

10TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

GOD

LOVES



STORIES BY

VIVEK
SHRAYA

ARTWORK BY

JULIANA
NEUFELD

FOREWORD BY

CHERIE DIMALINE

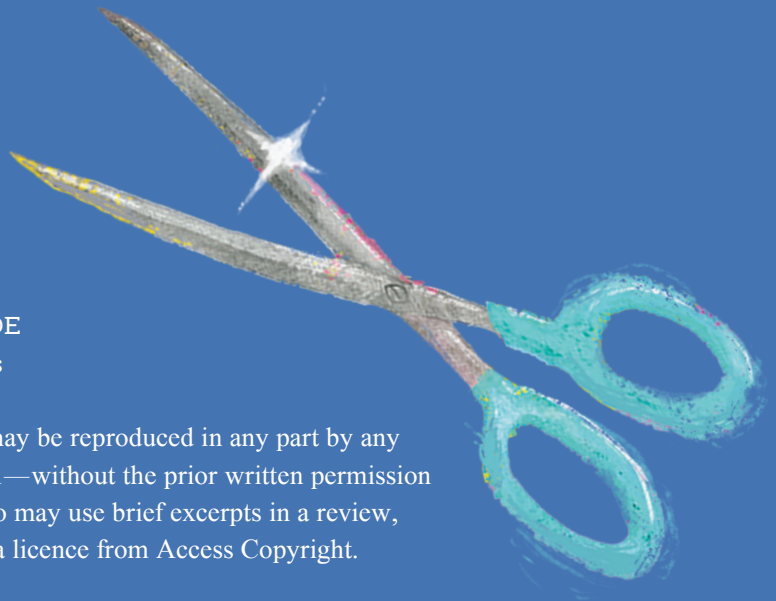
HAIR

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Robin Phillips



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Suite 202 – 211 East Georgia St.
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Canada
arsenalpulp.com

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Design by Jazmin Welch
Art by Juli

In celebration of the tenth anniversary of *God Loves Hair*, here are ten simple and adaptable learning activities that invite teachers to meaningfully engage with the text and with their students.

LEARNING INTENTIONS AND OUTCOMES

- Reflect on the complexity of self-love in adolescence
- Explore non-conventional gender expression
- Consider various emotional states of being
- Analyze the tension in adolescence between individuality and belonging
- Think about the complexities of identity, encompassing sexuality, gender, racial difference, religious belief, and ways of belonging

PICTURE THIS: The illustrations in the text add depth and texture to the story. As an initial activity, before reading the book, activate student interest and curiosity by engaging them in a “picture walk.” For instance, show illustrations out of sequential order, post the illustrations around the room gallery style, divide students into groups and give each group an illustration. In whatever form the picture walk occurs, use a guiding question to focus student conversation. For example:

- What might this book be about?
- What story do the illustrations tell?
- What words do the illustrations evoke?
- What illustration are you most drawn to? Why?
- What emotions might these illustrations elicit?
- What questions do you have about this illustration?

LIFE RAFT: The protagonist travels through bullying, shame, and family history towards self-preservation. For this activity, ask students to consider the metaphor of the life raft and to identify the life raft for the protagonist, what keeps him afloat in hard times (music, religion, etc.). Extend this task and have students identify their life raft, (friendship, sports, art, sleep, music). Students should justify their thinking and visually represent their responses, possibly creating or illustrating a life raft in the theme of their chosen support.

WORDS UNSAID: The parent-child relationship is central in the text. In adolescence this relationship is constantly in flux, and often much is unspoken. Using the text, create a two-voice poem, between the protagonist and his mother. A two-voice poem is a flowing conversation between speakers, moving back and forth. Imagine what he wants to say to her but doesn't, and vice versa. Students could employ choral speaking techniques to explore the poem further and create oral presentations. Extend by asking students to write a two-voice poem between themselves and a person of their choice, for example, a parent, a friend, someone they have unresolved feelings for, or someone they have lost.

