



# the PROM

TEACHER & FAMILY RESOURCE GUIDE

# ABOUT THE SHOW

Emma, a high school student from Edgewater, Indiana, hopes to take her girlfriend to prom, but when the PTA disapproves, the event is canceled. Meanwhile, a group of Broadway actors struggles with their latest flop and waning relevance. Upon discovering Emma's story online, the former stars see a chance to reclaim their public image and decide to take action.

## CREATORS

Chad Beguelin (Book) is a six-time Tony® nominee known for his work on several hit musicals, including:

- **Disney's Aladdin** (Tony nominations for Best Book and Best Original Score, Drama Desk nominations for Best Book and Outstanding Lyrics)
- **The Prom** (Tony nominations for Best Book and Best Original Score, Drama Desk nominations for Best Book and Outstanding Lyrics)
- **The Wedding Singer** (Tony nominations for Best Book and Best Original Score, Drama Desk nomination for Outstanding Lyrics)
- Writing the lyrics for **Elf the Musical** on Broadway, which set box office records at the Al Hirschfeld Theatre.

Chad's other notable achievements include winning prestigious awards like the Edward Kleban Award for Outstanding Lyric Writing, the Jonathan Larson Performing Arts Foundation Awards, and the ASCAP Foundation Richard Rodgers New Horizons Award.

A graduate of NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, Chad currently lives in Bridgehampton, NY, with his husband Tom and their dog, Tucker.

## WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BOOK & MUSIC IN A MUSICAL?

In a musical, the book is basically the script—it's all the spoken stuff, like the dialogue, the scenes, and the story that connects everything. It's what keeps the plot moving and gives the characters depth. The music is the songs! That includes writing the melodies and lyrics. And then there's orchestration, which is about arranging those songs for the band or orchestra so everything sounds full and polished. So while the book tells the story, the music and orchestration help you feel it.



CHAD BEGUELIN

the  
**PROM**





**BOB MARTIN**

### WHAT IS A TONY AWARD?

Short for the Antoinette Perry Award for Excellence in Broadway Theatre, the Tony Award is one of the highest honors in American theater. It's like the Oscars, but for live stage productions. Each year, the Tonys recognize outstanding performances, direction, design, and overall production of shows on Broadway in New York City. It's a big night that celebrates the best in live theater, with plenty of glitz, talent, and heartfelt moments.

Bob Martin (Book) is an accomplished actor and writer with over three decades of experience. He won a Tony Award for **The Drowsy Chaperone** and has received numerous accolades in both Canada and the U.S.

Recent TV projects:

- **Slings & Arrows** (TMN, Sundance)
- **Michael: Tuesdays and Thursdays** (CBC)
- **Sensitive Skin** (HBO)
- **Elf: Buddy's Musical Christmas** (NBC)

Recent theater projects:

- **Hey, Look Me Over** (Encores!, Off-Broadway)
- **The Sting** (Paper Mill Playhouse, NJ)
- **The Prom** (Alliance Theatre, Atlanta)
- **Elf the Musical** (Broadway, Dublin, London)
- **The Drowsy Chaperone** (Toronto, Broadway, London)
- Second City Toronto (performs, directs, former artistic director)

the  
**PROM**

Matthew Sklar (Score) is a two-time Tony, Emmy, Drama Desk, and Outer Critics Circle Award-nominated composer. His notable works include:

- **The Prom** (Tony nominations for Best Musical and Best Original Score, winner of the 2019 Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Musical)
- **Elf the Musical** (a global favorite)
- **The Wedding Singer** (Tony nominations for Best Musical and Best Original Score)

At 18, Matthew began playing keyboards for **Les Misérables** on Broadway, and by 21, he was conducting the show. He has also worked as a keyboardist, conductor, and/or arranger for Broadway productions like **Shrek, Caroline, or Change, Nine, Oklahoma, 42nd Street**, and **Miss Saigon**. He also appeared onstage as "Oscar" in the Broadway revival of **42<sup>nd</sup> Street**.



