

**EDUCATOR'S GUIDE**

**WORDS  
OF CHANGE**

**QUEER**

**POWERFUL VOICES,  
INSPIRING IDEAS**

**COCO ROMACK**



# ABOUT THIS BOOK

*Queer (Words of Change)* is a curated collection of thought-provoking quotes from the writings and speeches of activists and allies in the LGBTQIA+ community. Compiled by journalist Coco Romack, these stirring words are intended to enlighten, prompt change, encourage, and deepen readers' commitment to the movement. The passages—from a mix of famous and less-known activists—celebrate identity while focusing on solutions. This book is inspirational—featuring a diverse range of proud voices—and a call to action. A brief bio is included for each person quoted to provide context for their life and work.

**Voices include:** Emma González, Janet Mock, Audre Lorde, Laverne Cox, Anderson Cooper, Billy Porter, Carmen Maria Machado, Megan Rapinoe, RuPaul, Lena Waithe, Jonathan Van Ness, and many more.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Coco Romack** is a writer and editor based in Brooklyn, New York. They are dedicated to elevating the voices of LGBTQ+ and marginalized creatives and have held leading editorial roles at *Out* magazine and MTV News. Their writing frequently examines the intersections of identity, culture, fashion, and politics. They contribute to many national publications including the *New York Times*, *Architectural Digest*, and *VICE*. Beyond having a prolific journalism career, Coco is a model, who was featured in 2019's Express Love Unites campaign, which featured Coco on a billboard in Times Square.



# NOTE TO EDUCATOR

In many ways, LGBTQIA+ identity and culture is more accepted and indeed celebrated than at any previous time in modern history. This is without doubt a positive development, but this current reality was achieved through the hard work of activists across the globe—people who stood up and demanded recognition, equality, and basic civil rights. And as a movement, it is not over. For that reason, *Queer (Words of Change)* is a compilation of quotes that strive to do a number of things. One is to honor the victories (and people) who laid the foundation for the ongoing LGBTQIA+ movement. It is also a reminder that just because Madison Avenue and Hollywood have given lip service to something does not mean there is true liberation or freedom. And third, the book uses quotes and speech excerpts as a support system to encourage people to embrace this part of their identity, to come out and to exchange fear for pride. This emphasis on identity in many ways breaks through the fourth wall between book and reader, as it speaks directly to someone who may be struggling to come out. It lends an urgency to the compilation, while also stressing the continued work that awaits all activists and allies. In the words of Anderson Cooper, “The tide of history only advances when people make themselves fully visible.” This book lets them know that a community awaits them when they are ready to be seen in their totality.

## TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

- LGBTQIA+ movement
- LGBTQIA+ rights
- Hate crimes
- Activism
- Sexual identity
- Becoming an activist
- The power of the spoken word



# PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

There are a number of enlightening films that you can watch to learn more about the history of moments referenced in the book. Here are a few to get started:

**Stonewall Uprising** (a PBS documentary on a major turning point in the global modern gay civil rights movement)

**Major!** (an Amazon documentary on the life of Stonewall veteran and trans activist Miss Major)

**Milk** (a biopic on politician Harvey Milk and the gay rights movement in the 1970s)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In the introduction, the author writes, “For one month out of the year, the onslaught of rainbows—on logos, shopping bags, store displays, Instagram advertisements—is as endless as it is hollow, as businesses use the iconography of Pride to attract customers.” Do you believe that this commercialization of Pride is positive or negative? In what ways could you argue that it is both?
- The author writes, “The path to freedom lies firstly in what we can give ourselves, which is the commitment to expressing and nurturing our own truths. It is found in the words we speak of ourselves, the histories we keep close, the lessons we share with each other and all those willing to hear.” How would you describe the path to freedom for LGBTQIA+ rights? And is it a different path to freedom than the one other groups would take? Why or why not?

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Taylor Mac says that “subtlety is a privilege.” What does this mean? Give examples of ways that being bold and loud—the opposite of subtle—have successfully worked to bring social change.
- Alicia Garza offers a strategy that is the opposite of what Taylor Mac says—Garza believes that in the face of some problems it is best “not to be sledgehammers, but to be like water and move around, through, over, and under.” What are examples of when this would be the ideal way to confront a problem?
- Cameron Esposito said, “Whenever you’re on the side of power, you’re not making art. Art upends power.” What role does art have in activism? And how do you think it can challenge power?
- “It’s easy to fictionalize an issue when you’re not aware of the many ways in which you are privileged by it,” said Julia Serano. What does it mean to fictionalize an issue? And give examples of heterosexual privilege that many heterosexual people likely take for granted.
- In the back of the book, a bio is given of each person quoted. The bio includes that person’s preferred pronoun. Why is it important—and powerful—to choose your pronoun?
- A number of quotes focus on using one’s voice. Janet Mock says telling a story is “a revolutionary act” while Tarell Alvin McCraney said, “A community is only as strong as the stories it tells about itself.” Why is there power in telling your own story?
- “Surrender was unimaginably more dangerous than struggling for survival,” said Leslie Feinberg. What makes surrender dangerous? And what does surrender mean when talking about LGBTQIA+ identities and rights?
- Do you agree or disagree with Amber Dawn that “silence is the work of people who can’t comprehend that change is possible”? What other reasons can people be silent?



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- “Love is not relevant to liberation without principled political action,” said Diana Tourjée. “How could our foremothers have known that their own movement would betray them, its purpose replaced by an obsessive pursuit of tolerance?” Why is tolerance not liberation?
- “I have walked this earth, Black, Queer and HIV positive, but no transgression against me has been as powerful as the hope I hold within,” said Mykki Blanco. Why do you think hope is so powerful and transformative?

## POST-READING ACTIVITIES

The book quotes a number of people whose lives are particularly rich and noteworthy. Here’s how to learn more about some of them:

### **Read:**

*The Purpose of Power: How We Come Together When We Fall Apart*,  
by Alicia Garza

*Boy Erased*, by Garrard Conley

*Dispatches from the Edge*,  
by Anderson Cooper

*Sister Outsider*, by Audre Lord

*The Tradition*, a poetry collection  
by Jericho Brown

“James Baldwin, The Art of Fiction No. 78,” an extended interview with Baldwin  
from the *Paris Review*

### **Watch:**

*Nanette* and *Douglas*, stand-up performances by Hannah Gadsby

*Brother Outsider*, a documentary on  
Bayard Rustin

### **Follow:**

Senator Tammy Baldwin on Twitter

# TAKE ACTION

- The bio section of the book includes organizations founded by the people quoted. Find one that really interests you and sign up for its newsletter.
- Designate your classroom a “safe zone” for LGBTQIA+ students by posting signs (that you made as a class) that challenge biased thinking or bullying.
- Many of the people quoted in the book have active social media accounts—follow three that you really admired and keep an eye out for live videos that they post on Instagram.
- As a classroom, figure out an activity that you can do to celebrate Pride in your city or town.

This guide was prepared by Ayana Byrd, an author and journalist who has been writing about activism for her two-decade-plus career. As a new mother, she is now thinking more passionately about how words and actions will shape the future for the next generation. Her work has appeared in publications including *The New York Times* and *Essence*, and she has an essay in Kenrya Rankin’s *How We Fight White Supremacy*.