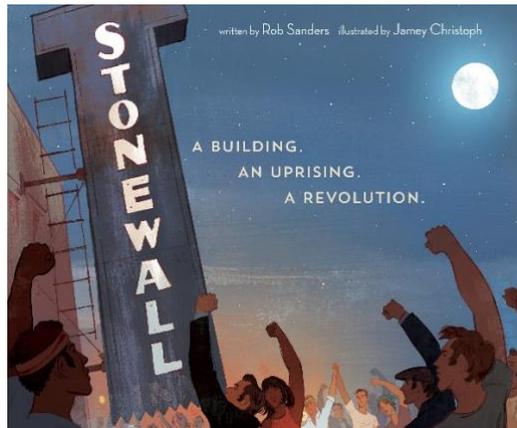


Second Reaction: Share the Stories of Change-Makers

Sanders, Rob. *Stonewall: A Building, An Uprising, A Revolution*. Illustrated by Jamey Christoph. Canada: Random House for Young Readers, 2019. Print.

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The day I chose to share the book *Stonewall* by Rob Sanders in my fourth-grade class, I overheard four students in my class discussing a different book, with two of the four students recommending the graphic novel *The Prince and the Dressmaker* by Jen Wang. These two girls excitedly told their classmates about the book, which tells the story of a prince who secretly dresses as Lady Crystallia, a fashion icon and socialite in Paris. The prince's best friend, Frances, is also in the book as the dressmaker. As the two girls were raving about this read, the other two peers were visibly uncomfortable and questioning. One of the peers said, "a boy who wears dresses? Gross!." The other peer said, "You should burn that book." One of the students who was sharing the book defended it, still trying to convince her friends to pick it up. She said, "no, it's so good; you have to read it!" Almost on cue, the morning announcements began and the students' conversation came to an end.

After the morning announcements, I shared the story, *Stonewall* by Rob Sanders, with my students during a unit focused on change-making. To summarize, the book tells the story of the 1969 uprising of the same name from the perspective of the building itself, the Stonewall Inn. We had already studied the lunch counter sit-ins of the 1960s and the legal battle to integrate public schools that led to the Brown vs. Board of Education decision in 1954. We had been discussing groups of people who, because of their identities, had to fight for their rights in our country. I was a bit nervous about sharing this story, especially given the recent media attention around discussing sexuality, and more specifically queer people, in a school setting. However, the conversation I overheard that morning only convinced me more that this was an important book for us to read, study, and discuss together.

At the ages of nine and ten, many of my fourth-grade students already have some knowledge about gender and sexuality. They seem to naturally want to divide up by boys and girls at recess or get into same sex groups for projects, despite my efforts to develop mix-sex groups. In conversations they do casually discuss friends with two dads or a character in a book who is transgender. However, we have not explicitly discussed the LGBTQ+ community as a class. So, when I first introduced *Stonewall* the book, my students seemed a little hesitant to participate. However, I approached it the same way we did the Civil Rights Movement the week before by beginning with definitions of words they might encounter in the story.

The first words we discussed were the letters in the acronym: LGBTQ+. Most of my students were familiar with the terms *gay* and *lesbian*, and several knew *bisexual* and *transgender*. One brave student raised his hand and rattled off the entire acronym, ending with "... and Q is for *queer*, but I'm not sure what that one means." To my surprise there were very few giggles or side conversations as most of my students were quiet and engaged.

After defining and discussing words, we began to read. However, as good teaching goes, we did stop at certain points to discuss what was happening in the story. Students were shocked to find out that queer people were arrested by police while at the Stonewall Inn. When they turned to discuss with their peers, one student remarked, "they were arrested just for being who they are. They didn't even do anything wrong." Many students made connections to the other instances of change-making we had studied, sharing that the people at Stonewall stood up and rallied to say that being different was good. One student made the analogy that "if we all liked the same things, it would be so boring," and another added, "yeah, all of our friends would be

just like us and we wouldn't have anything to talk about." I asked students to share other reasons that diversity, a term we'd defined earlier in our unit, was so important. Many expressed similar sentiments, and some shared that different people have different strengths and skills that we need to solve problems, "like in our math teams" (insert fist-pump here).

Overall, this was a good introduction to the topic of LGBTQ+ folks and their fight for equality. The book remained a very surface-level telling, and I look forward to diving deeper into this topic and discovering more instances of social change in our history and present day with my students in the future.

About the Author

TJ Rosa is a fourth-grade teacher in West Lafayette and a Purdue University graduate. She loves sharing books with her students, and when she's not teaching, you can find her spending time at her local community theater.