MATTHEW SKLAR

Matthew is the recipient of several prestigious honors, including the Dramatists Guild Frederick Loewe Award, the ASCAP Richard Rodgers New Horizons Award, the Jonathan Larson Performing Arts Foundation Award, and the Gilman/Gonzalez-Falla Theatre Award.

Matthew is a proud member of the Dramatists Guild and ASCAP. His music is published by Warner/Chappell Music. He was educated at The Juilliard School of Music (Pre-College Division), the Boston University Tanglewood Institute, and New York University.

#### WHAT IS THE DRAMATISTS GUILD?

The Dramatists Guild is a professional organization that supports playwrights, composers, lyricists, and librettists. Its mission is to advocate for the rights and interests of theater creators, offering resources like legal assistance, contracts, and networking opportunities. It also helps ensure fair treatment in the industry, fighting for things like better pay, royalties, and copyright protections.



Jack Viertel (Concept) is an American theatrical producer and writer born in Stamford, Connecticut. He spent 34 years at Jujamcyn Theaters (1987-2021), holding roles such as Creative Director and Senior Vice President. His notable contributions include:

- Conceiving **Smokey Joe's Cafe**, the longest-running musical revue in Broadway history
- Conceiving **After Midnight**, which earned critical acclaim.
- Serving as dramaturg for **Hairspray**.
- Developing the musical and movie **The Prom** from his original concept.



JACK VIERTEL

From 2000 to 2020, Jack was a producer for the Encores! series, where several productions transferred to Broadway, including **After Midnight**, **The Apple Tree**, **Finian's Rainbow**, and **Gypsy**.

In 2003, he began lecturing at NYU Tisch School of the Arts. He later turned his music theatre studies course into a book, **The Secret Life of the American Musical**, published in 2016. The book received positive reviews, with The New York Times calling it "revelatory and entertaining."

### WHAT IS CONCEIVING?

In theater, conceiving can refer to the process of forming an idea or plan for a production. It can also refer to the idea itself.

the  
**PROM**

## BIG IDEAS

Discrimination against queer youth.

Performative activism.

Community support and efforts.

Power dynamics and their positive or negative effects.

## DISCUSSION BEFORE THE SHOW

- Who in your life do you look up to as a mentor? Why? How have they been a support to you?
- How can high school students oppose injustice? Where do you hold power and sway?
- What do you think of when you hear the word “performative”? How can performative activism harm a cause?
- Why do you think prom is such a significant event in the lives of high school students? How does it symbolize tradition, popularity, and acceptance?

## DISCUSSION AFTER THE SHOW

- The group of actors goes to Edgewater, Indiana, to try to “save” Emma, but it takes a couple of different tactics before they accomplish their goal. Why did their initial attempts fail? What changed that allowed them to succeed by the end of the show?
- In the show, there are different views on what “acceptance” really means. How do characters, like the Broadway stars and the townspeople, have contrasting definitions of acceptance?
- While **The Prom** is a comedy, it tackles serious issues like homophobia, exclusion, and identity. How does the use of humor affect the way we engage with these issues?
- Do you think the musical’s portrayal of LGBTQ+ characters is a positive or limited representation? Why or why not? In what ways could the show have expanded its representation of the LGBTQ+ community?



