

# Alliance Theatre

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## *institute*

Study Guide  
*Becoming Nancy*

Created as part of the Alliance Theatre's Dramaturgy by Students program  
by: Liz Davis, Manager of Education Services



Book by Elliot Davis  
Music by George Stiles  
Lyrics by Anthony Drewe  
Based on the novel 'Becoming Nancy' by Terry Ronald  
Directed by Jerry Mitchell

September 6 – October 6, 2019  
Coca-Cola Stage

**Advisory:**

Adult language is used in this show.

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Pictured: Cast of the Alliance Theatre’s *Becoming Nancy* in rehearsal.  
Credit: Tricia Baron

## Georgia Standards of Excellence

### English Language Arts (Grades 9-12)

ELAGSE9-10RL3: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

ELAGSE9-10RL4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone.)

ELAGSE9-10RL5: Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

ELAGSE9-10RL9: Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

ELAGSE11-12RL1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

ELAGSE11-12RL2: Determine two or more themes or central ideas of text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

ELAGSE11-12RL3: Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

### Dramatic Writing (Grades 9-12)

TAHSTL.RE.1: Evaluate various aspects of dramatic arts literature using appropriate supporting evidence.

- Compare and summarize theatre literature from various historical periods, cultures, and styles.
- Develop and apply a set of comprehensive criteria for theatre text analysis.

### Theatre (Grades 9-12)

TAHSMT.RE.2: Critique various aspects of theatre and other media using appropriate supporting evidence.

- Utilize constructive criticism, appropriate musical theatre terminology, and study of existing performance styles to modify and improve performance choices.

TAHSMT.CN.2: Examine the role of theatre in a societal, cultural, and historical context

- Compare and contrast presentational and representational styles in musical theatre.
- Examine the role and influence of musical theatre in various historical and contemporary cultures.

TAHSTT.RE.1: Respond to technical elements of theatre using appropriate supporting evidence.

## Author Study

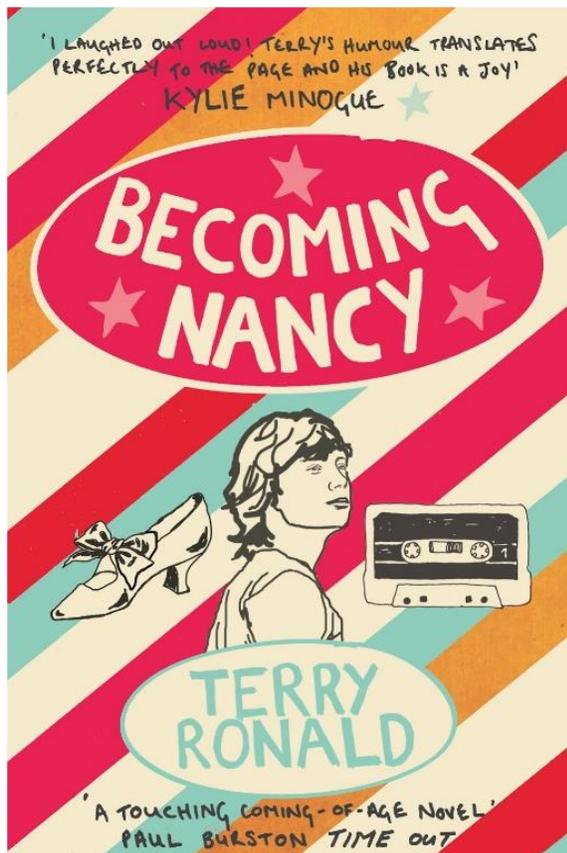


Terry Ronald

Author of the novel, "Becoming Nancy"

Photo source: <http://www.terryronald.com/>

*Becoming Nancy* is a world premiere musical based on the novel "Becoming Nancy" by Terry Ronald. Visit the author's webpage (<http://www.terryronald.com/>) to learn more about his fascinating career.



1. When was Terry Ronald's debut novel, "Becoming Nancy," published? Which publication first released the piece?
2. Which Broadway director and producer purchased the rights to the book, and which productions has that person worked on in the past?
3. Who else is on the creative team (music/lyrics and book) for the musical, *Becoming Nancy*?
4. Where have workshops for the musical occurred?
5. In addition to his work as a novelist, Terry Ronald has experience as a:
  - recording artist
  - songwriter and record producer
  - vocal arranger and coach
  - playwright
  - book writer; and
  - celebrity memoir collaborator

Which one of these careers is most intriguing to you, and why?

