

Giovanni's Room

by James Baldwin

"Not many people have ever died of love. But multitudes have perished, and are perishing every hour...for the lack of it."

The Moraine Valley Library and Moraine Valley Bookstore present the 2014-2015 One Book, One College program.

Upcoming Events

Domestic Violence and LGBT Community featuring Jennifer Nye, Community Educator from Pillars

April 16, 12:30-1:45 p.m., Moraine Rooms, Building M

Domestic violence has no boundaries. Domestic violence effects women, men, children of all ethnicities, cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic status, education background, and sexual orientation. Members of the LGBT community face additional barriers in finding resources and support when confronting domestic violence within their relationships. Jennifer Nye, Community Educator from Pillars, will explore these issues and help us raise awareness.

All events are free and open to the public. Visit the events page to see upcoming events.

Introduction



Video/Podcasts

- **GASP! A Discussion by Gender and Sexual Minority Students** (<http://ext.morainevalley.edu/librarynews/?p=2292>)
- **En avant les calories! ("Bring on the calories!")** (<http://ext.morainevalley.edu/librarynews/?p=2268>)
- **Writing for Change** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eMF42ksLnsk>)
- **James Baldwin & the Intersection of Race, Gender, and Sexuality** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJNVdFzsHq4&feature=youtu.be>)
- **Sexuality, Gender, and the Coming Out Process** (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8R8tNsYjMQE&list=UUK_vdoEfkHxEB7Ha53ccDFA)
- **Suffer in Silence No More: Art Fair for Mental Health Awareness** (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJivBN_Zhlo&list=UUK_vdoEfkHxEB7Ha53ccDFA)
- **All About Bullying: A Faculty Panel Presentation** (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvwarJjZOa4&list=UUK_vdoEfkHxEB7Ha53ccDFA)
- **Scotty Works OUT: Film Screening and Conversation with the Filmmaker** (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJqvrB_AeQ&list=UUK_vdoEfkHxEB7Ha53ccDFA)
- **What is Queer?: Current and Historic Struggles of LGBTQ People** (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3l_8RKIfdNc&list=UUK_vdoEfkHxEB7Ha53ccDFA)
- **Understanding Giovanni's Room: A Faculty Panel Discussion** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQpMEG0QZdg&feature=youtu.be>)
- **Review of Giovanni's Room & Discussion of James Baldwin** (<http://ext.morainevalley.edu/librarynews/?p=2003>)
- **Defining Gender Identity, Sexual Identity, Gender Expression, LGBT, and Queer** (<http://ext.morainevalley.edu/librarynews/?p=2006>)
- **Services for LGBTQ Students at Moraine Valley** (<http://ext.morainevalley.edu/librarynews/?p=2009>)
- **James Baldwin, the Activist Voice, and Views on Privilege in Giovanni's Room** (<http://ext.morainevalley.edu/librarynews/?p=2013>)

About the Book

In *Giovanni's Room*, renowned 20th century author James Baldwin presents a beautiful, but ultimately tragic, portrait of a man who finds love but is unable to accept it. David, the novel's protagonist, discovers himself and Giovanni in the underworld of Paris where the not quite acceptable of society meet and mingle. In this meeting Baldwin captures the beauty and promise of love, but David must choose between his fiancé Hella and this new, possibly truer romance. Eventually, David must make a choice between his own happiness or the acceptance of society, and his inability to make this decision has devastating repercussions for himself and those closest to him. *Giovanni's Room* is a heart wrenching narrative that reveals the pain and struggle that comes from living in a society where being one's true self is seen as shameful or wrong. Although Baldwin was writing in the 1950's, the voices and conflicts he presents are still with us today.

Giovanni's Room represents James Baldwin at his best. The prose is complex but accessible interweaving description, dialog, and narration to create a heartbreakingly tragic tone throughout the book. After writing the book in the 1950s, Baldwin could not find a publisher. It was first published in London and eventually in New York. Since that time, the book has received much acclaim for its groundbreaking nature as well as for the craft it represents. As a One Book text, *Giovanni's Room* presents a range of timely themes that cross the Moraine Valley curriculum. Most importantly, it challenges the reader to consider love, relationships, and self acceptance.

