



Annotated Bibliography of Children's Books With Gay and Lesbian Characters

Resources for Early Childhood Educators and Parents

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Teachers and parents now have available to them a number of books written for children which include lesbian or gay parents either as their major plot or as a side plot. Reviews of 26 of these books, published in the early 1980s and through the present, plus others reviewed earlier¹ and reviews of two books, *MARTIN'S FATHER* published in 1977 and *LOTS OF MOMMIES*, published in 1983 -- which are not explicitly about gay or lesbian characters but which contain material that can be related to these themes -- will be included here as well. It should be noted that the 26 books to be reviewed were chosen for their emphasis on gay- and lesbian-headed families, their explicit or implicit depiction of gay or lesbian parents not gay or lesbian youth, and their appropriateness for children between the ages of two and 10. Many of the books have been published by Alyson Publications, a company which has been publishing and distributing literature for children, youths, and adults such as fiction, poetry, picture books and other genres.

Of the 26 books, one story can be used to imply a single gay father, one family book to imply a lesbian-headed family and another book to imply both a single gay- and a single lesbian-headed household. Eleven stories explicitly depict lesbian-headed families, five explicitly include gay male-headed households and four books show

both lesbian- and gay-headed families. The collection of fairy tales includes, as background information to the various central themes, gay- and lesbian-headed families. One book (*LOTS OF MOMMIES*) includes a commune of women with no indication of the relationship among them.

There is at present, more literature on lesbian-headed families where no father figure is mentioned (ten). Four of the books on gay male-headed households mention a mother while four do not. Six of the stories (a few from the fairy tales and one from a family book) specifically feature families of color and eight books (through color illustrations or physical features on black and white illustrations) included, as non-central characters, other children and adults of color. Most of the books seem to depict middle-class families who live in houses and engage in activities that may not be the experiences of children from lower/middle class families.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF BOOKS WITH GAY AND LESBIAN CHARACTERS

The books are organized alphabetically by the author's last name. For full citations, see the Children's Bibliography attached.

A BOY'S BEST FRIEND

takes place in Montreal. Will is turning seven years old and has asked his mother and her friend, Jeanne, for a dog for the past four years. Unfortunately, he has asthma. To his surprise he is given a stuffed dog which he cherishes because he is able to sleep with it, take it to the park to meet other dogs, take it on the school bus, and hide it in his school locker. While at school he is teased by some "bullies" and his dog is thrown up a tree. Miraculously, the dog falls in his arms after he has called to it. His mom and Jeanne are surprised to hear what happens and repeat what Will has heard many times before, "Everyone is different. When you don't mind your difference it stops being a problem and becomes your distinction."

The story has a lot of text and is most appropriate for children ages five and older. The illustrations, hand colored black and white photographs, depict wonderful scenes of home life, i.e. eating dinner, trips to the park and bedtime rituals. His family structure is explained and visually depicted, but not a negative aspect of the story. We get a glimpse of what school life is like for Will as he encounters the school bullies, an experience many children perhaps can relate to. Also familiar to many children is the frustration of living with asthma. Will is unable to join in a school ritual of running around the room while the others sing happy birthday to him, he is teased because he cannot play ball and towards the end is coughing and running out of breath after his interactions with the bullies. Unfortunately, asthma is not explained or discussed in a way that will help others understand what it is or why he has it and Will is depicted as a sad and lonely child because of asthma.

JENNY LIVES WITH ERIC AND MARTIN

by Bosche, is one of the first children's picture books to be published which include gay characters. It is the story of a weekend spent by Jenny, her father and her father's partner, Eric. On Friday Jenny and her dad throw a surprise birthday party for Eric. They invite Jenny's mum, who often comes

over to visit her and her two fathers. On Saturday morning Jenny looks through a book and has breakfast in bed with her fathers and then they go out into the garden. On Sunday they all clean the house and do the laundry. While both men are pulling Jenny back home in a cart, they run into a woman who wishes that gays would "...stay at home so the rest of us don't have to see you. Ugh!"

Jenny is bothered and confused by the woman's comments. Eric explains that being gay is when two men love and live with each other. He goes on to explain the woman's behavior by saying that when people don't understand something or are told it is wrong, they get scared and angry. Using chalk to illustrate, he tells Jenny a story about a woman who disapproves of homosexual love until it is explained to her by her husband, who once loved another man. As Jenny is getting ready for bed she asks if her fathers can have babies. Eric explains that only men and women can have babies.

The portrayal of Jenny's family will be familiar to children who live in a gay-headed household. Jenny's mother seems to have a role in the family that is unlike any of the other books. There is a relationship between Jenny and her mother and between the mother and Eric and Martin. "Living nearby is Jenny's mum, Karen. She often comes to visit them." The original relationship between Martin and Karen is not made clear in the text.

The black and white photos illustrate how the two men care for Jenny, each other, and their home in a variety of circumstances. The events that occur in the story (for example, holding the birthday party, doing the laundry, cleaning the house together, solving conflicts between parents) are familiar to all children and their families. Jenny's father's attempt to explain homophobia to her was simple, to the point, and successful.

