

# FILM DISCUSSION & STUDY GUIDE

## THE PROM

Dee Dee Allen (three-time Academy Award winner Meryl Streep) and Barry Glickman (Tony Award winner James Corden) are New York City stage stars with a crisis on their hands: their expensive new Broadway show is a major flop that has suddenly flatlined their careers. Meanwhile, in small-town Indiana, high school student Emma Nolan (newcomer Jo Ellen Pellman) is experiencing a very different kind of heartbreak: despite the support of the high school principal (Keegan-Michael Key), the head of the PTA (Kerry Washington) has banned her from attending the prom with her girlfriend, Alyssa (Ariana DeBose). When Dee Dee and Barry decide that Emma's predicament is the perfect cause to help resurrect their public images, they hit the road with Angie (Academy Award winner Nicole Kidman) and Trent (Andrew Rannells), another pair of cynical actors looking for a professional lift. But when their self-absorbed celebrity activism unexpectedly backfires, the foursome find their own lives upended as they rally to give Emma a night where she can truly celebrate who she is. GLSEN + Netflix are partnering in creating this discussion guide. The Prom is available on Netflix starting Friday, December 11th.

### How to Utilize *The Prom* Discussion Guide

You can host a virtual movie screening using this guide and the discussion questions (choose 3-4) below to start conversations in your GSA, diversity club, leadership class, or other virtual youth group. Topics such as identity, heteronormativity, coming out, parental rejection, advocacy, education, acceptance and solidarity are interwoven throughout this film and can speak conversations and relatable moments. For your discussion, use GLSEN's [GSA Guidelines for Respectful Conversations](#).

The Prom gives everyone a reason to celebrate this December! For more information on how you can continue your advocacy for LGBTQ+ students visit <http://www.glsen.org> or send email to [students@glsen.org](mailto:students@glsen.org)



## The Prom

**Directed By** Ryan Murphy

**Screenplay By** Bob Martin, Chad Beguelin

**Produced By** Ryan Murphy, Alexis Martin Woodall, Adam Anders, Dori Berinsein, Bill Damaschke

**Cast** Meryl Streep, James Corden, Nicole Kidman, Keegan-Michael Key, Andrew Rannells, Jo Ellen Pellman, Ariana Debose, Tracey Ullman, Kevin Chamberlin, Mary Kay Place, Nico Greetham, Logan Riley, Nathaniel J. Potvin, Sofia Deler, and Kerry Washington

**Trailer** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJ0jBNA6JUQ&t=3s>

**Social Media** #TheProm

**Content Warning** homophobia, some suggestive/sexual references, language, microaggressions, anti-LGBTQ+ religious implications, parental rejection, bullying, conversion therapy, “hang yourself” joke

# THEMATIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*THE PROM*

## TERMS TO KNOW

### Heteronormativity:

Heteronormativity is the assumption that heterosexual identity is the norm, which plays out in interpersonal interactions and institutional privileges that further the marginalization of lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, and queer people etc.

### Coming out:

Disclosing one's gender identity and/or sexuality to people who previously did not know. Not all people who come out experience rejection and others might. Each person has their own experiences and often "come out" multiple times. Outing someone could jeopardize a person's safety and ability to decide for themselves when and if the time is right. It is best to ask for permission before sharing.

### Cinematic Stereotyping:

A common portrayal in films of a specific category of people that can lead to prejudices and assumptions that might be harmful. e.g. all gay people love musicals and lesbians drive trucks.

## Cinematic Stereotyping

- The film is meant to have exaggerated comedy and cinematic tropes or stereotypes. For example, Trent introduces himself and his friends as "liberals from Broadway", Dee Dee calls the people in Indiana "local yokels", and Barry makes a comment about Indiana having no queer people.
  - › Identify other cinematic stereotyping that comes up in the film.
  - › How can stereotypes negatively impact identities?

## Solidarity

- After Dee Dee and Barry get slammed in the papers for being narcissists, they come up with a plan to use Emma's situation to their benefit. They decide to go to Indiana and save the day hoping it will make them look like good activists.
  - › What are important actions and intentions to building genuine solidarity and allyship with people you are supporting?
  - › How have you experienced meaningful solidarity and allyship?
  - › What made your experience meaningful?
- Principal Hawkins was supportive of Emma throughout the film even when Emma was not in the room.
  - › What are some examples of Principal Hawkins solidarity with Emma?
  - › How have adults/educators shown up for you in a supportive way?

## Heteronormativity

- Several times throughout the film, the word "normal" is used in contrast with "inclusive."
  - › What are some examples of heteronormativity in the film in relation to the idea that heterosexual identities are the "norm?"
  - › What are other inclusive alternatives that can be implemented in your school?
  - › What does support look like for you and how do you communicate this to the folks who care about you?

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## THE PROM

### Parental Relationships

- At the “Inclusive Prom” at the end of the film Alyssa confronts her mom saying “I know how you were raised, and the world’s a different place”. Mrs. Greene emotionally tells Alyssa “I just don’t want you to have a hard life.” There are multiple aspects to consider from Alyssa and Mrs. Greene’s conversation about the impact of oppression on identities that are marginalized such as race, gender, sexuality etc.
  - › What are the identities they could be referring to?
  - › What does Mrs. Greene mean when she says “I just don’t want you to have a hard life?”
  - › Mrs. Greene’s intentions are to protect Alyssa but she actually makes it more difficult for Alyssa to come out. In an ideal situation, what could Mrs. Greene have done to build a safer environment where Alyssa did not feel she needed to hide?
- In the film Barry told Emma’s grandma that he left his home before they could kick him out. He also shared with Dee Dee that they were going to try conversion therapy on him. Barry is holding on to a lot of hurt by his parents when Dee Dee calls Barry’s mom. She shows up to the school to meet him.
  - › What are the identities they could be referring to?

- › What are some ways you can support someone whose parents are not supportive?

### Advocacy

- In the song “Unruly Hearts”, Emma sings “and nobody out there ever gets to define the life I’m meant to lead, with this unruly heart of mine.” Her story generated millions of views and other students related to her song.
  - › What were some of Emma’s moments of self advocacy and empowerment in the film??
  - › Self Advocacy is speaking up or acting for your own best interest. Have you ever advocated for yourself?

### Bullying

- Throughout the film Emma experiences anti LGBTQ+ bullying all over campus. From the first scene at her locker, to the guys during PE at the pool, and the scene where not only students but parents humiliated Emma by setting up a prom no one showed up to except her.
  - › Does your school have an anti bullying policy that you are aware of? What is the process for reporting bullying?
  - › When someone is bullied, what are some ways to intervene?

### Relationships

- Alyssa’s song “When You’re Alyssa Greene” reveals her struggle of feeling “in between” her mother’s expectations to uphold a perfect image that feels unattainable and her commitment to Emma which would require her coming out to everyone.
  - › Why do you think the choice for Alyssa to be her true self was hard?
  - › What did you think about Emma feeling hurt that Alyssa did not show up when she was at the gym and Alyssa saying she wasn’t ready to come out?

*“Nobody out there gets to define the life I’m meant to lead, with this unruly heart of mine”*