

Two Boys Kissing
By David Levithan
Rationale by Hui Wang

Bibliographic Citation

Two Boys Kissing is a young adult literature, fallen into the genre of GLBTQ. It is written by David Levithan, who was born on September 7th, 1972 in America. And this book was published on August 27th, 2013 by *Knopf Books for Young Readers*. Since its publication, it has won a lot of awards, such as *National Book Award Nominee for Young People's Literature* (2013), *Stonewall Book Award Nominee for Children's & Young Adult Literature* (2014), *Milwaukee County Teen Book Award Nominee* (2014), *Lambda Literary Award Nominee for LGBT Children's/Young Adult* (2014), *The Inky Awards Nominee for Silver Inky* (2014). And because of its theme of gay love, it has been regarded as banned book by ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom. This book has also been listed in the top 10 most challenged book of 2015.

Grade Level and Audience

In *Two Boys Kissing*, David Levithan describes three pairs of teenage gays and a single teenage gay looking for existence. The whole book is complicatedly twined by the different stories of them, who are unknown to each other.

And the potential young adult readers should be students in Grade 10 to 12, no matter whether they are gay or not. Also, this book is targeted to any teacher and parent who are perplexed by their gay students or children. As more and more students claim to be gays or lesbians, this book should not be banned in classroom reading and should be recommended to many people in the society.

Plot Summary

Two boys Kissing talks about 3 couples of gays and a single gay. Firstly, Harry and Craig used to be a couple, but somehow they are separated but still friends. And one day, they would like to break the World Guinness Record of the longest kiss. Before they actually carry out this plan, Harry's parents have already known that their son is a gay and accept such relationship with Craig and even treat Craig as their son. While, comparatively speaking, Craig's family members are kind of traditional and have no idea of their son of sexual orientation. And in the process of their "long kissing" in public, Craig's mother has accidentally come to the spot and has seen the whole scene, which drives her insane. Through the help of Craig's friends, she gradually accepts the reality and went home to inform her other family members about this breaking news. Through hardship and perseverance, Harry and Craig finally break the record and realize what they would love to show the whole world.

The second pair, Peter and Neil are in relationship for almost one year. And once again, only Peter's parents know their relationship. Although Neil's mother has once seen her son holding hands with Peter, she says no words about this in public and pretends to be

unknown. One day, Neil is stimulated to urge his parents and sister to talk about this in public and begs them to speak out the fact that “Neil is a gay” and “Peter is Neil’s boyfriend”.

Another couple, Avery and Ryan, have only just met in a gay prom. They fall in love the minute they see each other. But they two have to overcome many obstacles both from inside and outside. For Ryan, his aunt is the only family member who is there for him, and it is his aunt that promotes the relationship between Avery and Ryan.

The last protagonist, Cooper, has experienced and suffered a lot in the book. When evening, his father went into his room and saw the chat record on the computer screen and has discovered that his son is gay and saying something disgusting with his gay friends. Then, his father burst out and even beat him, which finally drove him away from home at mid-night. Then, Cooper went out aimlessly and had some irrational relationship with another gay online. And being unable to be understood by everyone surround him, he finally decides to suicide by jumping from the bridge. However, he was luckily rescued by a policeman.

Theoretical Support and Redeeming Values and Purpose of Teaching

David Levithan has been awarded as New York Times Bestselling Author of *Every Day*, and *Two Boys Kissing* is a young adult literature based on true-event story. And this novel has its practical social value, as we are now living in a generation rich of gay and lesbian. While the previous generation has no intelligence to cleverly deal with such intractable problem. This book is, as David Levithan put, “written about the generation of gay man that went before me looking at the generation of gay man that came after me”. This can be a guide for parents and teachers who are facing with similar dilemma of dealing with such problem. While at the same time, this book is perfectly suitable for teenage gays and lesbians who are lost and confused in their dealing with such secret and even “shameful” relationship. Some of them are regardless about the outsider’s comment and attitude, keeping themselves in the self-protected space. While some others are very sensitive and vulnerable about their “shameful” relationship, hiding and suffering all within themselves. Some even cannot bear the external burden and commit suicide eventually. While, knowing the seriousness of the situation, few people are professional enough to handle the problem. At this particular moment, this book appears. It is a gift and surprise for all the people suffering from gay relationship.

Literary Qualities and Summary of Reviews

Frankly speaking, this is not an easy book to read, literally. The language is not that easy for second language readers or students. What’s more, the novel is written in first person’s perspective- “I”. While “I” is not any person in the story, instead, this “I” is an imagined speaker who is omnipresent and omniscient. And three couples and the single gay are strangers to each other and have no connection in their lives, but the story is written from one person’s story to another, it changes suddenly and without a hint for readers. Therefore, it is really difficult for readers to follow. The only connection among

them is the shared news of Harry and Craig's kissing in public.