A RECIPE FOR REBEL LOVE: The text explores the strangeness of one's body, of puberty, and of desire, arcing towards the possibility of self-acceptance, and maybe even the rebellious act of self-love. For this task, ask students to create a recipe for self-love. What ingredients are required? Students should explain how their chosen ingredient leads towards loving themselves (even if they can't do it yet, they know what it takes). Consider creating this recipe as a collaborative task so that all have access to this recipe.

LOST AND FOUND: The book's dedication reads "For the boy who was almost lost." Rather than mapping the narrative on a plot diagram, ask students to illustrate a map, using elements from the story that helped the protagonist find his way through the hardships of adolescence. Students indicate key places (people, events, things) on the map with icons/symbols. Extend the task by having students justify why these places are significant to the journey.

OVERLAP: Often adolescents walk a tightrope between the quest for individuality and the desire to belong. In recognition of both individuality and commonality, have students work with a partner to complete a Venn diagram examining the ways they are similar to others and the ways they are unique. In this lesson, emphasize the importance of active listening and ground rules for sharing in a vulnerable space.

EMOTION RAINBOW: Colours have particular significance throughout the text, holding meaning and message for the protagonist. Explore student connection to colour in an activity where they assign colour to emotions. Students could create an art piece using different colours and write an artist's statement explaining what emotions the colours represent and why.

A CHANCE TO REPAIR: Use the drama strategy Corridor of Voices to explore the possibility of repairing the pain the protagonist endured at school. In this lesson, it is important to bring to the surface the homophobia the protagonist experiences, as well as guide and support students to articulate the specific sites of bullying that were endured. Students stand facing one another forming a corridor. A student in the role of the protagonist walks down the middle as the students on either side speak, answering the questions: What might need to be said to the boy to repair the harm he experienced in school? What words might heal his heart? Allow different students to experience the role of protagonist, and then facilitate a debrief where students articulate their feelings from the exercise.

PARTS OF SELF: The text explores the many dimensions of identity, including gender, sexuality, religion, and race. Ask students to use magazines, illustrations, and photographs to create a collage representing their identities. It might be necessary to brainstorm with students the many parts of self that forge one's identity. This is an opportunity to engage in conversations about the complexity of identity and how all elements (mind, body, heart, spirit) coexist in harmony.

WEATHERING ADOLESCENCE: Throughout the text the author uses the image of snow to represent the protagonist's sadness/depression. For this task, ask students to assign weather phenomena to states of being (emotions). Ask students to express these ideas both visually and in writing.

ROBIN PHILLIPS is a passionate educator with fifteen years of teaching experience. She holds a graduate degree from OISE/UT and has worked with the Toronto District School Board and the Calgary Board of Education. Robin is committed to equity and anti-racist educational practices and believes wholeheartedly that public education serves the greater good.

Connect with Robin at msrobinphillips@gmail.com.

I am often mistaken for a girl. Not just because I like to wear dresses or makeup. I don't mind. My parents are from India and Canada isn't quite home. School isn't always safe and neither is my body. But I feel safe in my love for God. And God loves hair.

Originally self-published in 2010, Vivek Shraya's first book is a collection of short stories that follows a tender, intelligent, and curious child who navigates the complex realms of gender creativity, queerness, brownness, religion, and belonging. Told with poignant insight and honesty, *God Loves Hair* is a moving and ultimately joyous portrait of the resiliency of youth.

The tenth-anniversary edition, published in hardcover for the first time, includes a new story, two new illustrations, a new foreword, and a new preface.

"God Loves Hair is the book every child should know exists, that every person should read."

—From the new foreword by Cherie Dimaline, author of *The Marrow Thieves* and *Empire of Wild*

"This impressive collection of stories made me think about the senseless shearing of my own lovely locks when I was four years old. Shraya's endearing descriptions of childhood and adolescence are both humorous and heartbreaking. I wish we had known one another during those unforgiving and difficult times. I think we could have taken comfort in growing our hair and ourselves out together."

—Sara Quin (of Tegan and Sara)

For more information, contact:

info@arsenalpulp.com

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