## ACTIVITY PROMPTS

- Design your ideal prom outfit. How does it reflect your identity?
  - Allow the media used to create the outfit to become a part of how this may reflect your identity! Are you using all online or digital elements? Drawing by hand? Cutting out pieces of paper? Magazine collages? The world is your oyster!
- Research LGBTQ+ discrimination in schools in 2025 and send letters to administrators. Make sure you do plenty of research and that you have a full idea of how the administration has been handling these stories.
- After prom, Emma and Alyssa both go home and text one of their longtime friends about the whole experience.
  - Use a text creation site such as [Fake Texts](#).
- Choose a character from **The Prom** and mock up what their social media accounts may look like. Consider how they want to present themselves to the world and how visible they want to be. What might their profile picture be? What might they put in their bio? What might they post?
  - Use a site such as [Social Media Generator](#).
- Design your own dream prom! Pick a theme, a decade, etc.
  - Students could include things like theme/aesthetic, inclusivity features (how will it be welcoming to LGBTQ+ students, dress code policies, language on invites, chaperone training, etc.), venue, atmosphere, and make an invitation design!
- Watch the 2020 Netflix adaptation of **The Prom** after attending Wheelock's production. In writing or discussion, compare and contrast how the productions grappled with issues of community and discrimination.



# THE LEGACY CONSTANCE MCMILLEN

When Constance McMillen was prevented from attending prom with her girlfriend in 2010, she fought back. Her story later became the inspiration for **The Prom**.

## WHO IS CONSTANCE?

**The Prom** is inspired by the true story of Constance McMillen and her fight to attend her own senior prom. In 2010, Itawamba Agricultural High School in Fulton, Mississippi, forbade 18-year-old Constance from attending the prom with her girlfriend and from wearing a tuxedo. Constance reached out to the American Civil Liberties Union, or ACLU, who filed a lawsuit. In response, the school canceled the prom, and Constance was subjected to bullying from her classmates. While a private prom was organized for everyone, upset parents hosted a separate prom, excluding Constance and her girlfriend once again. After her story gained national attention, the high school agreed to enforce a nondiscrimination policy and settled with her for \$35,000.



## CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

### What If?

Students can work in small groups to create a “what if” scenario in which the events surrounding Constance’s prom differed.

- What would have happened if the school had been more supportive or had her classmates stood by her? How would the outcome have changed if the community had been more accepting, or the lawsuit had never happened? Students can then act out this scenario, offering alternate endings and exploring how different choices affect the narrative.
- Some questions could be: What if the principal had organized an inclusive prom from the start? What if student leaders stood up for Constance publicly? What if the PTA president had a change of heart earlier? What if the media never got involved—how would things have played out? What if the school were in a different state or decade?

### Reflective Journaling

Ask students to write journal entries reflecting on their own experiences with social expectations, identity, and belonging.

- How do they relate to Constance’s story? Have they ever felt pressured to conform to a certain role or expectation?



# A SEAT AT THE TABLE: THE PROM EVOLUTION

**The Prom** centers on a queer teenager who wants to bring her girlfriend to prom—a desire that sparks backlash in a conservative town. This reflects real struggles faced by LGBTQ+ youth across the U.S. for decades.

## ALTERNATIVE PROMS

Proms began in the early 20th century as a way to teach students social etiquette before adulthood. These events were deeply gendered and heteronormative, with strict dress codes and expectations of boy-girl pairings. For decades, LGBTQ+ teens were either discouraged or explicitly banned from attending prom with same-sex dates. In many cases, this wasn't just social pressure, it was enforced by school policy. As traditional proms remained unwelcoming, queer communities created alternatives:

- **Queer Prom (San Francisco, since the 1990s):** Hosted by community centers, this inclusive dance welcomes all identities and expressions.
- **Youth Pride Prom (NYC):** Hosted by the NYC LGBT Center, this prom centers queer youth and provides a safer space for celebration.
- **Rainbow Prom (Seattle):** A drug-free, inclusive prom for LGBTQ+ youth and allies ages 13–22.
- **Queer Prom Chicago:** Hosted by the Center on Halsted, offering a glamorous, affirming night for LGBTQ+ teens.

While many schools have become more inclusive, there's still work to be done. **The Prom** reminds us that visibility, acceptance, and the right to celebrate love shouldn't have to be revolutionary.

### FUN FACTS

In 2002, a Massachusetts high school crowned a gay couple as prom kings—a first in U.S. history.