There are several issues about this book which must be addressed. One issue which can provoke powerful, almost visceral reactions from many adults is the photo of Jenny in bed with her two fathers, one of whom, though under blanket or pillow, appears to be in the nude. *JENNY LIVES WITH ERIC AND MARTIN* was authored in Sweden, translated in England and distributed in this country by Alyson Press. The difference in cultural practices and values may attribute to the seeming nonchalance in displaying such a photo in a children's book. The inclusion of this scene may make some adults uncomfortable, or for those individuals in families or cultures which are more open about their bodies, this book may be a nice addition to other story books about families. This frequently intense reaction is unfortunate because the book itself is one of the best in terms of the naturalness of being gay, being a parent and being a child who has gay parents.

The book's long length and detailed text make it more appropriate for children ages six and older.

GENEROUS JEFFERSON BARTLEBY JONES

by Brown, is a story told in rhyming verses about young Jeff and his two fathers. Jeff has a lot to feel good about because of the four days out of the week he spends with his dads, they always find exciting things to do like hiking, farming, horseback riding, or taking trips to the zoo. Jeff's best friends, Chad and Kim, don't feel as lucky as Jeff because they have only one dad each. Jeff generously loans out his dads, sometimes to Kim and other times to Chad. One day he loans both other dads out on the same day and is left alone.

In the space of only four lines, we are told that Jeff lives with his mother on unspecified number of days out of the week, and with his two fathers the remaining time. The accompanying illustration gives a profile of the mother. Each page is filled

with illustrations and verses which add more detail to the characters. Kim, who is Asian, loves baseball and is a Little League catcher. Chad, portrayed as a Black or Latino child, enjoys trips to the zoo and playing checkers. The author has nicely displayed children engaging in cross-gender play.

Kim and Chad's fathers are too busy to play with them, but one of Jeff's dads are always around. As the story continues, we get a glimpse of some of the activities Jeff and his fathers engage in: farming, because one of his dads knows a farmer; the zoo; swimming; horseback riding; camping and carnivals. These are all activities which may not be in the experiences of children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, particularly those who live in urban areas.

Although a bulk of the story focuses on Jeff and his fathers, some further explanation would help the reader better understand this situation than the lines which read, "He moves in with Joe and with Pete, and his friends think his system's a hard one to beat." For children living everyday with their gay parents the experience of "moving in" with their father(s) on weekends would not directly speak to them. For others, who are the subjects of joint custody arrangements, the book may offer an important legitimization of their lives. The black and white illustrations depict great details in the characters and glimpses of their elaborate homes. The verses are fun to read and the message is quite clear about having two dads is something to feel good about. The book is most suitable for children ages four and older.

YOUR FAMILY, MY FAMILY

by Drescher, is out of print, but may be obtained directly through the publisher or from certain libraries. This book is described by Jenkins and Morris² in their annotated bibliography. They report that the book describes many different types of families. There are various racial groups, adopted

families, foster families, extended families, and one lesbian-headed family. This entry reads, "Margo and Rita are Peggy's family. Although Margo is her real mother, Peggy feels as if she has two mothers."

YOUR FAMILY, MY FAMILY is one of the first picture books to depict gay characters, published in 1980, which may account for the language used in making the distinction between the "real parent" and the biological parent. Jenkins and Morris believe the book displays minimum sex-role stereotypes, some ageist assumptions and no differently abled adults or children, with the exception of an older man with a cane. They conclude, the "merits of the book outweigh the flaws."

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MARTIN'S FATHER

by Eichler, is a story of the special things that Martin and his father do together. They play hide and seek, have breakfast and lunch, do the laundry, go for walks, splash under the hose on a hot day, play special games during bath time and sing songs during bedtime. For Martin, these things make his father the best father in the world, an opinion one would have a hard time refuting!

There is no direct implication in the story that Martin's father is gay. However, in depicting these father and son experiences, children from single father and including single gay father households will see aspects of their own lives in this book. Some young children confuse the illustrations of adult women in the book with Martin's mother, even though the book is very careful not to make any connections to a "mother" figure. The beautiful black and white illustrations of Martin's father holding a frying pan and making eggs, doing the laundry, pushing Martin on the swing, helping him make his lunch for a picnic, kneeling beside the tub as Martin bathes and reading to him, bring the experiences of a child in a single or coupled, gay- or straight-headed household to life. It beautifully

illustrates the deeply nurturing role that a father can take with his child. This book can be appreciated by children as young as two years old. It provides an interesting and needed alternative to the prevalence of the depiction of children always being cared for by mothers.

ASHA'S MUMS

by Elwin and Paulse is the story of a girl, approximately eight or nine years old, who is told by her teacher to have her trip permission slip done which was signed by her two mums and re-done "correctly." While there is a bit of a mystery about what "correct" exactly means, the teacher blatantly tells Asha she can't have two mums, and if the form is not filled out correctly, she cannot go on the trip. Clearly Asha is devastated because she believes her brother, two mums and her are a family, and she wants to go on the trip.

