



An Original EduGuide for

IT GETS BETTER

COMING OUT, OVERCOMING BULLYING,
AND CREATING A LIFE WORTH LIVING

**IT GETS
BETTER**
PROJECT

ABOUT THE BOOK

IT GETS BETTER

It Gets Better: Coming Out, Overcoming Bullying, and Creating a Life Worth Living is a collection of original essays and expanded testimonials written to teens by celebrities, political leaders, and everyday people.

The book was edited by Dan Savage and Terry Miller. Dan is an American author, media pundit, journalist, and activist for the LGBTQ+ community. His husband, Terry, is a model and official U.S. Ambassador for Tom of Finland. Together, they created the first It Gets Better video and co-founded the It Gets Better Project. So far, the It Gets Better Project has distributed over 3,000 copies of the book to schools and libraries across the United States.

To learn more, go to www.itgetsbetter.org/TheBook.



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

A LETTER FROM THE WRITER

When It Gets Better began as a video project ten years ago, the internet provided a means to reach teens who were struggling. In a public, accessible way, LGBTQ+ adults who had overcome struggles affirmed that yes, teens too can get through it, whatever "it" is: bullying, high school, or coming-of-age. Now in 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic has forced people everywhere to be more isolated than ever, the internet is still one of the most powerful tools we have for reaching out to each other. And so, this EduGuide pairs both written essays and online videos for a powerful combination: readers can see the writer's face and hear their voice, as well as digest their words.

In these ten essays, you will find examinations of activism, transnational migration, family, bullying, spirituality, joy and grief, community, ethnicity, and LGBTQ+ identities. The essays reflect the diversity and intersectionality of LGBTQ+ experiences, and the reality that there is no single unifying message that will serve every young person. Instead, these essays are openings for deeper conversation and contemplation, in the belief that there is something here for everyone, something to pull from, something that sparks recognition. In recognition, there is hope.

This guide is intended for ages 14 and up, for students in late middle school and high school. The discussion questions may be used for group or individual reflection – you could journal your responses or share your thoughts with a friend or family member. Educators, parents, allies: truly, thank you for spending time with these stories and bringing them into your communities. Expand on these conversations, challenge yourselves, challenge each other – it gets better, because we make it better.

Adrianna Jereb

She/Her/Hers

Volunteer Curriculum Writer

Saint Paul, Minnesota – 2020

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

THE ESSAYS

1. **“Action Makes It Better”** by Urvashi Vaid (EduGuide - p. 4, Book - p. 24)
2. **“The Person Worth Fighting For Is You”** by Alex R. Orue (EduGuide - p. 6, Book - p. 35; also available in Spanish, Book - p. 32)
3. **“Life Unfolds Exactly As It Should (But Not As You Planned)”** by Sean Blane and David Robinson (EduGuide - p. 8, Book - p.40)
4. **“Getting Stronger and Staying Alive”** by Gabrielle Rivera (EduGuide - p. 10, Book - p. 45)
5. **“Rockin’ the Flannel Shirt”** by Krissy Mahan (EduGuide - p. 12, Book - p. 71)
6. **“How It Got Better for an Ordained Christian Minister”** by Professor Stephen V. Sprinkle (EduGuide - p. 14, Book - p. 74)
7. **“Gwendolyn Gone”** by Meshell Ndageocello (EduGuide - p. 16, Book - p. 112)
8. **“I Didn’t Always Wear a Tuxedo”** by Murray Hill (EduGuide - p. 18, Book - p. 201)
9. **“How I Got Over”** by Tuan N’Gai (EduGuide - p. 20, Book - p. 205)
10. **“You Can Live a Life That’s Worth Living”** by Kate Bornstein (EduGuide - p. 22, Book - p. 312)

*A NOTE FROM THE ORGANIZATION: These essays are not one-size-fit-all. Each person’s story and the words of advice they share are unique. Some may resonate with you, others might not. That’s okay. Take from each essay what you will. To help with that, we recommend you read each author’s bio at the end of their chapter in the book before reading their essay. Doing that might help put into context who that person is and where their perspective may be coming from. We hope it helps.

ACTION MAKES IT BETTER

BY URVASHI VAID



Related Video:

<https://youtu.be/K4O7nWnj-zc>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. As a child of Asian immigrants, Urvashi knew her parents had high expectations for her; she says those dreams and demands weighed heavily on her. What do you think she meant by that? Explain your reasoning.
2. “Activism saved my life,” Urvashi writes, but she still experiences moments of defeat. What is it about activism that helps her to keep going, despite disappointments or setbacks?