6. What three questions would you ask Terry Ronald if you had the chance?

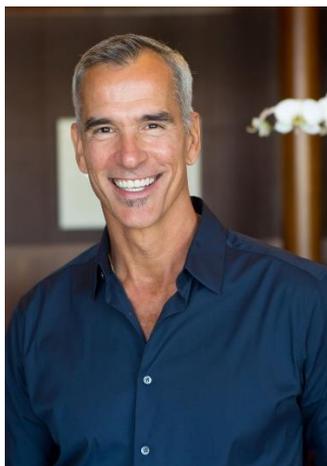
Photo source: <http://www.terryronald.com/becoming-nancy>

## Synopsis

It's 1979 in the south London suburb of East Dulwich and David Starr is unquestionably one of the smartest, most talented kids in the 12th grade – he's got a wild imagination, a vocal range to die for, and a bedroom plastered with posters of his beloved pop idols: Blondie, Sting, and Kate Bush. But smarts, talent, and great taste in music may not be enough to get him through secondary school, where, to his great surprise, he's just been given the female lead in the school play. The unconventional casting sends shockwaves through David's small town, first with David, and then with his parents, his aunt, and his classmates. Before long, it seems like everybody has an opinion on whether David should go on with the show, inspiring him to turn to his no-nonsense best friend Frances and his unlikely co-star Maxie, the enigmatic captain of the football team. *Becoming Nancy* is the huge-hearted new musical that weaves a story of family bonds, first loves, and the courage it takes to find your own spotlight.

To learn more, visit: <https://alliancetheatre.org/production/2019-20/becoming-nancy>

## Meet the Director



Jerry Mitchell

Director, *Becoming Nancy*

Photo source: <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/jerry-mitchell-1325>

### Alliance Theatre Resources:

View this video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99YWFcnsvhg>) featuring Jerry Mitchell, Director of *Becoming Nancy*.

1. Why does the drama teacher cast David Starr in the role of Nancy?
2. Why was Jerry Mitchell drawn to the material and time period of this piece?

Additionally, peruse these photographs from rehearsals in New York City:

<http://www.playbill.com/gallery/alliance-theatres-becoming-nancy-in-rehearsals?slide=10>

3. What do you see, think, wonder about the rehearsal process for *Becoming Nancy*?



Word (part of speech)	Definition Source: Dictionary.com	In Context
Conundrum (noun)	A riddle, anything that puzzles	"Love is a conundrum" (pg. 33)
Taffeta (noun)	A light to medium-weight fabric that is usually smooth, crisp, and lustrous	"It's the Cherry Red Taffeta left over from the dress I made for you" (pg. 46)
Dirndl (noun)	A woman's dress with a close-fitting bodice and full skirt	"Is this a dirndl pattern?" (pg. 49)
Aubergine (noun or adjective)	A dark purple color	"Abigail appears in an aubergine tank top" (pg. 55)
Neo-Nazi (noun)	A person whose beliefs (anti-Semitism and Aryan supremacy) are inspired by Nazism	"We see a group of Neo-Nazis wearing BALACLAVAS" (page 62)
Balaclavas (noun)	Close-fitting, knitted caps that covers the head, neck, and tops of shoulders	"We see a group of Neo-Nazis wearing BALACLAVAS" (page 62)
Nonchalant (adjective)	Coolly unconcerned, indifferent, unexcited, casual	"He seems so strangely nonchalant – that's part of his appeal" (page 65)
Maneuver (noun)	A planned and regulated movement	"He's pulled off quite a tricky maneuver" (page 71)
Trowel (noun)	A tool with a flat blade and handle that is used for working with mortar or plaster	"She has a fascinator on her head and make-up that looks as if it has been applied with a trowel" (page 72)
Canker (noun)	An ulcerous sore, especially in the mouth	"There's a poison, there's a canker that is spreading through this land" (page 84)
Bigot (noun)	A person who is utterly intolerant of any differing belief	"Bob Lord is a disgusting bigot" (page 94)
Mayhem (noun)	Random and deliberate violence or damage, a state of rowdy disorder	"You and your antics have caused total mayhem" (page 95)
Palpable (adjective)	Capable of being touched or felt, tangible	"The pre-performance manic energy is palpable" (page 112)

Photo source: <https://sites.google.com/site/missparrishonlineclassroom/vocabulary>

## Setting: Time Period

What happened before, during, and after 1979?