In 2022, a Tennessee student wore a dress to prom and received national support despite pushback from his school community.

"Queer Prom" events are now held in nearly every U.S. state.



## CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

### STEP ONE: Prom Research Project

- Students research the history of the prom. There are several articles on [History.com](https://www.history.com) to begin.
- Have students share their findings with the whole class via a slide presentation.

### STEP TWO: "Voices of Prom" Oral History Project

- Students interview older family members, teachers, or community members about their prom experiences and compare them with stories from LGBTQ+ individuals (via online archives or articles).
- Have students share their findings in small groups or with the whole class!

### STEP THREE: Reimagine the Prom

- In small groups, students redesign a school's prom to make it more inclusive (themes, language on invites, dress code, chaperone policies, etc.).
- Have students present their plan to the class or in a mock school board pitch.



the  
**PROM**



# POWER AND IMPACT

## STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

**Grade Level:** High School

**Length:** 60 mins

### National Theatre Standards:

- TH:Re8.1.1.c. Justify personal aesthetics, preferences, and beliefs through participation in and observation of a drama/theatre work.
- TH:Re9.1.1.c. Formulate a deeper understanding and appreciation of a drama/ theatre work by considering its specific purpose or intended audience
- TH:Cn10.1.1.a. Investigate how cultural perspectives, community ideas and personal beliefs impact a drama/theatre work.

## MATERIALS

- Three chairs
- Water bottle
- Kickball/gator ball
- 3-4 other noisemakers and/or props
- Paper and writing materials for each student

## SPACE NEEDS

- Open Space to Move Around

## STEP 1: INTRODUCTION

Start by asking students who comes to mind when they think of someone powerful. Where do these people get their power? What different types of power are there? What gives someone power? Explain that you will be using the next few activities to dig deeper into their ideas about power and influence, and look at how they come into play in **The Prom**.

## STEP 2: GREAT GAME OF POWER

- Invite students to gather in an open area around four chairs in a row and a water bottle.
- Ask a student volunteer to silently arrange the chairs and a water bottle into a formation in which one chair has more power than all the other objects. They can move any object in any direction and stack them, but all five objects will remain in the playing space. Ask the student to return to the group once they are satisfied with the image, and to not reveal their thinking to their classmates.

### SIDE COACHING

- Make sure you are moving the chairs safely. Be aware of the people in your surroundings.
- Remember that this is a silent activity.
- How can you experiment with levels with the chairs and the water bottle?
- For the people watching the volunteer, you can move around the space to view how the chairs and water bottles are being moved.



## Reflect

- After the students have had the opportunity to silently observe the image from different perspectives, discuss the class's interpretations of the image:
  - What do you see? Describe the way the chairs are positioned.
  - What does that position represent or make you think of? Why do you say that? What is another interpretation of this position? Which chair has the most power? Why?
  - If completing this activity before the show: In a school system, what dynamics might these objects represent? Who holds the power?
  - If completing this activity after the show: In the context of **The Prom**, which characters or dynamics might these objects represent?

## Transition

The Great Game of Power introduces power dynamics. The next activity, Heartbeat Ball, will explore how individuals with power can use that power to impact others.

- (If before the show) Explain that when they go to see **The Prom**, students will notice characters using their power for different reasons. Some characters use their power to set others against Emma, and a variety of characters use their power to support Emma along her journey.
- (If after the show) Remind students that in **The Prom**, different characters use their power for different goals. The PTA uses its power to cancel the prom, setting Emma's peers against her, while by the end of the show, the Broadway actors and Principal Hawkins use their connections and positions to organize a new prom.

Encourage students to keep an eye out for when they do and do not have power in the following activity.

