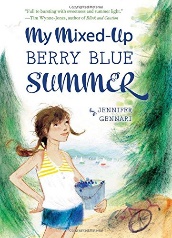
**Novel Title:** *My Mixed-up Berry Blue Summer* by Jennifer Gennari

**Contemporary Novel Synopsis:**

Vermont summers are made for berry picking, pie baking, and swimming in Lake Champlain. At least, that’s what twelve-year-old June anticipates until her mother announces her upcoming marriage to her longtime girlfriend, Eva. Now, June finds herself caught in a political and personal struggle as she seeks to find her own peace with change amidst a community’s apparent determination to throw her life into a state of upheaval.

In this middle level text, readers will find themselves connecting with June’s sense of confusion as she confronts her ever-growing feelings for the boy next door, her personal struggles with friends who appear to disapprove of her mother’s lifestyle, and her desire to remain hidden from the political implications of her mother’s impending marriage.

**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 finds herself facing potential criticism and judgement based on her mother’s homosexual identity and evolving relationship with another woman. Teachers can read the novel and engage in discussion surrounding students who have family members and friends who identify as LGBTQ. This can assist teachers in noting the way in which students might struggle with wanting to support those they love, while also remaining hidden from potential stigmatization and conflict. As a result, they can discuss implications for the classroom, and strategies to ensure all students and families feel included and safe within the classroom and school community.

- The text features children who find themselves following in the beliefs and values set forth by their parents – regardless of their own potential ideals and critical considerations for alternative perspectives and experience – as well as children who feel caught between what they want to believe, and what they are expected to believe. The text serves as a reminder for teachers of the way in which students can acquire the belief systems of their family, and the need to cultivate classrooms that encourage examination of personal bias, stereotypes, and critical engagement with said belief systems. Rather than striving to bestow our own beliefs onto students, it is important to implement social emotional learning that encourages students to reflect on their own potential bias and privilege, and identify critical considerations of such beliefs.

- 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 – doing what they can to act as allies, others fall on their beliefs that denounce the mother’s relationship, take on political action to revoke the right to same-sex marriage within the state, and boycott the family’s business. 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.

- Finally, the text examines the role of bystanders and upstanders in the face of bullying, intentional hostility, and micro-agressions. This component of the text provides opportunity for professional development that helps teachers gain a more solid understanding of micro-aggressions in the classroom, as well as opportunity to develop instructional focus on the role of upstanders versus bystanders within the school and classroom, thus providing a safe space for LGBTQ students and families.