**The American civil right movement** against racial segregation and discrimination occurred in the 1950s – 1960s. This play is set nearly one decade after the assassination of civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Photo source: <https://time.com/4629523/martin-luther-king-jr-books-all-ages/>



On June 28, 1969, police raided the **Stonewall Inn**, a bar in Greenwich Village, New York City, which served as a safe space for members of the LGBT community. This raid, which targeted employees and patrons, sparked an uprising that marked the impetus of the gay civil rights movement in the United States. This play is set nearly one decade following the **Stonewall Riots**.

Photo source: [https://www.history.com/news/stonewall-riots-timeline#&gclid=ci024785f780002481&pid=stonewall\\_nypl\\_1582302u](https://www.history.com/news/stonewall-riots-timeline#&gclid=ci024785f780002481&pid=stonewall_nypl_1582302u)



On January 9, 1978, **Harvey Milk** was inaugurated as San Francisco city supervisory. He was the first openly gay man to be elected to a political office in California. On November 27, 1978, Milk was murdered. That year, inspired by Milk, Gilbert Baker designed the first **rainbow flag** as a symbol of pride and hope for the LGBT community.

Photo source: <https://www.npr.org/2018/11/27/670657965/40-years-after-the-assassination-of-harvey-milk-lgbt-candidates-find-success>



**Margaret Thatcher** was elected as Prime Minister in 1979. According to britannica.com, the term “Thatcherism” referred to “to certain aspects of her ethical outlook and personal style, including moral absolutism, fierce nationalism, a zealous regard for the interests of the individual, and a combative, uncompromising approach to achieving political goals.”

Photo source: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Margaret-Thatcher>



In 1979, Sony released the first **Walkman**, a portable cassette tape player that sold for approximately \$150.

“If ever a musical style defined a decade, Disco was the definition of the 1970s. Although its popularity was relatively short-lived, the genre hosted a great deal of songs and artists that people are still dancing to today and had a large influence on the fashions of the decade, too” (<http://www.thepeoplehistory.com/70smusic.html>).

Photo source: <https://www.theverge.com/2014/7/1/5861062/sony-walkman-at-35>

Setting: Place  
East Dulwich, London

East Dulwich, London is a suburban town that first transformed in 1865 – 1885. Rail transportation “sealed the area’s success” in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the town – which developed to include shops, places of worship, schools, and recreational facilities – was home to a population of lower middle class, young families (source: <http://www.ideal-homes.org.uk/southwark/assets/histories/east-dulwich>).

100 years later, the Starr family resides in East Dulwich. Read the excerpt below, **highlighting** key words and phrases that impact the **tone** of this song.

KATH STARR  
IF I'DVE PICKED MY DREAM HOUSE  
IT WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN  
IN EAST DULWICH