The next day, Asha tries to explain her family. This provokes discussion among the children about whether or not a child can have two mums. One child says her parents told her that having two mothers living together is bad. While the class is in gym, Asha's mums have a talk with the teacher to clarify their family structure. Asha is able to go on the trip and the other children are informed that both of her mums are important to her. This book makes an important statement: children from gay- and lesbian-headed households do not always make distinctions between their parents such as the "real" mother or father. Parents are frequently distinguished most commonly by names, such as "mama" and "Mom" or "papi" and "daddy."

ASHA'S MUMS is one of a few books which raises the issue of children's families not being accepted or represented in the classroom. It also highlights the difficulties children of gay and lesbian families encounter when their parents have not disclosed their family structure to the school or teacher. Some readers may feel a little

uneasy that it was initially left up to Asha and some of her friends to defend and explain her family structure. Still, this may very well be the reality for some children from gay- and lesbian-headed families, especially as parents are not yet aware of the need to explain their family until a "crisis" occurs.

The wonderful illustrations add to the beauty of the story. They portray Black, Asian, Latino/a and European-American children. This story can be used with older fours and would probably work well with a discussion on exclusion, acceptance and diverse family structures.

HOW WOULD YOU FEEL IF YOUR DAD WAS GAY?

by Heron and Maran tells the story of Jasmine and Michael, who's parents are gay, and Noah, who lives with his lesbian mother. While the third grade class is making Father's Day cards, Jasmine reveals that her fathers are gay. This seems to be the first time the class is made aware of this information. Word of Jasmine's family gets to Michael's fifth grade class where he hears about the incident. Michael, who wants this information kept secret, is taunted by his fifth grade classmates about his fathers until Noah announces that if his dads are gay that's "his private business." The two boys are teased about possibly being gay themselves and they walk away from the situation, clearly upset and embarrassed.

Over dinner the children talk to their fathers about the incident in school. Jasmine feels that she should be able to tell people if she wants, but Michael feels very strongly that his family structure should be kept secret. The fathers speak to the children about respecting each others' decisions and decide to speak to the principal of the school. (It is interesting that this story highlights the way in which peoples lives are so intertwined that an individual acting on her behalf can affect the lives other others in intense ways.)

Also during dinner, Noah describes the situation to his mother. While Noah had come to Michael's defense in the school yard, he tells his mother that he felt he had to "since we're gay too." His mother explains that, just because she is gay, Noah may or may not be gay himself. Noah's mother also decides to speak to the principal. As a result, a school assembly is planned to talk about family diversity where gay and lesbian families are included.

This book addresses various issues which are prevalent in all families, including individual versus family privacy, teasing, sticking up for someone, feeling alone, and school/family support. It is important to note that there is little mention of the children's mother. Instead the focus on the two children living with their fathers, helps to validate the experiences of many children in gay-headed households who have no or little contact with their biological mother. Also, for older children, the difficulty and pain of being teased because of their parents' sexual orientation is an important contribution is addressed head-on by this book. It should be noted that the focus of this particular book is on the difficulties and problems of being in gay families and how these problems get solved.

Both of the families discussed in the story are people of color. The families live in average homes and the story takes place in home and school settings. There is no added detail which can take away from the experiences of an "average family." This story is most appropriate for children age nine and older. Some of the issues addressed are of little concern to young children.

FAMILIES: A CELEBRATION OF DIVERSITY, COMMITMENT, AND LOVE

by Jenness, is a collection of the stories of 17 young people from around the country, their families and the problems and joys they experience from their families. The

material in this book was originally assembled as a traveling exhibition and came out of the Boston Children's Museum.

Each story is no more than two pages long with a picture of the child and the text on one page and a picture of the family on the facing page. The book depicts families with step relations, divorced parents, gay and lesbian parents, foster siblings and religious communes. The message common to all stories is that every family is precious, is made up of the people who love each other, and can have one or 100 other people in it. In their own words, the youngsters describe some of their experiences. Jody, a young adult, for example, was "hysterical" when her mom decided to be a lesbian and "hated" her mother's partner Carol, when she first met her.

This book is not a storybook and quite lengthy. It cannot be read entirely in one sitting with young children, but can be used as part of an ongoing curriculum on family with children as young as four. It is a valuable resource when telling stories of real people's lives. Many children will be able to relate to some of the youngsters, their families and/or their experiences. The Boston Children's Museum exhibit was incorporated into the curriculum of the Runkle Elementary School in Brookline, Massachusetts.

Diversity exists from cover to cover, involving white parents adopting children of color, interracial relationships, and children and families from Alaska, Thailand, Mexico, the Philippines, Cuba and the mainland U.S. There is something heartwarming about each story as children talk about what makes up their family.

A BEACH PARTY WITH ALEXIS

is yet another wonderful addition to children's coloring books. In the story, school has ended and Alexis' mom wants to have a beach party. The reader is taken through the familiar events of planning and

waiting for any festive event, who to invite, mailing out invitations, buying food and party favors, and enjoying the blessed event.

From cover to cover, one is immersed in a world which many wish existed more often. There is a lesbian headed household, single mother, nuclear family, different cultures/races, hair styles, facial features, and even people getting on a bus with a sign which reads "Fight Aids Not People With Aids." Personally, I would have loved to have had this book with colored illustrations so that children and adults are able to pay more particular attention to the text.