Themes

- **Sexual Identity:** Who we are attracted to and how we define ourselves based on that attraction is not always as clear cut as being straight or gay. Discovering and coming to terms with our sexual identities is both a part of coming of age and a lifelong process that is often complicated by stereotypes and social expectations. Those of us who do not fit predefined labels are often the victims of discrimination, harassment, and violence. How do we think about and express our sexual identities? In what ways do our identities impact the way we live our lives and interact with others? How do we make safe spaces for this kind of self understanding?
- **Race, Class, and Sexual Orientation:** Many literary scholars have noted that Baldwin uses homosexuality in *Giovanni's Room* as a representation for race. In the 1950s and still today, minority groups and LGBT individuals have a less privileged position in society. Since the Stonewall riots of 1969, the Civil Rights struggle has been extended by many to include sexual orientation and sexual identity. But, this extension has brought about tensions of its own. The meaning of the Civil Rights struggle and the connections between race, class, and sexual orientation are at the center of many debates today. Freedom of religion, freedom of association, and freedom of expression are guaranteed in the Bill of Rights, but the meanings of these freedoms are widely debated. *Giovanni's Room* is an opportunity to explore and discuss these meanings.
- **Cliques and Fitting In:** David seems to be seeking community, but he never quite seems to really belong. Why do we (especially when we are young) care about fitting in? Why do people form cliques that exclude others? Is this an evolutionary leftover or is this something else?
- **Bullying and Abuse:** Bullying has become a topic of national importance. It was referenced at several points in *Giovanni's Room*. What is the cause of bullying and what can we as a society do to address and prevent it? What situations bring about abuse and how do we break the cycle of abuse?
- **Healthy Relationships:** All of us face the challenge of transforming the exciting early days of newfound love into a healthy relationship that grows and evolves. How do we transform the energy and romantic nature young love into a mature commitment? What are the psychological factors at play? What are the factors that lead to success? Are they the same for all of us?
- **Surrogate Family:** Many of the characters in *Giovanni's room* seem to be escaping their families and homes. They become part of a community that acts as a "chosen" family as opposed to a biological family. In what ways are we authentic or inauthentic with our families? How do friends become part of our family circles?

- **Shame and Internalized Hate:** A significant factor in David’s life is the shame he feels. He leaves America because he cannot face his father. In Paris, he refuses to be honest with Giovanni, Hella, or himself. He is not able to accept his sexuality and live with the consequences
- **LGBT History:** The Stonewall Riots in New York in 1969 are acknowledged in the US as the event that ignited the move for LGBT equality in presentday America. But LGBT history did not start in 1969. From Ancient Greece, to the Middle Ages, to the Renaissance, to modern day, individuals of “alternative” sexualities have not only been present but have made significant contributions to society and culture. Giovanni’s Room, as an artistic expression, is a part of that history, and it calls on us to reconsider what is missing from the standard history text.
- **The Expatriate Experience:** The term “expatriate” refers to people who temporarily or permanently live abroad. Historically, expatriates have formed influential communities influencing both their temporary homes and their original homes. Famously, the “lost generation of the 1920s included Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Many notable thinkers, artists, and philosophers have lived as expats including Mark Twain, Paul Gauguin, and Richard Wright. Today, in our globalized world, the expatriate experience is more common, but the mingling of cultures and ideas remains just as important. What is the value in these international connections? Why do famous expatriates continue to influence the thinking of their home countries? What is different about the expatriate experience as opposed to the “normal” immigrant experience?

About the One Book Program

For thousands of years, humans have used stories to communicate knowledge about the world. Stories provide contexts for our understanding of facts, emotions, discoveries, history, relationships, and all kinds of human interaction.