DAVID STARR  
A PLACE SO UNAMAZING YOU WOULD BE AMAZED  
AND MOTHER'S WELL PLUCKED EYEBROWS ARE SELDOM RAISED

DAVID STARR & KATH STARR  
THAT'S EAST DULWICH

KATH  
THERE'S NOT A LOT TO DO

BOTH  
IN EAST DULWICH

DAVID STARR  
EACH DAY IS DÉJÀ VU

BOTH  
IN EAST DULWICH

KATH  
THE BEST ADVICE FOR YOU  
IS IF YOU'RE PASSING PASS ON THROUGH

BOTH  
EAST DULWICH

KATH  
IT'S PRETTY NONDESCRIPT

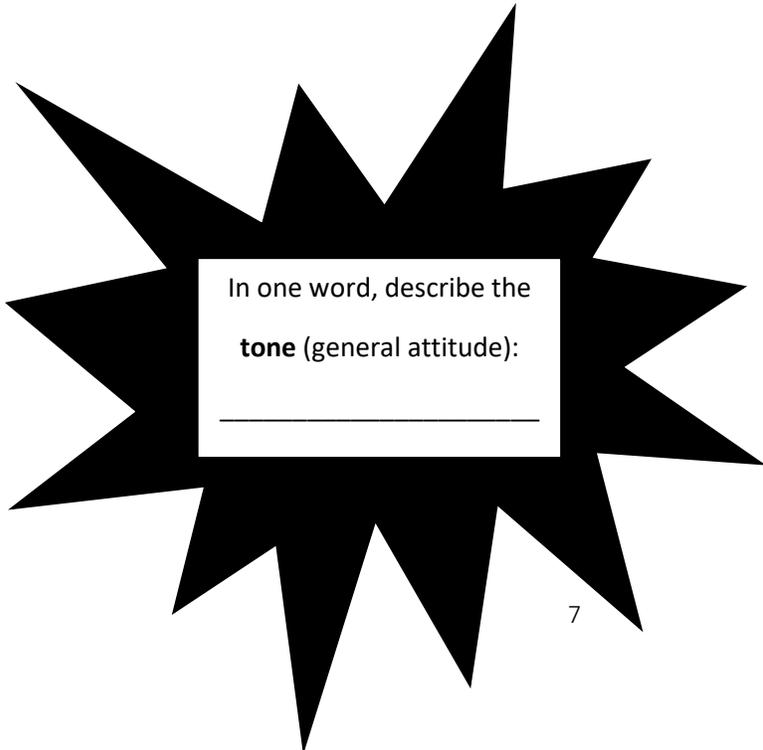
BOTH  
IN EAST DULWICH

DAVID  
YOU FIND THE GLAMOUR STRIPPED

BOTH  
FROM EAST DULWICH

DAVID  
THERE'S MORE LIFE IN A CRYPT THAN

BOTH  
EAST DULWICH, LONDON, S.E. TWENTY TWO



## Allusions

Photograph	Description
	<p><b>ABBA:</b> one of the most successful and beloved pop groups in music history. “Dancing Queen” was a number one hit in 1977.</p> <p>Source: <a href="https://www.rockhall.com/inductees/abba">https://www.rockhall.com/inductees/abba</a></p>
	<p><b>Blondie:</b> the most commercially successful band (lead singer: <b>Debbie Harry</b>) from the New York punk/new wave community of the late 1970s.</p> <p>Source: <a href="https://www.allmusic.com/artist/blondie-mn0000044764/biography">https://www.allmusic.com/artist/blondie-mn0000044764/biography</a></p>
	<p><b>Charlie’s Angels:</b> an American crime television series that aired 1976 – 1981.</p> <p>Source: <a href="https://www.metv.com/lists/10-heavenly-facts-about-charlies-angels">https://www.metv.com/lists/10-heavenly-facts-about-charlies-angels</a></p>
	<p><b>Donna Summer:</b> a singer-songwriter known as the “Queen of Disco” in the 1970s.</p> <p>Source: <a href="https://www.biography.com/musician/donna-summer">https://www.biography.com/musician/donna-summer</a></p>
	<p><b>Dusty Springfield:</b> hailed as Britain’s “best ever pop singer” by Rolling Stone, with hits such as “You Don’t Have to Say You Love Me.”</p> <p>Source: <a href="https://www.biography.com/musician/dusty-springfield">https://www.biography.com/musician/dusty-springfield</a></p>
	<p><b>Evita:</b> Eva Perón (1919-1952) was the first lady of Argentina and an advocate for women’s suffrage and the poor.</p> <p>Source: <a href="https://www.biography.com/political-figure/eva-peron">https://www.biography.com/political-figure/eva-peron</a></p>
	<p><b>Gladys Knight:</b> Born in Georgia in 1944, Gladys Knight is an R&amp;B singer-songwriter who is fondly known as the “Empress of Soul.”</p> <p>Source: <a href="https://www.biography.com/musician/gladys-knight">https://www.biography.com/musician/gladys-knight</a></p>
	<p><b>Gloria Gaynor:</b> A soul singer famous for the hit “I Will Survive” (released in 1978).</p> <p>Source: <a href="https://www.allmusic.com/artist/gloria-gaynor-mn0000664849/biography">https://www.allmusic.com/artist/gloria-gaynor-mn0000664849/biography</a></p>
	<p><b>Ian Dury:</b> a fringe rock and roll artist from England with a thick Cockney accent who acquired a following in the 1970s.</p> <p>Source: <a href="https://www.allmusic.com/artist/ian-dury-mn0000090188/biography">https://www.allmusic.com/artist/ian-dury-mn0000090188/biography</a></p>

