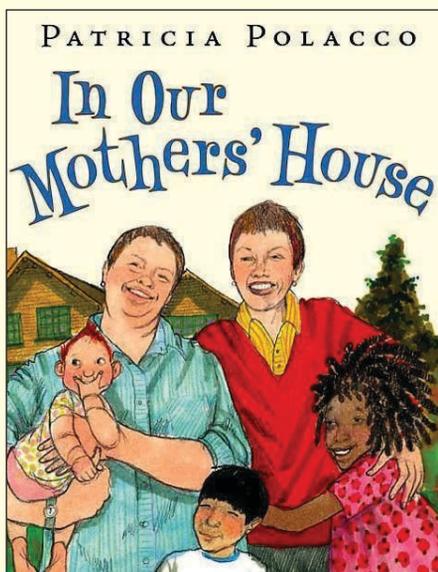


IN OUR MOTHERS' HOUSE

UNTIE THE KNOTS OF PREJUDICE – FOCUS ON OPEN-MINDEDNESS, RESPECT, TEAMWORK, ACCEPTANCE, CARING/KINDNESS, COMPASSION, EMPATHY, LOVE, HONESTY AND SAME-SEX FAMILIES



IN OUR MOTHERS' HOUSE

AUTHOR: Patricia Polacco
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SYNOPSIS

This book is about a same-sex couple named Marmee and Meema and their family. The narrator, a Black girl, describes how her two Caucasian mothers adopted her, her Asian brother, and her red-headed sister. The story focuses on their lives and activities with their friends and large extended family who love and care for them. One neighbour is not friendly or supportive of this same-sex family. The story serves as a model of inclusiveness for children who have same-sex parents, as well as for children who may have questions about a “different” family in their neighborhood.

Choosing the book *In Our Mothers' House* reflects our fundamental beliefs that classrooms should be safe and inclusive spaces. Part of our role as educators is to challenge societal stereotypes and promote a more inclusive understanding of sexual orientation, family compositions and what it means to be accepting and open-minded. When children see themselves, their families and those that they love, in the curriculum, they are more likely to be successful, healthy and happy. Health is not defined by a narrow sub-section of the Healthy Living strand. Instead health encompasses the whole child and should continue to be a lifelong journey of learning and growth. The purpose of health education is to foster an understanding and appreciation of what it means to be healthy, included and respected. *In Our Mothers' House* challenges many stereotypes and is a great starting point for educators to discuss challenging topics of sexual orientation, gender-based role models, society's expectations, self-awareness and self-advocacy. Ontario is the most di-

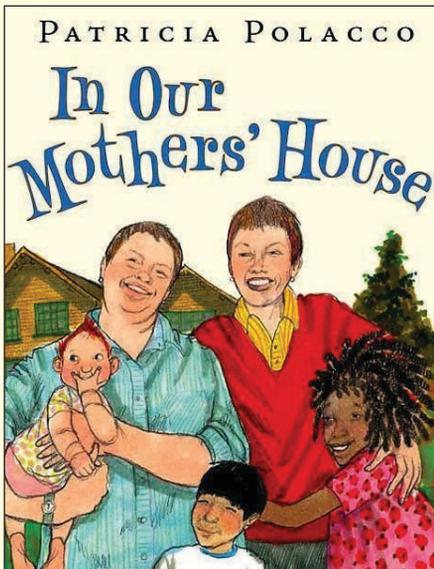
verse province in Canada, and our students need to respect and understand that there are differences among people. The curriculum and the resources we use to support it should be built on the principle that regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or religious beliefs, all students have the right to a safe and positive learning environment where they can thrive and be accepted.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES AND CULMINATING TASKS

Before Reading

- ▶ The teacher may wish to review ETFO's LGBT Take Action Kit for additional classroom resources and information. <http://www.etfo.ca/Resources/New/lgbt/Pages/default.aspx>
- ▶ Have students brainstorm with a partner what a family is. Who is in a family? What kinds of activities do families participate in? What are differences in families? Have partners share their points for you to record on chart paper.

Types of Families	Important Characteristics	Differences in Families



MATERIALS

- Picture book listed above
- Chart paper
- Markers
- Journals
- Newspapers
- Magazines
- Scissors
- Glue sticks
- Art paper
- ETFO's *LGBT Take Action Kit*

MINISTRY EXPECTATIONS

English Language

Oral Communication:

6e1, 6e5, 6e6, 6e15

Reading: 6e22, 6e28, 6e31

Writing: 6e44, 6e45, 6e55, 6e67, 6e68

Media Literacy: 6e73, 6e75, 6e78, 6e81

CURRICULUM CONNECTION EXPECTATIONS

The Arts: 6a21, 6a25, 6a26

- ▶ Introduce the terms gay, lesbian, same-sex couples/family, and adoption. Students may be familiar with these terms, but may be more familiar with slang and negative terms. Explain what these terms mean and that understanding them will help students to understand the story.

While Reading

- ▶ Stop to check students' comprehension and address any questions or concerns.

After Reading

- ▶ Have students revisit their brainstorm activity about what a family is and who is in a family. See if they have any further ideas or contributions to add to the charts.
- ▶ Why are people afraid of differences or things that are new? Can students make text-to-self connections to a time when people were afraid of them because of a difference?
- ▶ Have students write in their journals possible reasons why the one family on the street didn't like the narrator's family. What might that have felt like for her? What might it feel like to be in a family that others perceive as different?
- ▶ Have students work in small groups of four to six. Have each group choose their favourite part of the story and represent it as a tableau. It may be helpful for each group to discuss the steps and to generate their ideas prior to proceeding to demonstrate their tableau. Once students have practiced their tableau, have them present it to the class. They can unfreeze to tell the class about their tableau. As a group, discuss the tableau in terms of the techniques the students used and also the content.

EXTENSIONS

- ▶ Extend students' tableau to include opportunities for speaking parts.
- ▶ Write a passage in role as one of the characters from the tableau.
- ▶ Have students create their own photo album of their family, using photos or drawn pictures. Have students write about how their family is unique. What does the family do together? What types of responsibilities does each family have? Students could write a paragraph or two to explain.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT/ RELATED RESOURCES

Provide some example photos of different couples in relationships (e.g., biracial, same-sex, older couples, etc.). Have students go through magazines and newspapers and cut out different couple pairs. See if students can come up with a diverse range of couples. Have them glue their couple pairings onto a sheet of paper in the form of a collage. When finished, have them share with their table groups and later, in the large group, discuss what they found. Was it easy to find pictures of different kinds of couples? Why or why not? How many students were able to find same-sex couples? Talk about what they would need to do to find those representations of our society. Display the students' work in the school or in a local community centre.