BELINDA'S BOUQUET

by Newman is a story of how young Belinda is teased for having gained weight. She and Daniel, both about ten years old, discover with the help of one of Daniel's mothers and a garden cared for by his other mother that people, like flowers, are different. All people have special needs which make each one quite beautiful and unique. Belinda comes to realize that her body belongs to her and that it is okay to look and be different from others.

Although the focus of this story is Belinda's growing understanding of the beauty of differences (some people are short, some of us are tall, some are dark, some are light, some are fat and some are thin), other messages are communicated as well. The author has addressed sex-role stereotypes when Daniel describes some of the things they both enjoy doing, such as playing dress-up, hide-and-seek, playing catch and riding their bikes. Other messages communicated are: Daniel lives with two mothers; the importance of nutrition and growth; one's body, even those of children, are private and that it is unjust for adults to tease children because of their differences.

BELINDA'S BOUQUET is one of a few books which doesn't use the parents' sexual orientation as the focus of the story. So, the fact that Daniel lives with his two mothers,

that no father figure is part of the family, and most importantly, that his family structure doesn't seem to pose a problem for him, his friends, his school or the driver of the bus who tells Belinda she has gotten fatter, is a genuine plus. The beautiful house and garden which belong to Daniel and his mothers will resonate most personally to the child who either has or lives in what many children refer to as the "country house."

In contrast to the author's other two children's books (see reviews below), *GLORIA GOES TO GAY PRIDE* and *HEATHER HAS TWO MOMMIES*, this book features color illustrations. Belinda's Bouquet is appropriate for children age three and older and can assist adults who wish to discuss the various issues Newman raises in this book.

GLORIA GOES TO GAY PRIDE

is a story about Gloria's day at the Gay Pride Parade (it is also one of the books recommended in the *CHILDREN OF THE RAINBOW, FIRST GRADE, FIRST EDITION*). Gloria begins her narrative with a description of some of the events that occur during such celebrations as Valentine's Day, Halloween, Chanukah and Mother's Day. She then recounts the events, colors, people and families who make up Gay Pride Day. She finds this celebration as enjoyable as the other holidays.

Various issues are discussed throughout the book and several implicit messages are conveyed. One of the messages which may or may not be explicit to adults and children is that anyone can be gay. One of Gloria's moms, for instance, holds a more traditional woman's job as a nurse while the other is a mechanic. At the parade, Gloria sees many familiar faces, such as her female mail carrier, male music teacher and the male nurse who works with her mother and who is there with his toddler son. The primary message of this story is that "love is the most important thing of all."

The book raises the issue of homophobia by including people by the side of the parade holding signs which says, "Gays go away." One of Gloria's mothers explains to her that some people don't think two women or two men should love each other, but that the parade is held to help insure that people can have a choice. Although that message is appropriate and clarifies that being gay is an adult's choice, it somehow removes the issue from the direct experiences of a young child. It also does not acknowledge that youth may feel and be gay themselves. In addition, homophobic responses and attitudes may be experienced by children raised by gay and lesbian parents. As a way to counter much of the real-world homophobia, the author has included people in Gloria's life who, whether they are gay or not, are supportive of her family structure (the owner of a restaurant they frequent and their shoe salesperson, for instance).

The book contains black and white illustrations and is recommended for children ages three to seven. The length of the book is appropriate for threes and the events Gloria experiences are familiar to many children who have gone to parades and, specifically, to the Gay Pride Parade.

HEATHER HAS TWO MOMMIES

, by Newman, is a story of a lesbian couple who decides to have a child through alternative insemination. At three years old, Heather joins a play group where it is suggested for the first time that she has no daddy. While the children are drawing pictures and discussing their diverse families (children with two daddies, one mommy and no daddy, a mommy and step-father, adopted family and nuclear family) the teacher acknowledges that "each family is special."

HEATHER HAS TWO MOMMIES has been the focus of a great deal of controversy in schools, districts and with parents and other adults. This is a lengthy story which can be seen as an "explanatory book" because of the

focus on spelling out how Heather's family began. Part of the story is dedicated to: how Heather's mommies were friends for a long time, fell in love and decided to live together, how they created a family, visited a fertility doctor and extended their family with a child. There is even a page or two on the types of careers the women have. Mama Jane, the biological mother, is a carpenter and Mama Kate is a doctor.

The discussion of alternative insemination includes visiting the "special" doctor, putting some sperm in Mama Jane's vagina, and the sperm and egg meeting in the womb. This detail is needed to explain how Heather was created without a father. This section makes for interesting conversation among eight year olds, for example, who are beginning to question and understand the world of sexuality and family configurations, or even six- or seven-year-olds who are wondering how a child cannot have a father because "you need a mother and father to make a baby."

These issues and the book's length may cause the book to be considered inappropriate for casual reading with children in a school setting under the age of six. However, it may be an interesting selection to help support discussions with individual children on different types of families or, more specifically, for lesbian parents needing to carefully explain to their children how they were created. This was the first of a wave of literature which explicitly depicted and discussed a lesbian-headed family in the U.S. (published in 1989). For many families, this book was extremely helpful because it addressed some of the concerns of young children of lesbian parents which were not addressed in other children's literature.