### TEACHER TIP

- Great Game of Power can also be used to teach and analyze stage pictures when learning how to block or direct a show.
- Great Game of Power is a strategy borrowed from Augusto Boal, who developed Theatre of the Oppressed. Ask students to research Boal and Theatre of the Oppressed.

the  
**PROM**

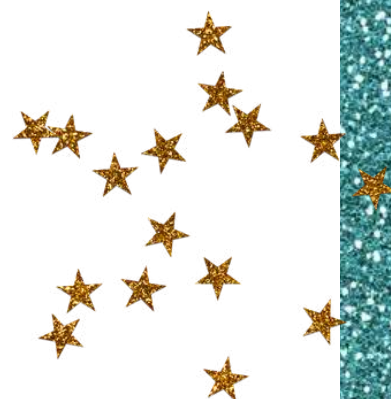


### STEP 3: HEARTBEAT BALL

- Ask students to form a standing circle
- Introduce the class to the “heartbeat ball,” a kickball or gator ball that is easy to catch. The goal for the class is to keep throwing and catching the ball at a consistent rhythm as it passes around the circle.
- Set a pace by throwing the ball to yourself a few times, and then start passing it around the circle until the group has reached a steady pace. There should be no talking.
- Pause the ball as you introduce another object moving in the opposite direction. This could be a stick to bang on the ground, a scarf to put on and take off, or another simple task. Pass this around the circle without the ball once or twice, and then explain that, although this new object is important, the most important thing is keeping the heartbeat ball consistent.
- Start both the ball and the other object together, going in opposite directions around the circle.
- Add more objects as the game progresses. After a couple of minutes, start to collect the items as they reach you, until only the heartbeat ball remains. Then, collect the heartbeat ball and discuss the class’s experience.

#### SIDE COACHING

- Remember that maintaining the heartbeat is the most important thing.
- Consider how you might support your peers when they are overwhelmed with items.



#### Reflect

- What strategies did you use or notice others using to keep the heartbeat ball going?
- How did your strategy change when you had many objects coming at you versus when you had fewer? How did you use your situation to benefit the group?
- (If after the show) In **The Prom**, which characters did you see using their powerful situations to help others?
- In the real world, how can you use the times in your life when you have the power to support those who have less power, like how those who were less overwhelmed with tasks supported those who had more items coming at them during the activity?

#### Transition

Explain that now that you have discussed power and how it can be used to help or harm others, students will be connecting these ideas to their own lives.



## STEP 4: FREE WRITE

- Write the following prompt where students can see it:
- "Where do I hold power? Think about places in which you have a leadership position, communities in which you have sway, or identities you hold that give you privilege."
- Ask students to take ten minutes to write stream-of-consciousness about this prompt without stopping. Let them know before they start that they can share a snippet after if they would like to, but they will not be required to share any of their writing.
- After ten minutes have elapsed, ask students to underline or highlight parts of their writing that they find especially interesting or insightful.
- Invite any students who would like to share the highlighted parts of their writing to do so. Or, ask students to pair up and share their writing.

### SIDE COACHING

- Think about times in your past or present, or even your future.
- Who do you know who holds power or influence? How does knowing them give you power?

### Reflect

- What did you discover during this activity?
- Why might it be important to understand the power you and others hold?
- Who in the real world holds power? How do they/do they not use that power to support others?

### TEACHER TIP

- To prompt dialogue and support a deeper reflection, it is important for students to hear each other's responses before moving on to the reflection questions.
- Discuss the role of positional power – the power that an individual holds based on their context and identity markers. Ask students to name their positionality.



the  
**PROM**

# IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY

## STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

**Grade Level:** High School

**Length:** 50 mins

### National Theatre Standards:

- TH:Re8.1.1.b. Identify and compare cultural perspectives and contexts that may influence the evaluation of a drama/theatre work.
- TH:Re8.1.1.c. Justify personal aesthetics, preferences, and beliefs through participation in and observation of a drama/theatre work.
- TH:Re9.1.1.c. Formulate a deeper understanding and appreciation of a drama/ theatre work by considering its specific purpose or intended audience

## MATERIALS

- Pens (all the same color) and paper
- Post-it notes (all the same color)
- Name tags with numbers on them

## SPACE NEEDS

- Open Space to Move Around

## STEP 1: INTRODUCTION

Start by asking students what they think of when they hear the word “identity.” What does “identity” mean? Why is identity important?