Photograph	Description
	<p><b>Judy Garland:</b> An American actress and singer who starred in many classic musical films, including <i>The Wizard of Oz</i> (1939). She died in 1969 of an accidental overdose.</p> <p>Source: <a href="https://www.biography.com/actor/judy-garland">https://www.biography.com/actor/judy-garland</a></p>
	<p><b>Julie Andrews:</b> An English motion-picture, stage, and musical star with a four-octave vocal range. She starred in <i>Mary Poppins</i> in 1964 and <i>The Sound of Music</i> in 1965.</p> <p>Source: <a href="https://www.britannica.com/biography/Julie-Andrews/media/1/24000/110660">https://www.britannica.com/biography/Julie-Andrews/media/1/24000/110660</a></p>
	<p><b>Kate Bush:</b> a British singer-songwriter who debuted in 1978. She was one of the first to blend performance art and dance and reached #1 on the U.K. charts for her single “<i>Wuthering Heights</i>,” a haunting tribute to the piece of literature by the same name.</p> <p>Source: <a href="https://bust.com/music/195097-kate-bush-wuthering-heights.html">https://bust.com/music/195097-kate-bush-wuthering-heights.html</a></p>
	<p><b>Laura Ingalls Wilder:</b> An American author famous for the beloved “<i>Little House</i>” series, which recounted her experiences as a young girl on the Western frontier in the late 1800s.</p> <p>Source: <a href="https://www.notablebiographies.com/We-Z/Wilder-Laura-Ingalls.html">https://www.notablebiographies.com/We-Z/Wilder-Laura-Ingalls.html</a></p>
	<p><b>Liberace:</b> a famous pianist who started as a child prodigy and developed into a pop sensation. He had (2) television shows and regularly performed in Las Vegas.</p> <p>Source: <a href="https://www.biography.com/musician/liberace">https://www.biography.com/musician/liberace</a></p>
	<p><b>Oliver:</b> <i>Oliver!</i> is a popular musical by Lionel Bart. Based on “<i>Oliver Twist</i>” by <b>Charles Dickens</b>, <i>Oliver!</i> tells the story of a young, neglected orphan who runs away to London and is taken in by a group of “pickpockets” led by the Artful Dodger and Fagin. Through Fagin, Oliver encounters the violent Bill Sikes and his girlfriend, Nancy.</p> <p>Source: <a href="https://broadwaymusicalhome.com/shows/oliver.htm">https://broadwaymusicalhome.com/shows/oliver.htm</a></p>
	<p><b>Shirley Bassey:</b> A glamorous singer who recorded numerous hits, including three James Bond theme songs.</p> <p>Source: <a href="https://www.biography.com/musician/shirley-bassey">https://www.biography.com/musician/shirley-bassey</a></p>
	<p><b>Sting:</b> Gordon Sumner is best known for his singing career, both with the 1980s band The Police and as a solo artist. He is also a philanthropist, supporting causes from environmentalism to human rights.</p> <p>Source: <a href="https://www.biography.com/musician/sting">https://www.biography.com/musician/sting</a></p>

## David Starr's Bedroom

*Becoming Nancy* begins in David Starr's bedroom, as follows:

ACT ONE – SCENE ONE – DAVID STARR'S BEDROOM.

September 1979.

*David Starr's bedroom is pre-set. A LARGE POSTER OF DEBBIE HARRY hangs over his bed. Smaller posters of ABBA, KATE BUSH, STING and DONNA SUMMERS decorate the room.*

Discussion questions:

1. What does this setting reveal about David?
2. Why do you think the author chose to begin this story in David's room?

## Your Bedroom

Directions:

1. Identify (4) objects in your bedroom that are meaningful to you.
2. Illustrate those objects, below.
3. Think, Pair, Share: Explain what each object from your bedroom represents about you.

1. Object: _____	2. Object: _____
3. Object: _____	4. Object: _____

## Pre-Show Discussion Questions

1. Do adults always do the right thing?
2. Is it possible for a student to excel in multiple extracurricular areas, such as theater and football?
3. Are celebrities effective political activists?
4. What makes you feel safe? What makes a space “safe” for *everyone*?
5. Why do people spread rumors about others?

## Pre-Show Journal Prompt



Photo source: <https://lifehacker.com/why-you-should-keep-a-journal-and-how-to-start-yours-1547057185>

Preview the excerpt from the song “Look at Them,” below. This song features Jason Lancaster and Marcia Tubbert, who relentlessly bully David Starr and his best friend, Frances, throughout the play.