For this reason, the Moraine Valley Library and the Moraine Valley Bookstore invite all members of the community to come together to discuss a selected story in the One Book, One College program. Join us as we share knowledge across disciplines, exchange new ideas on useful topics, and enrich our curriculum in new ways.

For more information, contact us at **(708) 974-5709** or swanson@morainevalley.edu (<mailto:swanson@morainevalley.edu>).

Previous One Book, One College Selections:

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (2004)

Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2005-2006)

George Orwell's *1984* (2006-2007)

The Autobiography of Malcolm X as Told to Alex Haley (2007-2008)

Elizabeth Royte's *Garbage Land* (2008-2009)

Studs Terkel's *Working* (2009-2010)

Rebecca Skloot's *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (2010-2011)

Roxanna Saberi's *Between Two Worlds* (2011-2012)

Tony Horwitz's *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War* (2012-2013)

Max Brooks' *World War Z: The Oral History of the Zombie War* (2013-2014)

"Perhaps home is not a place but simply an irrevocable condition."

— James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*

Secondary One Book Choices



Will Grayson Will Grayson by **John Green and David Levithan**

Booklist review: “*Starred Review* Two superstar authors pair up and really deliver the goods, dishing up a terrific high energy tale of teen love, lust, intrigue, anger, pain, and friendship threaded with generous measures of comedy and savvy counsel. Though the ensemble cast revolves around Tiny Cooper, “the world’s largest person who is really, really gay, and also the world’s gayest person who is really, really large,” the central characters are the two titular narrators, who share a name (but don’t meet until partway through) and trade off alternate chapters. One Will has been Tiny’s satellite for years but is starting to chafe at the role—especially after Tiny forcibly sets him up with Jane, an infuriatingly perfect match. The other, whose clinical depression is brilliantly signaled by an alllowercase narrative and so intensely conveyed that his early entries are hard to read, sees at least a glimmer of light fall on his selfimage after a chance meeting with Tiny sparks a wild mutual infatuation. The performance of an autobiographical highschool musical that Tiny writes, directs, and stars in makes a rousing and suitably theatrical finale for a tale populated with young people engaged in figuring out what’s important and shot through with strong feelings, smartmouthed dialogue, and uncommon insight.”



Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit by **Jeanette Winterson**

Library Journal review: “ Raised by an oppressively evangelical mother, Jeanette grows up a good little Christian soldier, even going so far as to stitch samplers whose apocalyptic themes terrify her classmates. As she dryly notes, without self-pity or smugness, "This tendency towards the exotic has brought me many problems, just as it did for William Blake." Jeanette would

have remained in the fold but for her unconventional desires; though she can reconcile her love of women with her love of God, the church cannot. It could have been a grim tale, but this first novel winner of England's Whitbread Prize is in fact a wry and tender telling of a young girl's triumphantly coming into her own. Highly recommended.”



a + e Forever by Ilike Merrey (http://encore.morainevalley.edu/iii/encore/record/C__Rb280090)

Book List starred review: “Merrey’s soulful story of highschool juniors Asher and Eulalie shows just how tenuous our understanding of identity, friendship, and romance can be. Neither Ash, a shy, bisexual pretty boy, nor Eu, a strident dyke with the appetite of a trucker, can be reduced to a single aspect of their identities. During the few months of their intense relationship, they share music, a passion for drawing, and a variety of attempts to socialize with their families and other teens. Merrey introduces questions and complications that don’t get neatly resolved—why does Ash share a bedroom with what seems to be his nearly twin sister?—but instead make the characters and plot all the more realistic; we truly can’t know all of what makes somebody tick. The impressionistic and beautiful blackandwhite images were created with traditional paper and ink, a salutary opposition to all the nontradition offered up by Ash and Eu. Although the work appears sketchy at first glance, every line is clear and every word is clarifying. Without the story becoming didactic, Ash and Eu become students of human nature as they teach each other about the possibilities and boundaries of their lives. These are authentic teens with attitudes, sound tracks, and sexual curiosity (the few scenes of female nudity are restricted to the upper body) that their peers will understand.”

Presented To You By

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