(If after the show) Remind students of how, in **The Prom**, Emma remains determined not to hide her identity as a lesbian, even when she faces challenges and discrimination.

(If before the show) Tell students that **The Prom** centers a character named Emma who is discriminated against for her identity as a lesbian. Explain that Emma is determined not to hide this identity, which leads to much of the conflict of the show as she faces discrimination.

Discuss that you will be using the next few activities to talk about our own identities. Create community norms if needed or reference agreed-upon norms for respectful discourse.

## TEACHER TIP

- In discussion with students, work to name personal and social identity markers.
- Discuss the role of intersectionality – the interconnected nature of identity markers that together provide advantages or disadvantages in society.



## STEP 2: IDENTITY ICEBURG

- Invite students to take a minute to write out a list of identity markers they hold. You may decide to prompt them by listing out a range of identity types, such as religious communities, race/ethnicity groups, socioeconomic status, familial relationships, and/or hobbies/vocations.
- Ask each student to choose ten identity markers from their list and to write them on post-it notes. Each marker is on a new post-it note.
- Draw or reveal the outline of an iceberg on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper. Make sure to include the iceberg both above and below the water line.
- Invite students to place their sticky notes on the iceberg either above or below the water line– above if they feel that identity is seen by others, and below if they feel that identity is hidden from others. This is an individual choice for the person placing the Post-it note.

### SIDE COACHING

- List identity markers that are true for you.
- You get to decide if the identity marker is visible or invisible.

### Reflect

- How did it feel to write down ideas about your identity?
- What categories of identity markers did we choose to include/exclude?
- What identity markers are similarly/differently placed?
- Why do you think that happened?
- How might identity inform our interactions with others in our community?
- (If after the show) How did we see identity informing Emma's interactions with her community in **The Prom**?

### Transition

Discuss how, like Emma's experience in **The Prom**, people sometimes intentionally cause harm to people whose identities they don't understand. The next activity will look at how a community can support people whose identities are targeted.

### TEACHER TIP

- Ask students to focus on personal and social identity markers on their post-it notes. This will provide enough information to compare and contrast.
- Ensure you use the same color post-its and pens for all students so that markers can not be associated to a single person.

the  
**PROM**

### STEP 3: CRUMBLING

- Explain that students will each receive a nametag with a number on it and that they should remember their number through the strategy
- The goal of this activity is for students to help each other avoid “crumbling.”
- Explain that the students will move around the space and that you will call out a number. The person with that number will say “crumbling,” as the rest of the participants move to catch or assist that person back to a standing position. When the person crumbling is back in a standing position, students may continue to move around the space until another number is called.
- Call numbers one at a time, and, if students seem comfortable supporting one person crumbling, start calling a new number before the first person is standing again.
- Continue the activity for a few minutes, and then call the group together to reflect.

#### SIDE COACHING

- How can you communicate nonverbally with your peers?
- How can you work together with the other people supporting the person crumbling?

#### Reflect

- What strategies did the group use to support those who were crumbling?
- How did you adapt to support multiple people crumbling at the same time?
- How did the group keep everyone safe during this activity?
- How might this activity serve as a metaphor for community?

#### Transition

If it feels appropriate, thank students for their participation and vulnerability. Explain that now that you have been discussing our identities, you are going to finish up your lesson with a game that invites you to share things about your identity you are proud of or find important.

#### TEACHER TIP

- As you play Crumbling, ensure that students are spreading out as they move – mill and seethe/cover the space. Students “crumbling” should do so slowly so that participants can save/support.
- Crumbling is a silent activity, except for the calling of numbers and the word “crumbling.”