3. In pursuing common goals, Urvashi found a community, friendship, and love. With whom do you feel a sense of community? What brings you to and binds you to those people?
4. Urvashi gives several examples of political movements in the United States and around the world that have resulted in dramatic social change. She also writes that “there is nothing inevitable about change for the better.” What kind of changes do you want to see in the world? What are some ways you can take action to fight for social justice in your community?

RECOMMENDED ESSAYS

If you liked this essay, we also recommend you read:

- “**Darn It**” by Kate Clinton (p. 162)
- “**Save Yourself, Save the World**” by Khris Brown (p. 211)
- “**Hope Out of Tragedy**” by Matthew Anthony Houck (p. 282) – <https://youtu.be/MVHJxInwmP8>

THE PERSON WORTH FIGHTING FOR IS YOU

BY ALEX ORUÉ



Related Videos:

<https://youtu.be/HF5QxZ6Nm4A> (2010)

<https://youtu.be/o61VIPUTUrM> (2018)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the beginning of his essay, Alex notes that social discrimination and close-mindedness can continue despite legal gains for LGBTQ+ rights. Why do you think that's sometimes the case?

- BONUS: Do some research. What laws currently exist in your country, state, or local area that protect LGBTQ+ folks from discrimination?
2. As a teenager, Alex “played the game” and teased other students to protect himself from bullying. Even though he felt it was necessary then, he regrets it now. What advice would you give to someone in Alex’s situation?
 3. Moving to Canada was a transformative, eye-opening experience for Alex. How did living in another country affect the way he sees himself?
 - BONUS: Have you ever moved to a new place? What did you learn from the experience?

RECOMMENDED ESSAYS

If you liked this essay, we also recommend you read:

- “**An Identity Unfolded**” by Mark Ramirez (p. 99) – <https://youtu.be/0XgNzVNqDxM> (video in ASL)
- “**Journey to a Better Life**” by Juan Carlos Galan, MS (p.133)

NOTE: Alex’s essay is also available in Spanish as “**La persona por la que vale la pena luchar, eres tu.**” (Book – p. 32).

ESSAY #3: Book – Pg. 40

LIFE UNFOLDS EXACTLY AS IT SHOULD (BUT NOT AS YOU PLANNED)

BY SEAN BLAINE AND DAVID ROBINSON



Related Video:

<https://youtu.be/2DyvAJ3PuLo>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. As a kid, Sean didn't see positive gay representation on TV. For many people like him, seeing themselves reflected in the characters they see in movies and on TV

is very important. Who are some characters on TV you've been able to relate to? How does seeing them on screen impact the way you see yourself?

2. Having the chance to become parents was something David and Sean never expected when they were young, but now being dads is the most important aspect of their lives. What life do you imagine for yourself as an adult?
3. Sean believes that being gay is a gift because "it makes you special, it makes you adaptable." What makes you special? What experiences have shaped your perspective on life?
4. Being gay also taught Sean "how to read people; how to be an observer; how to be empathetic." Why might these be important skills to have in life? Explain your reasoning.

RECOMMENDED ESSAYS

If you liked this essay, we also recommend you read:

- **"You Will Meet People Who Celebrate You"** by Jenn and Erika Wagner-Martin (p. 96) - <https://youtu.be/TSiev5uYCa4>
- **"Perfect Just the Way You Are"** by Darren Hayes (p. 151) - <https://youtu.be/HhhTir-UQTQ>

GETTING STRONGER AND STAYING ALIVE

BY GABRIELLE RIVERA



Related Videos:

<https://youtu.be/hQPXOwt8Iq8>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. “You get stronger.” That’s a powerful statement based on Gabrielle’s own experiences growing up and finding success as a gay woman of color. What part of her story do you find most empowering, or what part resonates with you the most? Why so?

2. Though Gabrielle’s mom eventually came to accept her, she was initially upset when Gabrielle came out. Why do you think some parents struggle when their child’s life turns out differently than what they’d imagined for them? What advice would you offer a parent who’s struggling to support their LGBTQ+ child?
3. Gabrielle had a hard time reconciling her faith and her sexuality. She eventually made peace with the two, and continues to see God as a positive force in her life. Have you ever struggled to combine aspects of your life or identity that don’t seem to fit? How did you come to terms with those opposing elements?
4. If you could ask Gabrielle any question, what would it be? Why would that be the question you’d ask?

