

**LOVE,
SIMON**EVERYONE DESERVES
A GREAT LOVE STORY

COMING OUT MARCH 2018

LOVE, SIMON: A GLSEN DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR STUDENTS AND YOUTH GROUPS

LOVE, SIMON

Rated PG-13 for thematic elements, sexual references, language, and teen partying

Everyone deserves a great love story. But for seventeen-year old Simon Spier it's a little more complicated: he's yet to tell his family or friends he's gay and he doesn't actually know the identity of the anonymous classmate he's fallen for online. Resolving both issues proves hilarious, terrifying and life-changing. Directed by Greg Berlanti (*Dawson's Creek*, *Brothers & Sisters*), written by Isaac Aptaker & Elizabeth Berger (*This is Us*), and based on Becky Albertalli's acclaimed novel, *LOVE, SIMON* is a funny and heartfelt coming-of-age story about the thrilling ride of finding yourself and falling in love.

HOW TO UTILIZE *LOVE, SIMON* TO CREATE DISCUSSION

Whether you've read the book or watched the movie, Simon Spier and the rest of the crew at Creekwood High have the potential to spark many important and meaningful conversations about identity, heteronormativity, coming out, consent, safe spaces, and cyberbullying/social media. Host a movie night, assembly, or after-school screening, and consider inviting other student clubs or groups to join you. Use the guide and discussion questions below to start conversations in your GSA, diversity club, leadership class, or other youth group.

FRAMING THE CONVERSATION

1. Set up the room so that you can all see each other while discussing the questions (e.g. a circle or U-shape).
2. Before starting the discussion questions with your group, go over group guidelines of how to have a respectful conversation. Ask the group if they have any other guidelines they would like to add.
3. Pose one question to the group from the sections below. Limit reflections to 2-3 participants for each question to make sure you have enough time to touch on each theme.

NOTE: Each section below has 5-8 questions for discussion, including follow up questions, and should take groups around 20 minutes to work through. For those with a limited amount of time, please feel free to select enough sections to fill the time available while being considerate of the most relevant themes to your group.

These groupings can be modified depending on the comfort level of your group. While facilitating the conversation, be mindful of the unique identities and experiences of each member. Make sure to choose questions and themes that resonate with the group without causing harm or triggering members.

VOCABULARY

Heteronormativity: Heteronormativity is the assumption that heterosexual identity is the norm, which plays out in interpersonal interactions and institutional privileges that further the marginalization of lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, and queer people.

Cisnormativity: The assumption that cisgender identity is the norm, which plays out in interpersonal interactions and institutional privileges that further the marginalization of transgender people.

THEMATIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Identity: *Love, Simon* follows the character Simon Spier, who is navigating coming out as gay while also moving through the world as a white, upper-middle class, 17-year-old high school senior. His friends hold many diverse identities around race, religion, socioeconomic status, family structure, gender identity, and gender expression, which shape their relationships with each other and understandings of themselves.

- What are some identities that Simon holds? (consider race, sexuality, socioeconomic status, religion, and ability)
 - How is privilege connected to each of these identities?
- What are some identities that other characters, besides Simon, hold in the movie and how might those identities impact the way that they interact with each other? (consider race, sexuality, socioeconomic status, religion, and ability)
- What expectations of your identity have you felt pressured to look, dress, or act like (consider fashion/dress stereotypes)? How did that impact how you felt about your identity?
- After being harassed in the lunchroom for being gay, Simon tells Ethan, who has been out as the “resident gay” of their high school, “Maybe I was jealous because it seemed so easy for you.”
 - Why might Simon make this statement?
 - What assumptions might Simon have in making this statement?
 - What differences might there be between Simon and Ethan’s experiences in coming out and being out?
 - How do you think each of their identities might impact their experiences of being out in school?

Heteronormativity: When trying to decide if he should come out or share his sexual orientation, Simon says, “It doesn’t seem fair that only gay people have to come out. Why is straight the default?”

- What are some examples of heteronormativity in the movie? (*Example: Simon’s dad thinks that Simon is looking at girls on the internet.*)
 - How does heteronormativity impact the school environment?
- What are examples of how characters from *Love, Simon* break out of the box of what’s assumed to be “normal?”
- Where do you think Blue and Simon’s fear of rejection from those around them is coming from (with relation to coming out)?

- Why do you think Blue and Simon view coming out as a brave act?

Coming Out: *Love, Simon* follows Simon in his process of coming out to his family, friends, and then being outed to his entire school. Simon and Blue are shown navigating as young people, learning about their own LGBTQ identity and coming out in a heteronormative and cisnormative world that can often be challenging for LGBTQ youth.



- Are there any parts of your identity that you've had to "come out" about? (*Consider race, ability, religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc.*)
 - What did people say that affirmed you, or what would you want people to say to affirm you after you've shared?
- How can you be supportive to people who might be terrified to "come out" and share their identities?
- How might having a multitude of identities (i.e. race, religion, ability, etc.) play into someone navigating coming out? (*Example: Blue talking about coming out to his dad during a Hanukkah celebration*)
- What helps you to feel the most authentically "you"?
 - When was the last time you felt the most "you"?

Consent: Consent is asking permission from another person to do an action before doing it in order to make sure that the person is comfortable and on the same page. *Love, Simon* shows many characters navigating through consent and explores what happens when someone does not ask for consent and shares very confidential information.

- Where was the lack of consent in how Martin told Simon's identity?
- What was the impact of Martin "outing" Simon as gay? How do you think Simon felt when he found out that Martin had told people about his identity?
- Why do you think Simon yelled, "I get to decide where, when and how I come out!" at Martin?
- What does consent look like with regard to general relationship development?
 - How do you think Martin could have navigated the conversation about his hopes for a relationship with Abby differently?

Safe Spaces: Simon looks for signs of a safe space to be comfortable and disclose his gay identity. He talks about the probability of safety and how people might react negatively to him coming out.

- What are ways Vice Principal Worth showed his allyship throughout the movie? (*Examples: putting GLSEN's Safe Space sticker in his office window, and wearing a rainbow pin after Simon is outted*)
 - What are other ways Vice Principal Worth could have used his power as the vice principal to be an even better ally?
 - How do the educators and administrators at your school show allyship for LGBTQ students at school?

- What does a safe space feel like to you?
- What do you need in a learning environment to feel seen, welcomed, validated, and affirmed?
- How do you use your privileges to make sure spaces you're in are safe for others (also think about how heteronormativity and cisnormativity may manifest in your school)?

Cyberbullying/Social Media: Social media played a huge part in how each of the characters related to one another, giving space for some, like Simon, to express themselves anonymously, while also a platform that was used to cause harm.

- Fairy tales often include things like masquerade balls to hide one's identity while falling in love, and this film included social media to serve a similar purpose. What other ways does *Love, Simon* resemble a modern fairy tale?
- How might anonymity be potentially harmful when it comes to connecting with people online?
- Have you ever been bullied or teased on social media?
- What would you do if someone was bullying or teasing you on social media?
 - › What would you do if someone was bullying or teasing a friend on social media?

LOVE, SIMON

COMING OUT
IN THEATERS MARCH 16



DID YOU PARTICIPATE IN THIS ACTIVITY? TELL US HOW IT WENT AND WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN BETTER! EMAIL US AT STUDENTS@GLSEN.ORG OR EDUCATORS@GLSEN.ORG. FIND MORE RESOURCES AND DISCUSSIONS ABOUT *LOVE, SIMON* ONLINE AT [GLSEN.ORG/LOVESIMON](https://www.glsen.org/lovesimon).