One somewhat confusing aspect of the book is that while the black and white illustrations were appropriate for young children, the text seemed more appropriate for older children. Because of its illustrations, and by altering the text, this

book can be used with young children because there are interesting depictions of the women hugging each other, of Kate's hands on Jane's womb when she is nine months pregnant, and of the women caring for Heather in a number of instances. The details in each illustration, and the way the black and white sketches do not prohibit the audience from detecting various ethnic and racial differences among the children makes them find contributions to works for children. At the same time, some of the details of the illustrations are incongruous with the story. The children's drawings of their families, for instance, are extremely detailed for 3-year-old children, many of whom are not yet doing representational drawing. This small criticism, however, should not keep parents or teachers from reading the book to young children.

SATURDAY IS PATTYDAY

is Leslea Newman's fourth book about a child with two moms. Here, Newman focuses on the divorce of Frankie's two moms. The author and illustrator depict the events that follow the divorce, i.e. one parent moving and Frankie visiting her, the particular emotions that are felt when a child is separated from a loved one and how this young child is comforted and loved by both parents. Although the sadness is felt, there is also a strong sense that Frankie, and his moms, will be OK.

Similar to HEATHER HAS TWO MOMMIES and GLORIA GOES TO GAY PRIDE, the story is about a White family and the illustrations of other people help to support diversity, i.e. girls playing basketball and children/adults of color in the park. This book would be appropriate for even a three year old who has had a similar experience as Frankie and would be most helpful in a classroom curriculum on family.

LOTS OF MOMMIES

, by Severance, is the story of young Emily, her mother and the three other women in her family. Each woman contributes to the family, the household responsibilities and to Emily's personal growth. Annie Jo is a carpenter and enjoys cooking with Emily. Vicki is a school bus driver and takes Emily to the library. Shadowwoman teaches Emily about healing, and her mother, Jill, reads, walks, plays and sings to her. On the first day of school some children are discussing the members of their family. When asked, Emily can only think to say that she has "lots of mommies." The children tease and laugh at her. While thinking on the jungle gym about the unfair comments these children made, she falls and hurts her arm. The teacher wants to get in touch with Jill, but apparently other people go about contacting the other three women as well. All four "mommies" arrive. Vicki calls to her through the fence. Shadowwoman fixes her arm. Jill comforts her with a hug and Annie Jo speaks to the teacher. With all the women surrounding Emily, a child exclaims, "She does have lots of mommies," and another states, "And they all care for her."

This story is an interesting addition to a collection of stories on diverse families. The text and the illustrations demonstrate a number of occasions where Emily is being cared for by the women and each has a unique contribution to make. This book breaks down gender stereotypes and offers choice as a possibility (for instance, a girl upon seeing Annie Jo's hammer says, "I wish I could build things"). This book is most appropriate with children ages five and older who are able to engage in a conversation about diversity, difference, choice, family and care.

WHEN MEGAN WENT AWAY

, also discussed by Jenkins and Morris in the FICTIONS FOR YOUNG READERS SECTION, is the story of the divorce of young Shannon's lesbian mothers. Shannon moves from self-blaming and fear to anger and tears and then shares her feelings with

her mother. The book illustrates racial diversity and an average female-headed family. Jenkins and Morris comment on the illustrations, saying they are awkwardly drawn, "floating somewhere between cartoons and an uneasy realism, but this is probably more bothersome to adults than to children." ⁴

FAMILIES

, by Aylette Jenness, is another book discussed by Jenkins and Morris. The story is told by a six-year-old girl who lives with her mother in New York City, but who spends vacations in Boston with her father, stepmother and half-brother. She describes the families of her friends and neighbors, some of whom live in nuclear families, households with grandparents and in single mother- and single father-households. Similar to MARTIN'S FATHER, the story speaks of the experience of a child raised by a single gay or lesbian parent. (Note the even greater invisibility of these families for many children, when compared with two mother or two father families. See Chapter Four for more on this.)

There is only one Black and one Hispanic family featured and the illustrations seem to depict stereotypic roles. For example, the mother in the Hispanic family works in a dress factory and Frederick Douglass, who is Black, lives with his mother and grandmother. Jenkins and Morris believe that "despite these problems, this engaging written and illustrated book will delight a young audience." ⁵ There is room for disagreement here, however. The stereotyping of cultures or families or children cannot be excused for the sake of displaying single mother or single father households. There are more appropriate selections which depict single gay households and negate stereotypes and assumptions. There is not, and should not, be a need to choose between the two.

ONE DAD, TWO DADS, BROWN DAD, BLUE DADS

tells the story of Lou and his gay fathers, who happen to be blue. A young girl is very curious about his blue dads and asks many questions which Lou thinks are rather silly. For example, she wants to know if his blue dads can sing, cook, work, play, and stand on their heads like her dad can. Lou replies, "What funny ideas you have. Do you think dads are different because they are blue." The message is quite clear; blue dads, or gay dads, experience family life similar to white, black, or heterosexual dads.

Alyson Press has recommended this book to children as young as two years old. I question whether or not very young children will be able to separate the blueness of the fathers to actually understand that having two dads is as "normal" as having one. I suggest introducing this book to a three or four year old who is better able to understand the humor in having blue or green dads. The illustrations are eye catching, include diversity in many areas and display the fathers in many cross gender activities.