RECOMMENDED ESSAYS

If you liked this essay, we also recommend you read:

- **“What I Wish I Knew”** by Ivan Coyote (p. 87)
- **“Survival Tools”** by Ellen Forney (p. 177)
- **“Patience Makes Perfect...Sense”** by Angelo D’Agostino (p. 287)

ROCKIN' THE FLANNEL SHIRT

BY KRISSY MAHAN



Related Video:

<https://youtu.be/jvvfA4eT5ZQ>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. People often assume that LGBTQ+ folks only live in cities, or that they only *want* to live in cities. But Krissy is happiest in rural spaces where she can find nature and seclusion. Think about some of your favorite places. Why are those your favorite? How do those places make you feel?
2. Skills are an aspect of our identities that we have considerable control over. Krissy takes a lot of pride in her personal skills, especially her abilities to work

hard, build, and fix things. What skills have you fostered in yourself? What skills are you most proud of?

3. “I am not saying it will always be easy. You will just have more choices about how to handle tough times.” Why does Krissy say that’s a “big improvement”? How does having more choices make it easier to endure life’s ups and downs?
4. In the title and throughout her essay, Krissy makes reference to rocking the flannel shirt. Like many people, Krissy finds that her clothing is an important means of self- and gender expression. Do you have a favorite item of clothing that expresses who you are? How does wearing it make you feel?

