

**Dan Gutmann**  
**6th-grade focused reader teacher and co-teacher in**  
**8<sup>th</sup> grade English/Language Arts at Weeks Middle School**

We learn from others; the voices of others resonate in the thoughts of a child and nurture their sense of themselves into adulthood. A student's growth as a learner depends on access to connections with others who share similar experiences and those whose experiences may differ from their own. My trauma from the unexpected death of my mother when I was only twelve was outside of my father's experience or understanding. Family members wanted to help but had no personal history to draw on to be of support. As much as I was loved, my family and teachers couldn't truly understand. However, my trauma was not outside the experience of many authors found in my classrooms and school libraries. Examples of resiliency and cautionary tales helped me navigate my path. Now that I am an educator with students of many diverse backgrounds and experiences, the books in my classroom which are available for students to explore, are a vital way for me to encourage those connections.

I'm committed to public education and its solemn responsibility to prepare future citizens for our democracy. In addition to teaching, I'm a community organizer, advocate for school equity, advocate for my LGBTQ community, and a former Urbandale School Board member. These experiences have afforded me a deep understanding of the essential function of our state government and school boards in upholding the principles of free expression and intellectual freedom within our schools. My ability as a teacher to build a classroom library reflecting the diversity of people, families, and viewpoints in our community is as impactful as any action or decision I have taken in my roles outside of the classroom.

I teach 6<sup>th</sup> grade Focused Reading and coteach 8<sup>th</sup> grade English and Language Arts at Weeks Middle School in Des Moines. For 7 years before moving to Weeks, I taught special education at Jackson Elementary. I hold endorsements in reading, social studies, and instructional strategy. Prior to becoming an educator, for 15 years, I worked in the children's mental health field mostly in school-based programs. I am passionately dedicated to fostering a love of learning and intellectual curiosity among my students in a classroom that welcomes a diversity of thoughts, experiences, and perspectives. We must protect the diversity of thought, even those outside of our own experience and viewpoints. I hold this principle close to my heart. Removing ideas from our classroom does not create learners devoid of those ideas. Eliminating representation in our libraries does not eliminate the diversity they represent. Pretending our world is made up of one thought does not make that thought more powerful.