Los Angeles Times describes this as "a story that is always alluring, often humorous and much like love itself-splendorous."

Jodi Picoult comments that "I have never read a book like David Levithan's *Every Day*, and I have never met a character like his narrator, ...I didn't just read this book- I inhaled it."

One reader regards this book as "an extraordinary large-hearted, cheerful book (the first upbeat gay novel for teens) ... It seems to represent a revolution in the publishing of gay-themed books for adolescents".

Another reader says "this is a shinningly affirmative and hopeful book, in a genre filled with darkness, torment, and anxiety".

And School Library Journal reports that "Levithan's prophecy of a hate-free world in which everyone loves without persecution makes this a provocative and important reading for all young adults, gay or straight".

And Publish Weekly says "This book will challenge readers to reconsider storytelling and what it means to know and truly care for someone".

Some readers even believe this book can provide readers with "an immersive emotional experience".

Objectives, Teaching Methods, and Assignments

Suppose I am teaching a tenth Grade class in China. If I were to teach the young adult the literature of *Two Boys Kissing*, I would make the following teaching objectives and activities, as well as essay questions.

Suggested Teaching Objectives

1. Make clear of each of four stories, and make a connection of the four different stories.
2. make clear who is the narrative "I" in the whole novel and what is his or her perspective.
3. What do the four stories want to reveal to readers.
4. Be aware of the public's attitude and comment on gay and lesbian situation.

Suggested Students Activities

1. Carry out a survey about the interviewees' attitude on gay or lesbian. Students should first carefully design the questionnaire and select the subject to be surveyed. After the survey, scientifically analyze the data and draw some powerful conclusion and possible solutions to the existing problems.

2. Suppose you are a gay, write a letter to your parents and friends and teachers to talk about this in a proper manner and tone.
3. If you are a parent or teacher of a gay, learn to deal with this situation in a manner which can reduce the harm to the least.
4. Make a poster on campus-wide to talk about the banned topic of gay and lesbian love.

Possible Essay Questions

1. Why does Cooper do something that let every one online blocks him?
2. How do you know Craig's mother's attitude toward him change through the event? Find the evidence.
3. Why does the author use an imagined "I" as the narrative?
4. How do we know the public's attitude toward gay? How do you tell?
5. Why does Neil beg for his family members to speak out that "Neil is a gay"?
6. How do you understand the quotation from Page 128, "The minute you stop talking about individual and start talking about a group, your judgment has a flaw in it"?

Possible Objections

The first objection might fall on the language use, which is not easy for young adults. And the second might be the confusing "I". And the most important one is the vivid description of sexual behavior, which might be too much for young readers. And some adult might concern that such a book may mislead the students who do not report any potential problem in sexual orientation.

How to Address the Problems

Anyway, this book itself is much like the long kiss described in the story, as both of them are created to encourage the world to treat any sexual orientation objectively, and grant it fair status in public. Such sexual orientation, although off the mainstream, has its right to exist, and should not be stereotyped or biased any more. This kiss is not to show gay love, but to support those who are suffering from gay love. This book is the right one to provide readers correct understanding and great strength to handle gay love as well as world-wide bias.

And in order to address such problems, the teacher, parents and students surrounding the "gays" should hear their voice. By reading their voice and inner feeling from related books, the general public can first get the foundation of understanding and helping them. Discussing the books in school or in class could relieve the embarrassment of talking to the "victims" face to face. And such students could seize the perfect chance to express their inner opinion of the protagonists in the books, in a secured way. Such speaking out and sharing is a kind of healing for them, if they used to feel misunderstood and suppressed. Just like religious belief, we may not totally understand it and make ourselves a faithful believer of it, but at least we should render proper respect to those who have a religious belief. Such understanding and respect is of significance to those who are different from us!

Alternative Works for Students

Two Boys Kissing talks about homosexuality and condones of public display of affection. However, it is narrated in a mild and tender manner, without too much explicit sexual descriptions. And we could provide students with some alternatives as listed below. All these books have received many positive feedbacks by readers and professional authors.

Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings. (2014). *I Am Jazz*. New York: Dial Books.

Susan Kuklin. (2014). *Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out*. Massachusetts: Candlewick.

John Green and David Levithan. (2010). *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*. Boston: Dutton Books for Young Readers.

David Levithan. (2003). *Boy Meets Boy*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Jandy Nelson. (2014). *I'll Give You the Sun*. New York: Dial Books.

I still remember one thing I learned in class that we should provide students with a wide variety of choices, both in quantity and genres, and at the same time be serious readers by ourselves, if we want to motivate kids to read more and deeper.

In a word, *Two Boys Kissing* is definitely a banned book worth reading and teaching in Senior High Literature classes, especially at this particular period when more and more students are suffering from the trouble and confusion of sex orientation. I definitely recommend it in Senior High Literature class!