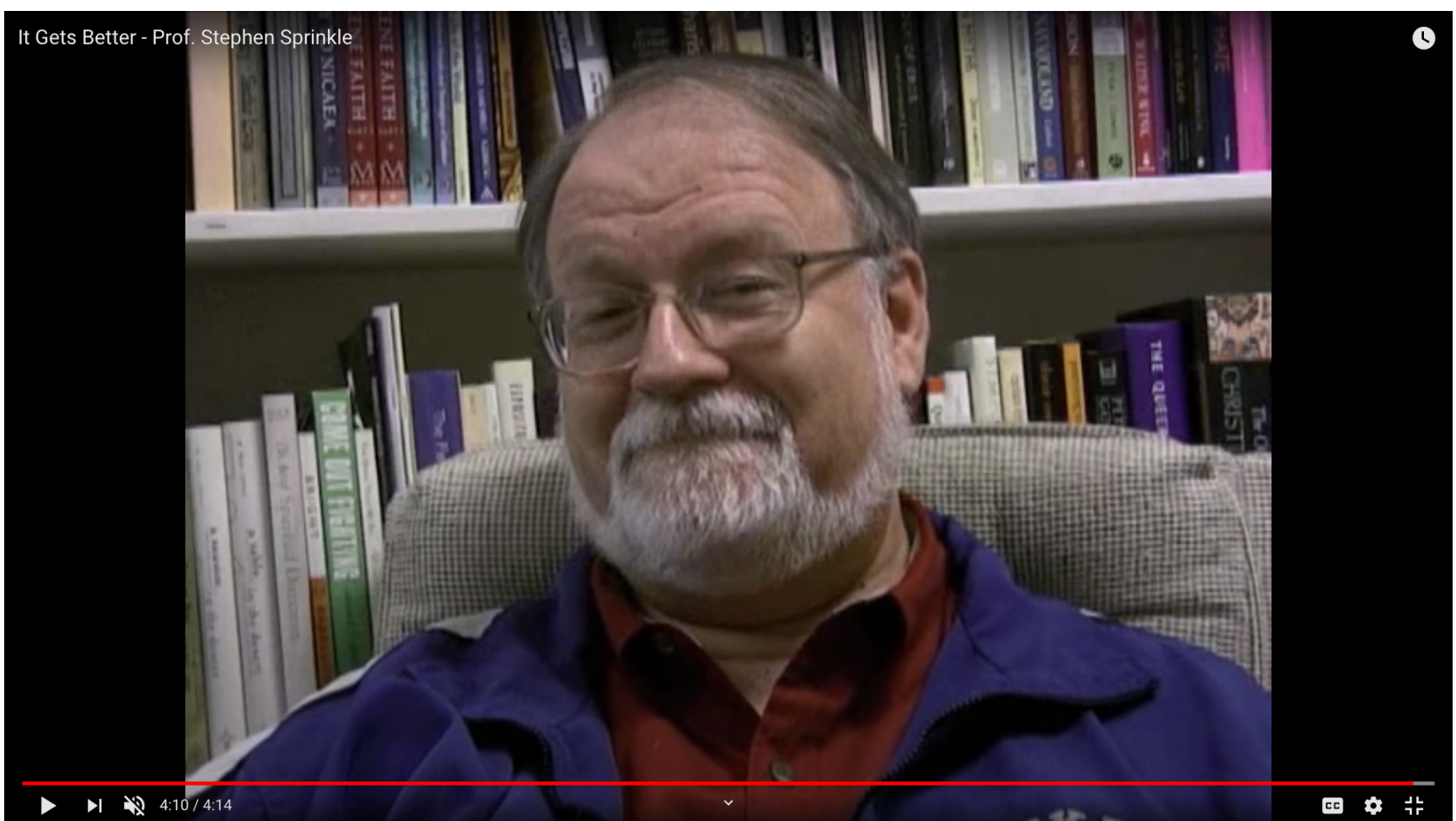
RECOMMENDED ESSAYS

If you liked this essay, we also recommend you read:

- **“You Are A Rubber Band, My Friend”** by Brinae Lois Gaudet (p. 27)
- **“I Was a Teenage Lesbian”** by Alison Bechdel (p. 79)
- **“My Own Worst Enemy”** by Jessica Leshnoff (p. 248)

HOW IT GOT BETTER FOR AN ORDAINED CHRISTIAN MINISTER

BY PROFESSOR STEPHEN V. SPRINKLE



Related Video:

<https://youtu.be/ROqzzokkKnc>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think Stephen's friend meant when they said, "if there are no longer any secrets, then there can be no ambushes"? Now, think about a time that you kept a secret about yourself. How did it affect your relationship with others?

2. As a minister, Stephen is a role model and leader for his community. Who are your role models? What is it about those individuals that inspire you to look up to them?
3. When Stephen came out he found many allies who supported and encouraged him, but there were some people in his life who no longer accepted him. That must have been tough. How would you support someone grieving the end of a friendship? How have you overcome rejection in your own life?
4. “Never turn loose what gives you hope!” That’s Stephen’s advice for getting through despair. What are some other things that Stephen mentioned in his essay that might give him hope? What gives you hope?