## STEP 4: REAL & IDEAL IMAGES

- Split the class into groups of three or four
- Ask the class to consider the reality of how people with diverse identities are treated. Brainstorm both positive and negative aspects of this theme.
- Once that class has collectively generated some ideas, ask each group to create a frozen image with their bodies that represents this reality.
- After each group has created a "real" image, ask them to create an "ideal" image, one that represents the ideal way people would treat one another.
- Once all groups have two images, ask them to create a third image that bridges the "real" and "ideal" images.
- Ask each group to present their three images (in the order "real," bridge, "ideal") and then gather to reflect.

### SIDE COACHING

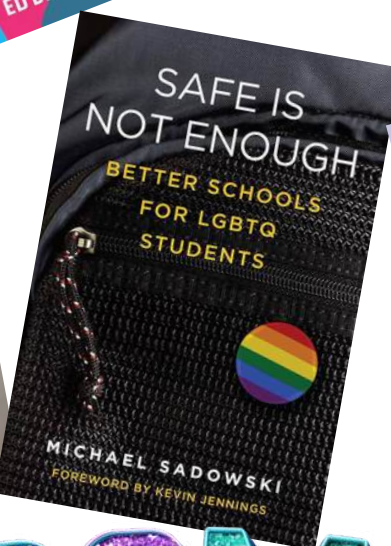
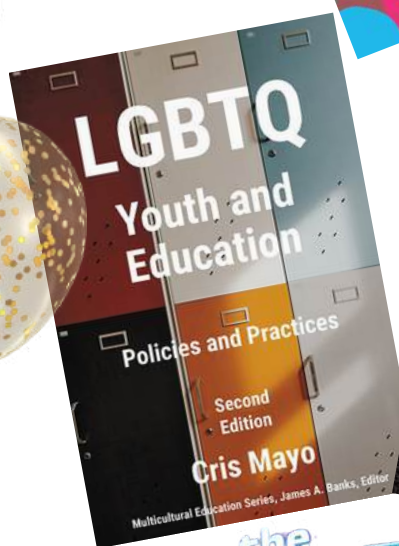
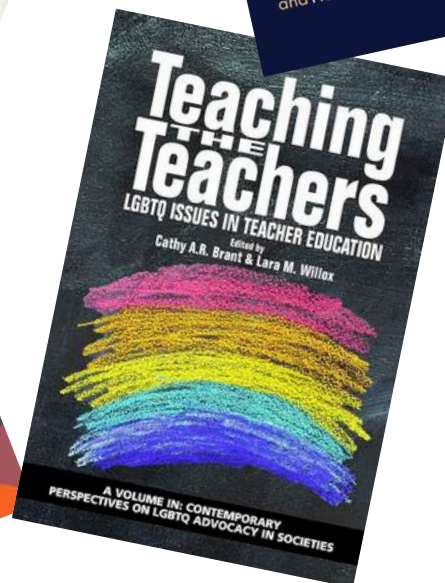
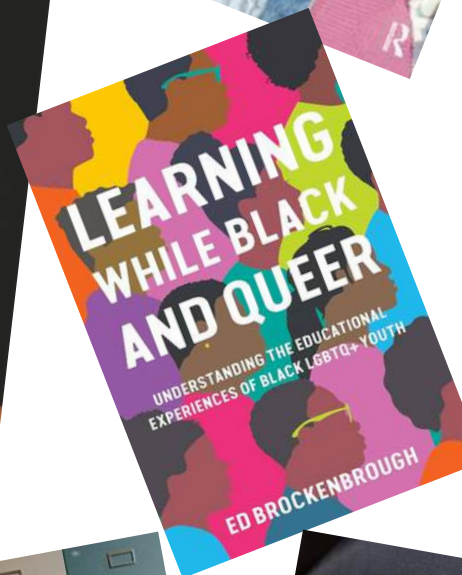
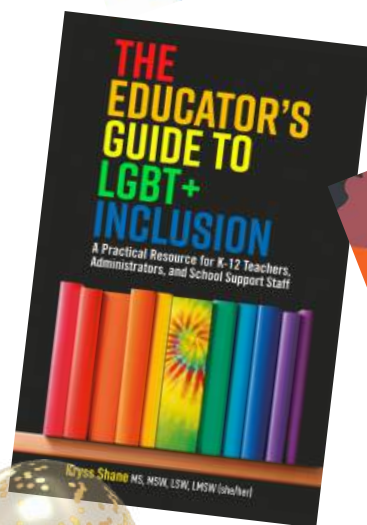
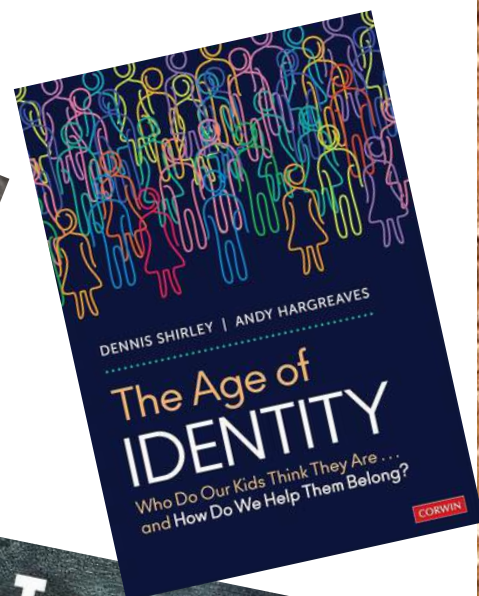
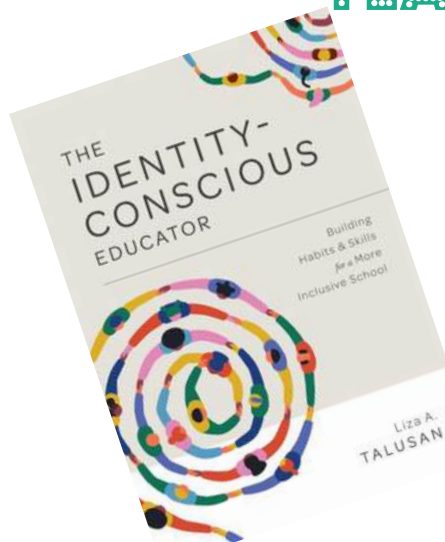
- The images you create can represent real items or people, or can be more abstract.
- How might you use levels, space, and gesture to communicate?