THE DADDY MACHINE

is a story told in rhymes by Valentine about Sue and her brother and a machine they put together to create daddies. They seem to live happily with their two mothers and three pets, but wonder what it would be like to have a daddy. Unfortunately for them, they do not have an off switch and end up with more than 64 dads. As Sue and her brother try to figure out what to do about their dilemma, they and the reader are given a glimpse of what "Dads do," i.e. fishing, caring for the pets, washing dishes, doing the laundry, having chats with each other, etc. In the end, daddy number one and two help to get rid of the others and the two men decide to settle in the vacant home next door.

Although the idea of creating daddies from a machine is farfetched, it does speak to children with two moms who wonder what life may be like with a father. For children

who do live with a father or "father figure," the illustrations may provoke interesting and meaningful conversations about what their own fathers do or their ideas of the role males play in a family.

THE DAY THEY PUT A TAX ON RAINBOWS AND OTHER STORIES

is another compilation of fairy tales by Valentine. The three fairy tales include gay and lesbian characters as part of the "norm." For example, in *The Ring of Consequence* a young girl lives with her father and his lover, Brendan, in *The Three Gifts* three brothers are also raised by their two fathers, and in *The Day They Put A Tax On Rainbows*, Peter lives with his two mothers. These family configurations are explicit in all three stories, but not so intensely discussed that they take the reader's attention away from the adventure Valentine is presenting. Cultural diversity and cross gender activities are also included in the text and illustrations.

THE DUKE WHO OUTLAWED JELLY BEANS AND OTHER STORIES

, by Valentine, is a collection of five original fairy tales: *The Frog Prince*, *The Eagle Rider*, *the Dragon Sense*, *The Ogre's Boots* and *The Duke Who Outlawed Jelly Beans*. Embedded within the stories are a cast of gay and lesbian characters. In *The Frog Prince*, a little boy is adopted by two fathers. With this little boy's help, a frog becomes a prince again and is also adopted by the fathers. In *The Eaglerider*, a young girl fulfills her dream of becoming an Eaglerider whose job it is to watch out for dragons even though this is a privilege reserved for boys. In *Dragon Sense*, a young boy and his lesbian mothers are so poor they cannot pay the rent until the boy hears of an old treasure guarded by a dragon. *The Ogre's Books* tells a story of Little Jenny who was too small to do much, except save one of her mothers from the hungry giant ogre.

When the Duke's parents went away and left him in charge, the people of the village were devastated. Not only did he outlaw jelly beans, but anyone who did not have a mother and father was sent to prison. The children of this town saw to it that they and their friends were not sent to jail. They strutted about the town imitating the Duke and making silly speeches. Horses, for example, were forbidden to burp and pet goldfish had to be toilet trained. As the adults began to think about these children's comments, they found it difficult to listen to and obey the Duke's speeches. Many children and adults will find humor in Valentine's fairy tales.

These stories are humorous and needed addition to those which illustrate positive images of gay characters, including gay and lesbian parents. The illustrations are sparsely laid out in the book, but the text is full of imagination. Through the several color illustrations, various races are depicted. The stories do not focus on the gay and lesbian families, except for the Duke who wants to imprison children who either have too many mothers or fathers, or not enough. This infusion of lesbian and gay people in peripheral positions in books for children is a refreshing change. These are truly stories for six- and seven-year-old children (and older) and they are not so much explanatory books.

TWO MOMS, THE ZARK AND ME

is about the adventures of a young boy who goes to the park with his two moms, meets up with a tame Zark, plays with this extinct animal for a while only to realize that he does not know where his moms are. He begins to ask people around the park for help. The McFinks think he doesn't have a family because he does not have "...a mom, a dad, two kids and two cars. And a house, and a yard, and a dog (or a cat)." Fortunately for him, he is able to escape (with the help of the Zark) and finds himself with MJ and Don. He is disbelieving of their generosity and willingness to help him find

his moms until they describe their own family structure; a heterosexual couple with kids of their own who adopted several other children from different cultural backgrounds. They also explain that "real families come in all forms and all sizes." They all search through the park and finally locate the moms near the Lost and Found.

There is a lot going on in this book that I wonder if children under the age of ten are able to take it all in. A story of a young child getting lost perhaps should not include anything other than the way in which he is safely returned to his parents, whether he has two moms, two dads or lives with grandparents. Several of the illustrations do not add to the sense of safety one would hope a lost child encounters. For example, when he reaches the McFinks, Mr. McFink is holding a potato in one hand and in the other hand he has a very noticeable sharp knife and Mrs. McFink holds a sharp nail file (which also looks like a knife). The illustrations border on cartoon like characters and at times their facial expressions are rather frightening. To an adult it is clear that one message which the illustrations portray is that there are some heterosexuals who are unsafe and perhaps unfit parents. After the young boy has met MJ and Don the illustrations are much more pleasant and comforting. In my opinion, the story would have been more successful if he had not met the McFinks.