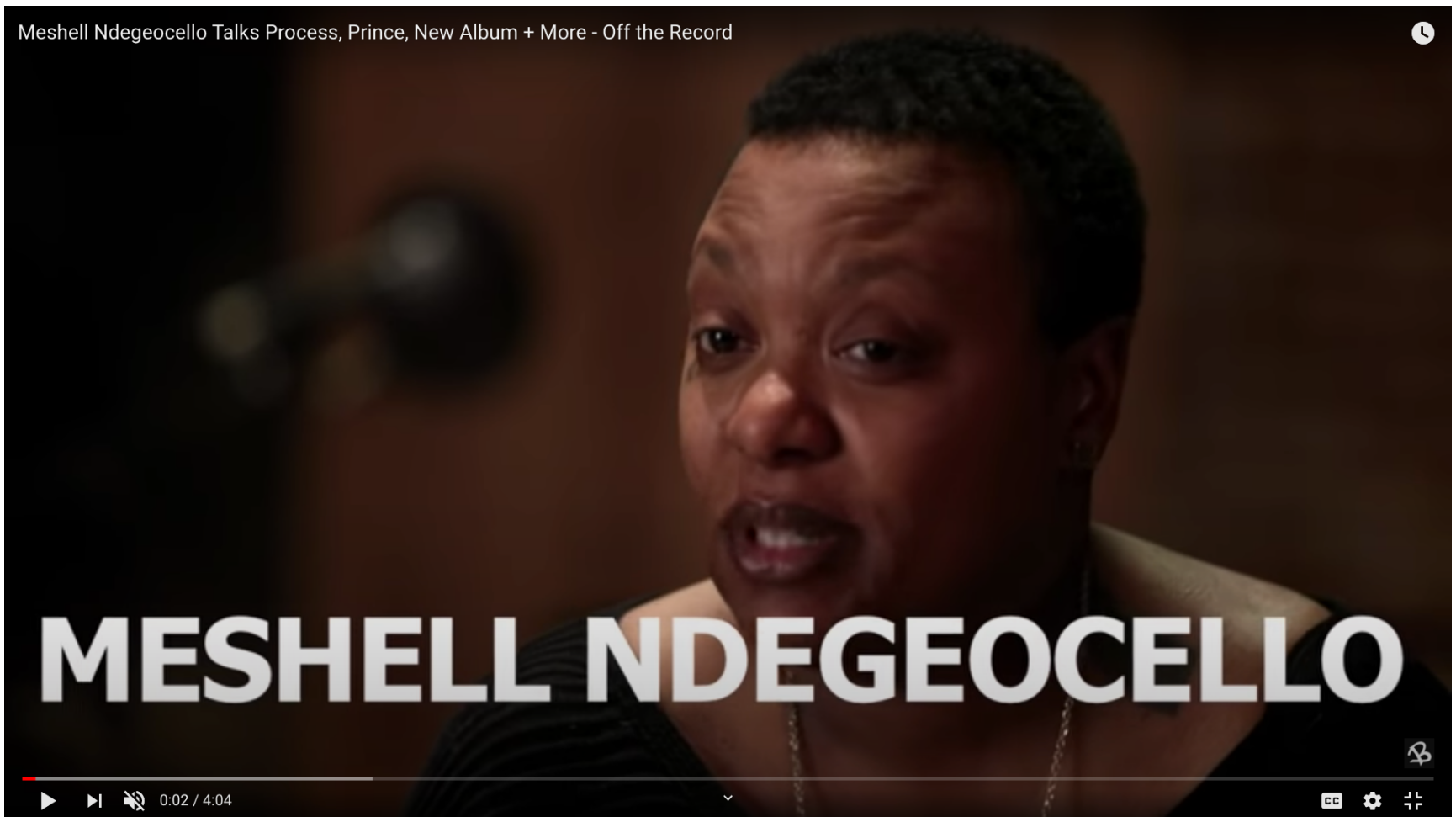
RECOMMENDED ESSAYS

If you liked this essay, we also recommend you read:

- “**Bully Me**” by Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum (p. 218) – <https://youtu.be/OtXx8ptxt2Q>
- “**You Are a Beloved Child of God**” by Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson (p. 254) – <https://youtu.be/VJOhjLXJmaY>

GWENDOLYN GONE

BY MESHHELL NDEGEOCELLO



Related Video:

<https://youtu.be/guz-CHAkWW8>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Bullying is sometimes waved off as “normal,” as “part of growing up.” For Meshell, it had a lasting effect. What changed for her after the confrontation with Gwendolyn?
2. Gwendolyn and Meshell reacted differently to being called ‘tomboys.’ Why do you think Gwendolyn acted so aggressively towards Meshell? How might things have turned out differently if Gwendolyn had turned her anger on the name-caller rather than on Meshell?

3. Although her teenage years were sometimes painful, Meshell is proud that she treated others with respect. How will you feel in a year from now about who you are today? How about in ten years? Is there anything you want to change?
4. In high school, Meshell sought out and found friends who recognized her. What do you want your friends to recognize in you? What qualities do you find most important in a friend?

RECOMMENDED ESSAYS

If you liked this essay, we also recommend you read:

- **“This I Know for Sure”** by A.Y. Daring (p. 64) - <https://youtu.be/mAXErDZoj8w>
- **“The Doors of Acceptance”** by Shaun Ridgway (p. 279)
- **“Closets on Fire”** by Anthony Antoine (p. 297) - <https://youtu.be/ttpe56zHxsQ>

I DIDN'T ALWAYS WEAR A TUXEDO

BY MURRAY HILL



Related Videos:

<https://youtu.be/KByY3VP3Nys>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Making people laugh helped Murray to survive. “Comedy has the incredible power to disarm,” he writes. Why do you think that is? How can comedy change the way people think?

2. When Murray was growing up, there was almost no visibility of LGBTQ+ folks, but when he moved to New York City, he found a vibrant LGBTQ+ community there. Why do you think that was so impactful for him?
 - BONUS: How can you help support LGBTQ+ communities in your own town or city?
3. As a kid, Murray struggled with other people's expectations that he appear more feminine. As he got older, he was able to live more freely, outside of rigid gender expectations. Who are some other celebrities or performers who you've seen challenge gender expectations? How has seeing them influenced how you understand gender?
4. Murray found a purpose and success in performance. How can performing be a source of power? If you had a stage, what would you want to say to the world?