### Reflect

- What did you notice in these images?
- Did any groups choose to incorporate similar images?
- What might these images have represented?
- How might these ideas come into play in your own life?
- (If after the show) How did Emma move her situation from real to ideal in **The Prom**?



# TEACHER'S BOOKSHELF



the **PROM**

# RESOURCES

## Trevor Project

The leading suicide prevention and crisis intervention nonprofit organization for LGBTQ+ young people.

## BAGLY

Queer teen organization in Boston that support queer and trans youth to become happy and healthy adults.

## GLAD

A non-profit legal organization focused on advancing LGBTQ+ rights and justice.

## Mass Equality

A statewide grassroots advocacy organization working to ensure that everyone across Massachusetts can thrive from cradle to grave without discrimination and oppression based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression

## Bay Windows

New England's Largest Gay and Lesbian Newspaper.

## SpeakOUTBoston

A GLBT Speakers Bureau, SpeakOut works to create a world free of homo-bi-trans-phobia and other forms of prejudice by telling the truths of people's lives.

## GLESEN

A resource for teachers and students to ensure that LGBTQ students are able to learn and grow in a school environment free from bullying and harassment.

## True Colors: Out Youth Theatre

A Boston-based theater program that trains and activates lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) and allied youth leaders ages 13-25.



RESOURCE GUIDE CREATED BY

Emma Ahlin and Maggie Elsen