

Novel Title: *One True Way* by Shannon Hitchcock



Contemporary Novel Synopsis:

After the sudden, tragic loss of her older brother, Allie finds herself navigating a great deal of change in a short time – new town, new home, and her parents’ recent separation compound her personal grief. On her first day of school at Daniel Boone Middle, she encounters Sam – a classmate who quickly becomes her closest friend and confidante. As Allie grows to learn more about her new town and her new friend, she discovers feelings she can no longer deny – feelings that help her to uncover her one true self – feelings that lead her to take action for change.

This middle level text, set in the south in 1977, tells the tale of two girls who find themselves navigating a time period in which politics, society, and religion were not on their side. As they come of age, and discover their growing affections for one another, they must also find the courage to share their true selves with those who might not be accepting.

The Novel and Professional Development Components:

- This middle level text provides a powerful catalyst for classroom discourse surrounding the history of LGBTQ rights and policies within classrooms across the United States. Teachers can engage in reading the novel as a means of professional development regarding their own understanding of the history and progress of civil rights and social movements surrounding the rights of LGBTQ youth and adults. In pairing this text with historic and contemporary political documents, teachers can acquire insight into the policies that helped to shape today’s public school shifts towards inclusion and in providing safe spaces for LGBTQ youth.
- This text is told through the first-person lens of a middle level female as she encounters her first crush, and seeks to establish her first same-sex relationship with a classmate. It provides the reader insight into the challenges our LGBTQ youth face in accepting their own feelings and true identities given a stigma that, despite the passing of time and policy, still lingers within today’s communities. Teachers can utilize this text as a means of professional development in the reading, reflecting, and discussion of ways today’s teachers can ensure students feel safe to reflect and examine their own identities without fear of judgment or ridicule. It presents opportunity for clear focus on the role of stigmatization within today’s classrooms, and discussion for strategies to further de-stigmatize LGBTQ identities and relationships within the middle and high school environment.
- The text features two teachers who are engaged in a same-sex relationship – a relationship that is disclosed within the pages of the novel. However, as a result of the community’s opposition to their lifestyle, the two teachers feel it is in their best interest to leave their roles within the school, and move to a community where they can feel more accepted, or can once again hide their relationship. The characters and situation highlighted in the text can further engage teachers in discussions of their own school and community, and provide opportunity for personal connection and reflection regarding their own professional and personal identities and roles within the school. The text serves as a springboard for teachers to discuss ways they can serve as allies for LGBTQ youth within their own school setting, and the value of serving as a positive role model and support system for LGBTQ youth.

- Finally, the text features a community in which the main characters find both support and open hostility. While some adults represent those who support the character's identity and relationship, others fall on their religious beliefs to back their decision to denounce the girls' feelings and relationship. This fact provides teachers a chance to examine and share out how LGBTQ youth within their own community can find the necessary supports to ensure they feel safe and free from insult, bullying, and violence. It also provides a glimpse into the hostility today's LGBTQ youth face on a daily basis – whether it take place at school, at home, or within the community. The text provides space for teachers to reflect on their own potential bias, and the manner in which one's beliefs affect the way in which they approach, teach, and mentor LGBTQ youth within their own classrooms.