RECOMMENDED ESSAYS

If you liked this essay, we also recommend you read:

- **"It Gets Better Broadway"** by Members of the Broadway and New York Theater Community (p. 67) - https://youtu.be/9_pK29toTLk
- **"Drop Dead, Warlock"** by David Sedaris (p. 110)
- **"Haters Can't Hate Someone Who Loves Themselves, and if They Do, Who Cares"** by Lynn Breedlove (p. 228)

HOW I GOT OVER

BY TUAN N'GAI



Related Video:

<https://youtu.be/pLQMHEeEWTo>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. As a young man, Tuan was outted by someone in his community. “Outted” means having your sexual orientation or gender identity shared without your consent. For Tuan, it was one of the most painful experiences of his life. Make a list of 3 reasons why you think it might be harmful to out someone.
2. Tuan found a mentor who was both a mother and a father to him. Why do you think it was important for Tuan, like it can be for many LGBTQ+ folks, to find someone like that to look up to? Who is someone you look up to in a similar way?

3. Though he struggled to reconcile his faith and his sexuality, Tuan eventually determined that “God loves diversity.” How would you define diversity? What does diversity look like to you?
4. Despite facing animosity at his church, Tuan became an ordained minister, and recommends reaching out to accepting churches or other organizations. What are some communities or organizations that you belong to, religious or otherwise? What is your role in these communities? How does being a part of these groups enrich your life?

RECOMMENDED ESSAYS

If you liked this essay, we also recommend you read:

- “**Brothers: It Gets Better**” by Lenox Magee, Rannon Harris, David Dodd, and Kean Ray (p. 104) – <https://youtu.be/lrIEempCAmo>
- “**It Gets Better for Small Towners, Too**” by Dwayne Steward (p. 264) – https://youtu.be/i__ehiMdGBM

YOU CAN LIVE A LIFE THAT'S WORTH LIVING

BY KATE BORNSTEIN



Related Videos:

<https://youtu.be/JxhZJJAGjW0>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discussing the topic of suicide is often taboo, but Kate approaches the subject openly and with humor, advising that nearly anything is a better alternative. What is your immediate reaction to the essay? What do you think are the pros and cons of Kate's approach to the subject matter?

2. ‘You can do whatever it takes to make your life more worth living,’ Kate writes. Thinking about your own life, what brings you joy? Who do you turn to when you’re down?
3. Kate’s only rule for using the “Get Out of Hell Free” card is “don’t be mean.” What do you think she means by that? If you were to add an extra rule about using the “Get Out of Hell Free” card, what would it be?
4. “I’ve led a freaky, geeky life,” Kate writes. Figuring out gender and sexuality can be complicated, and the way we identify ourselves can change over time. Do you think labels are helpful or limiting in this process? What are some words you’d use to label yourself? What parts of you are left out by using labels?

RECOMMENDED ESSAYS

If you liked this essay, we also recommend you read:

- “**Something Special**” by Sia Furler (p. 80) – <https://youtu.be/uQwyFauhG7M>
- “**For Aideybear**” by Ava Dodge (p. 171) – <https://youtu.be/m0lGt-jeqlo>
- “**Lesbian Teacher Believes in You**” by Kristin Rivers (p. 243) – <https://youtu.be/tZxpM3XBDvk>

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

IT GETS BETTER PROJECT

This guide was written by Adrianna Jereb, a volunteer curriculum writer, in collaboration with education staff at the It Gets Better Project, a nonprofit organization based in Los Angeles, California (USA). The organization uses the power of story – told through online video series, social media, films, books (like *It Gets Better*), and more – to uplift, empower, and connect LGBTQ+ youth around the globe.

CONNECT WITH THE ORGANIZATION

Website: www.itgetsbetter.org

Email: info@itgetsbetter.org

FOLLOW THE ORGANIZATION

Facebook: www.facebook.com/itgetsbetterproject

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Tumblr: <http://itgetsbetterproject.tumblr.com>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/ItGetsBetter>

YouTube: www.youtube.com/itgetsbetter

The It Gets Better Project has identified over 1,100 organizations in 40+ countries around the world offering support to LGBTQ+ youth. To find a resource near you, go to www.itgetsbetter.org/GetHelp.

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