

**Alyson Browder
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My name is Alyson Browder. I am in my ninth year of teaching 7th-grade English Language Arts in the Norwalk Community School District and am in my tenth year of teaching overall.

My kids are 7th-grade middle school students with varying experiences as readers. Some are avid readers who will try anything you put in front of them, and some come into the year not considering themselves to be readers at all. This is why I work to make sure my classroom library is extensive, diverse, and representative of all kids. I want my students to see themselves in the stories they read as well as have the opportunity to explore worlds beyond their own.

Middle school is a tough transition for many students. It is a time of self-discovery. Students start to gain more independence as they dive into extra-curricular sports and hobbies, find new social groups of peers that may be similar or different from themselves, and navigate their growing understanding of the ever-changing world and society around them. One of the many things I have discovered in my ten years of teaching middle schoolers is that above all else,

they want acceptance: Acceptance from peers, from family, from teachers, from coaches, but especially from themselves.

When students can read about a character facing similar situations as themselves, they feel less alone. They recognize that other people “get them”. It gives them a new perspective and self-assurance. Also, it helps students grow emotionally to begin to empathize with other people as well.

I have always prided myself in getting my more reluctant readers invested in literature by the time they leave my classroom, and I do that by getting to know who my students truly are and what matters to them, and then I try to connect them to characters they can relate to. Book censorship limits students' access to these potentially relatable titles. Censorship tells us that there are certain life experiences or qualities of who we are that are “inappropriate” and are, therefore, unworthy of being able to hold space on the shelf.

Senate File 496 has been enforced differently in many school districts across Iowa. It is unfair and discriminatory to censor the lives of some of our students and their families from school libraries and classroom library collections. To say that a book is not “age-appropriate” due to the existence of a non-heteronormative relationship, for example, is to tell some of our students that their families are inappropriate too.

Ultimately, our students deserve literature that they can relate to. As a classroom educator, I will continue to advocate in the best interests of all students, and I will continue to help all students recognize their worth.