### JASON LANCASTER

LOOK AT THEM  
BRINGING COLOUR TO THE NEIGHBOURHOOD  
ONE IS BLACK AND THEN THE OTHER ONE WE THINK  
IS PINK AS BLOODY PINK  
LOOK AT THEM

*Frances and David turn the other way to  
be faced by Marcia Tubbert.*

### MARCIA TUBBERT

LOOK AT THEM  
THEY KNOW RUNNING WON'T DO ANY GOOD  
ONE'S AN IMMIGRANT THE OTHER ONE IS QUEER  
AND WE DON'T WANT 'EM HERE  
LOOK AT THEM

Then, consider the following prompts:

- What do Jason and Marcia find problematic about David and Frances?
- How does this passage make you feel?
- What advice would you give David and Frances regarding this situation?
- What advice would you give Jason and Marcia regarding this situation?
- Do you think it is possible for Jason and Marcia to change their beliefs about David and Frances?

## Post-Show Discussion Questions

1. When Jason and his gang attack Frances, Jason refers to her as “it.” “Brilliant,” he says. “Look at it. It’s covered.” What does this moment reveal about Jason?
2. At a low point, David is incredibly unkind to Abigail Henson. Return to the passage below. How does this moment illustrate a *cycle* of cruelty?

DAVID STARR  
Don't be so ridiculous. Look I can't be with  
you, like that Abigail.

ABIGAIL HENSON  
Why not?

DAVID STARR  
Well for one thing. Hot pants aren't cocktail  
chic, you've been inappropriately sexually  
suggestive all evening and your make up looks  
like...

ABIGAIL HENSON  
... like what?

DAVID STARR  
... like you've tossed in the air and run  
underneath it.

3. Jason frequently uses strong, discriminatory language to describe David. According to Jason, David is: “bent,” a “pansy,” a “Nancy,” and worse. Are these words *powerful*?
4. Compare and contrast the educators in this play: Bob Lord and Hamish McClarnon. How do you define the culture at the school where these educators work?
5. How does David's dad evolve throughout the play?

## Post-Show Journal Prompt

1. Consider David's question, below: “Does it get easier?”
  - What do you envision for David's future?
  - Do you think his life will become “easier”?

DAVID STARR  
Does it get easier?

HAMISH MCCLARNON  
What?

DAVID STARR  
Being gay.

HAMISH MCCLARNON  
I can't answer that. But if someone has a  
problem with it, it's their problem not ours.

### Text-to-World Connections:

Hear one man's story about offering “Dad Hugs” at a recent pride parade here:

<https://www.cnn.com/2019/06/17/us/pittsburgh-free-dad-hugs-trnd/index.html>

Learn about the “It Gets Better” movement here:

<https://www.npr.org/2011/03/23/134628750/dan-savage-for-gay-teens-life-gets-better>

## Resources

### Social Justice, Equal Rights, Crisis Support

Are you interested in learning more about non-profit organizations focused on social justice, equal rights, and support for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning (LGBTQ+) youth in crisis? Check out these resources, below:

**GSA Network:** is a next-generation LGBTQ racial and gender justice organization that empowers and trains queer, trans and allied youth leaders to advocate, organize, and mobilize an intersectional movement for safer schools and healthier communities.

To learn more, visit: <https://gsanetwork.org>

**NAACP:** The mission of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is to secure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights in order to eliminate race-based discrimination and ensure the health and well-being of all persons.

To learn more, visit: <https://www.naACP.org>

**stopbullying.gov:** A federal government website managed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

To learn more, visit: <https://www.stopbullying.gov>

**The Human Rights Campaign:** represents a force of more than 3 million members and supporters nationwide. As the largest national lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer civil rights organization, HRC envisions a world where LGBTQ people are ensured of their basic equal rights, and can be open, honest and safe at home, at work and in the community.

To learn more, visit: <https://www.hrc.org>

**The Trevor Project:** Founded in 1998 by the creators of the Academy Award®-winning short film TREVOR, The Trevor Project is the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer & questioning (LGBTQ) young people under 25.

To learn more, visit: <https://www.thetrevorproject.org>



Photo source: <https://www.nationalable.org>

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