with it and to share this with others, including her family, best friend and June. 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.” Talk with your child about some of the challenges faced by other LGB characters in the book such as Robin, Gigi and Jessa. Remind them that in the book, it was explained by several characters that it can be difficult to “come out” (i.e., tell your family and friends you are gay) and how they worried about being accepted by friends, family and their community. Talk with them about Ivy’s coming out process or other friends and family you may know who went through a coming out process.

3. Acting as an Ally

Talk with your child about ally behavior. Define **ally** as someone who helps or stands up for someone who is being bullied or the target of prejudice. Explain that although Ivy wasn’t targeted in the book for bias or bullying (because she hasn’t told many people yet), she may encounter bias in her life when she comes out. Ask your child about other instances in the book where someone acts as an ally; there are several cases where someone acts as an ally to Ivy (e.g., Robin, Taryn and Layla). Emphasize that a person can be an ally in a number of different ways including: supporting the target, telling a trusted adult, not participating in the bullying, confronting the aggressor, etc. Ask if they have seen anyone act as an ally in their school or if they have ever been an ally to someone who was the target of bias or bullying. Make sure your child knows that they should think through what their goals are in being an ally, to be safe and to ask for the help and support they may need. Model being an ally by showing your children the ways in which you engage in ally behavior and potentially do something together.

Other Books You May Like

George by Alex Gino, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/george

The Best Man Title by Richard Peck, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/the-best-man

The House You Pass on the Way by Jacqueline Woodson, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/the-house-you-pass-on-the-way

ADL Additional Resources

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

Curriculum Resources

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

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

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.

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.

Definitions Related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity
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.

Empowering Young People in the Aftermath of Hate

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/empowering-young-people-in-the-aftermath-of-hate

A guide for educators and families that provide the tools they need to help young people confront hate effectively in the aftermath of hate violence or terrorism in their community.

Table Talk: Why We Need Diverse Books

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/table-talk/why-we-need-diverse-books

Provides the tools parents and family members need to engage their families in conversations about the importance of diverse children's literature.

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)