ANNA DAY AND THE O-RING

is the story of Evan's world. Evan is missing a piece to his new birthday tent and his dog, Anna Day, helps solve the problem. With color photographs, Wickens has captured some of the events and people that are important to very young children. We get a glimpse of the different things Evan enjoys doing, i.e. having sleepovers, eating oreo cookies, helping his parents make breakfast, taking his dog for a walk, having his four year old birthday party at school and, the high light of the story, looking for the

missing piece to his tent. By the way, Evan also has two moms.

Wickens has created a fun and adventurous story while enriching our collection of children's literature with lesbian families. This book appeals to me most because it is not loaded with issues that do not pertain to children as young as two and three years old. It is a needed addition to public libraries, for families and as part of a classroom curriculum on family.

DADDY'S ROOMMATE

, by Wilhoite, is a story told by a young boy about this weeks with his father and his father's partner, Frank. The child discusses some of the activities his dad and Drank do together ð activities which are familiar to all kinds of families. For example, they work, eat, sleep, shave and fight together, and always make up. The boy then describes how important Frank is to him and how Frank, as a co-parent, he likes him and helps the boy feel comfortable, safe and loved.

This book might appeal to children who, after their parents get divorced or are separated, live with one parent and visit the other parent and his/her new partner. The explanation given by the mother for being gay is one many children will understand. She says being gay is "just one more kind of love and love is the best kind of happiness." One teacher of nine- and ten-year-old children was uncomfortable with the fact that it is the mother in this story who explained the father's sexual orientation. It parallels my concerns with Ash having to explain her family structure to her teacher and class. It would be nice to see the adults in these stories take responsibility ð and control ð over explaining and feeling proud of their own lives and families.

Still, DADDY'S ROOMMATE presents a positive connection among gay people, love and family with illustrations of the father and Frank hugging, shaving, sleeping and caring for each other. Of the five

illustrations which show the two men physically and emotionally together, only one occurs outdoors, when Frank is placing suntan lotion on the father's back at the beach. The almost exclusive private expression of love may reinforce, for some, the fact that their intimate lives cannot be exhibited in the public eye.

With the mention of the parent's divorce on the first page, the story implies that the young boy was once raised by and lived with his mother and father until his father moved out and fell in love with another man. Given the often messy divorce relationships after a marriage breaks up, it is interesting to see how well this child's biological parents get along ð this may not reflect the reality in the lives of many children. As well, in the case of children who were born and raised or adopted into a gay-headed household, the biological mother may not have ever been a part of the family structure or the child's experiences. When reading the book to young children, the first two pages can be skipped so that the story is begun where it reads: "Daddy and his roommate Frank live together." The color illustrations and short text make DADDY'S ROOMMATE appropriate for children as young as three.

THE ENTERTAINER

is a story told through black and white sketches of a young boy's fame and the loneliness he feels because of it. As the young boy leaves his home and waves to what may be explained as his two moms he enters the park and begins to juggle with some apples he found on the ground. Before you know it a crowd arrives and a man offers him a "contract." Alex is soon performing on stage and his "moms" seem very proud. Unfortunately for him, he is very busy and seems to miss playing in the park with friends. He manages to get away from all the fame and fortune and is last seen in the park with his "'mom," other children and a big smile on his face.

THE ENTERTAINER provides endless opportunities to tell story after story about Alex's adventures. The absence of texts and the details in the illustrations allows even the youngest of children to become the story teller. His "family structure" may be seen as a lesbian headed household, or any other configuration with two women involved, i.e. mother and grandmother or sisters. I thought this book would be particularly safe to include in a classroom environment where nontraditional households were not so accepted because the children are given the opportunity to talk about this family in any way possible without adults imposing because of the given text.

FAMILIES: A COLORING BOOK

, is a short story which tells about the diversity of family life. This diversity is reflected in race, culture, generations and physical features. Some of the text describes how some of the families originated through adoption, birth, new partners and divorce. The coloring book is attractive to children and adults of all ages and includes gay and lesbian family members. For example, "Tad Oliver's Uncle Peter lives with Uncle Burt," and "After her divorce, Tony Forelli's mom moved in with a partner. Now Tony has two moms," and "Lisa Sinclair has two dads, too. And a brother ð sort of."

This would be a difficult book to use in a classroom during story-time for young children who may not be able to attend to the text without being distracted by the desire to color the pictures. It is, however, an important addition to available coloring books which also contains a diversity of stories to tell.

UNCLE WHAT-IS-IT IS COMING TO VISIT

is about two children, Tiffany and Igor, and their mom and dad who are expecting their Uncle Brett. Uncle Brett has not seen them since they were babies and the children ask many questions about him, i.e. does he like

baseball, what does he look like and is he married. The mom explains that he is gay and before she is able to explain what gay is the brussel sprouts she is making for lunch begin to burn. The children realize that they do not know what gay means and decide to ask someone. Igor accidentally trips over a neighborhood bully and the bully and his brother give the children their version of the meaning of gay. The children are given images of men dressed as women or men who dress like the "Hell's Angels" and are curious and frightened as to "what in the world was coming to visit." Uncle Brett finally arrives and explains that "gay men are guys who fall in love with each other instead of with women."

I found this book to address the issues that eight, seven and even some six year olds face when they are aware of and use derogatory terms for gay and lesbian people. I thought it most helpful in a classroom situation where children are given misinformation or have their own ideas of people who are different than they are, i.e. gay/lesbian, a person of color from Harlem, a person with special needs, people of different cultures or religions, etc. One other positive attribute of the story is the visible acceptance the children's parents have of their gay relative. Unlike DADDY'S ROOMMATE, Brett is given the opportunity to explain his own sexual orientation in a way that is clearly understood.

DISCUSSION

This literature is not written for a singular age group audience. As previously indicated, some of the literature is more appropriate for young children, between two and five, while others are better suited for children five and older. As Goodman comments, a wider selection of children's literature is still needed that depicts gay and lesbian characters in natural settings.⁶ Specifically, more literature is needed which depicts gay- and lesbian-headed families into which the children are either adopted or born and raised, such as HEATHER HAS

TWO MOMMIES.. As well, there is a need for stories on a variety of issues of importance to young children, where the focus or problem in the story is not based on gay or lesbian parents, such as THE DUKE WHO OUTLAWED JELLY BEANS , BELINDA'S BOUQUET, and ANNA-DAY AND THE O-RING, especially for young children. Literature is needed which implicitly or explicitly include other themes of multiculturalism or diversity such as GLORIA GOES TO GAY PRIDE and FAMILIES: A COLORING BOOK which depicts families living in a variety of circumstances. Lastly, there is a great demand for books which include families and children of color in the way ASHA'S MUMS, HOW WOULD YOU FEEL IF YOUR DAD WAS GAY and FAMILIES: A CELEBRATION OF DIVERSITY, COMMITMENT AND LOVE have been able to do. As well, literature which speaks to the experiences of children from various cultures and economic situations is an important lack in this literature.

Whether the books lend themselves to a particular theme in a curriculum, are used to validate the experiences of a child and a family, or are used for their individual qualities and messages, it is most important that they begin to be implemented and available in households and classrooms. One may question the use of these books in a classroom, even when it is known that no child comes from a gay- or lesbian-headed household. What if a child in the room has a gay or lesbian relative or close friend? What if, after the child leaves the classroom and parents separate and/or divorce, and one parent enters a gay relationship? Most importantly, how will a child respond to other children who do have gay or lesbian parents, or later in life are gay or lesbian themselves? These are important considerations because they help teach children about difference, and that, though different people live their lives differently, they don't have to be seen in a negative light.

In 1992 there was controversy originating in District 24 in Queens, New York, where the curriculum guide CHILDREN OF THE RAINBOW, FIRST GRADE was banned⁷ Some of the issues concerned the use of several of the books for children reviewed here, and which support a section of the guide which encourages teachers to be aware of varied family households including gay-headed families. The goals of the guide were to teach children to acknowledge the positive aspects of each of the various families mentioned. In so doing, educators can help increase the tolerance and acceptance of gay and lesbian communities and to decrease the number of hate crimes perpetuated against them.

Through my research and study of the materials relevant to this review, I have come across several guidelines for selecting books free of racism, sexism, ageism, heterosexism, and handicapism. The Council on Interracial Books for Children reprinted a pamphlet called, "Ten Quick Ways to Analyze Books for Racism and Sexism" which was taken from GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING BIAS-FREE TEXTBOOKS AND STORYBOOKS. The New York City Board of Education published a Resource Guide: Promoting Bias-Free Curriculum Materials, and Louise Derman-Sparks includes a list of children's literature appropriate for children age two to five which depict many types of differences as positive.⁸

Through these various materials and through reflecting on my own experiences working with young children from various family structures, I have discovered ways in which their experiences can, and most definitely should, be enriched and expanded. This is crucial in order for home and school experiences to complement each other, to provide consonance between home and school values by representing and validating difference, and to help children become more socially aware of the differences of others and to recognize and resist bias.

The work I have done for this review has affected my own outlook on teaching and on the materials I choose to use and the environment I wish to establish. It has also influenced the actions and decisions I have recently made in my classroom. For example, there is presently literature which depict the family structures of all the children in the room as well as other types of families. I see to it that there are more open conversations and options made among the teachers and children about the various adults who care for children. By listening carefully to what children are saying, I am able to make comments which help them become aware of the various differences around them, including family structures, skin color, physical characteristics, cultures, religions, and languages. My classroom has become a safe environment for these young children and their families to explore their many differences and to begin to develop positive attitudes about those differences. As well, by recognizing difference, they have begun to see the many ways in which they are similar to each other. Children's literature has been one important resource in my classroom which encourages the

exploration, discussion, contact with and acceptance of various differences, and which has also led to a process of growth and acceptance.

1 Jenkins and Morris, RECOMMENDED BOOKS ON GAY AND LESBIAN THEMES. Interracial Books for Children Bulletin, 14 (3&4), pp. 16-19. 1983.

2 IBID.

3 IBID., page 17.

4 Jenkins and Morris, page 15

5 IBID, p. 18

6 Need footnote

7 NEWSDAY, April 22, 1992, p. 1-3.

8 Interracial Books for Children Bulletin, ???.
Derman-Sparks, L. THE ANTI-BIAS CURRICULUM: TOOLS FOR EMPOWERING YOUNG CHILDREN, 1989.