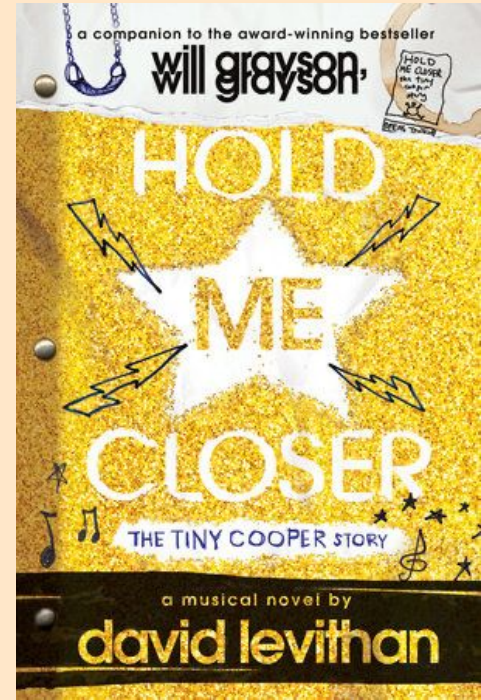


A Response to  
Hold Me Closer  
by David Levithan



# Key Characters

**Tiny Cooper-** the main character, comes out as gay his freshman year of high school, to no one's surprise. Spends the duration of the musical learning that he doesn't need the approval or love of others to be happy.

**Mom-** Tiny's mom. Acceptance and support of Tiny's sexuality came easily to her.

**Dad-** Tiny's dad. Loving and accepting of Tiny's sexuality, vows to be more open and have a better relationship with his son than he had with his dad.

**Lynda-** Tiny's babysitter who happens to be a lesbian. Supports and gives him advice about being a member of the gay community.

**Phil Wrayson-** Tiny's long time best friend, and the first person he came out to after his parents. Is very supportive and always has Tiny's back.

**Coach Fyre-** Tiny and Phil's baseball coach, Tiny ends up punching him in the nose in defense of Phil in middle school.

**Ex-boyfriends #1-#17-** All of the boys who have impacted Tiny's life in some way, with some of the relationships being more substantial than others.

**Will (Ex-boyfriend #18)-** Tiny's most recent ex-boyfriend, and the ex-boyfriend who lasted the longest and had the deepest relationship with him.

**Djane-** A good friend of Tiny and Phil's, always willing to give Tiny boy advice. Ends up in a relationship with Phil.

# Key Events of Act I

The scene opens in Tiny's living room, where he is joined by his best friend, Phil. They are sprawled out on the couch playing video games after their last day of freshman year of high school.

**Tiny:** Do you ever reflect on how fast time passes by?

**Phil:** *glancing around nervously,* We're not about to break out into song, are we?

**Tiny:** No, it's just crazy to me that we're done with a year of high school already. It feels like it was just yesterday that I forced you to befriend me in the little leagues.

**Phil:** I agree. Do you remember when you punched Coach Fyre in middle school to defend me?

**Tiny:** Sure do. Do you remember how you defended me when our teammates called me gay, and how you told Coach Fyre that being gay wasn't a bad thing?

**Phil:** Vaguely. I guess I knew on some subconscious level, huh?

**Tiny:** Seems like everyone did. When I came out to my parents, my mom made it well known that she had always known and that she loved me regardless.

**Phil:** And your dad?

**Tiny:** My dad was always accepting, maybe just less outwardly so. I know he didn't have the best relationship with his own dad, but to my dad's credit, he has always made every effort to have a good relationship with me. He even participated in that mother-daughter fashion show with me even though I could tell he really didn't want to.

**Phil:** I've always liked your parents.

**Tiny:** Me too. You know what else was pretty heartwarming this year?

**Phil:** What?

**Tiny:** Coming out to the football team.

**Phil:** That's right, they took it pretty well, didn't they?

**Tiny:** They really did, especially considering they barely knew me. A freshman on Varsity already tends to cause some tension, but only two people tried to bully me for it. And when they tried, everyone else on the team told them to get lost.

**Phil:** I'm glad they did.

**Tiny:** I am, too. Anyways, I'm starving. Want to order a pizza?

**Phil:** Sure!

**END OF ACT I**

# Key Quotes of Act #1

"Hello, dear Big Gay Baby, you might have to run before you can walk".

"More than anything else, we want to fit into our own families".

"It's not an insult. It's just a thing. Like, some people are gay. Some people have blue eyes".

"It was a glass closet. Everyone could see me inside.. But I was trapped nonetheless".

"The first person you have to come out to is yourself".

## Key Events of Act II

The scene opens in a park, where we find Tiny and Phil on a swing set. The sun is setting and there is a melancholy mood in the air.

**Tiny:** This feels so cliché to say, but I think that I've finally realized that I don't need someone else to feel complete.

**Phil:** Good thing it only took you eighteen different relationships to figure that out.

**Tiny:** *reaches over and lightly punches Phil on the arm,* No thanks to you! I mean, how long did it take for you and Djane to figure out you both Liked each other?

**Phil:** Hey, at least we eventually figured it out. Funny to think about how much we bonded over having to help you with your boy problems.



**Tiny:** True. I should have just listened to my old babysitter Lynda, she always told me not to spend my life thinking that I was only a half and that I needed to find my other half.

**Phil:** Honestly, that would have saved you a lot of regret.

**Tiny:** Regret? I don't know that I regret any of my relationships. Afterall, they did all end up teaching me something, even if that someone was that I should avoid dating actors at all costs.

**Phil:** You don't even regret dating Will?

**Tiny:** No! Did our breakup hurt the most? Yes, but he also taught me the most important lesson: there's no point in being afraid of falling, because you'll always stand back up again.

**Phil:** Wow, that's poetic.

**Tiny:** It is, isn't it? I'm glad to have you, Djane, and my parents by my side supporting me. As long as I have all of you, I know that eventually I'll Find my person.

**Phil:** And you know that I'll always be here for you.

**Tiny:** I know, Phil. Now let's get home before it's completely dark out.

**END OF ACT II**

## Key Quotes of Act II

"Our miracle is different because some people say it's impossible".

"Try to capture what it's like to have never squeezed yourself into the shape of someone else's expectations".

"It's like a cruel joke—to work so hard to be completely me, and then to feel so incomplete".

"I wanted to be his escape plan. I thought I could write it myself".

"You land and get up so you can fall again".

# Connections and Analysis

This book was one that I had a good level of connection with, as I am also gay. Tiny's story is one that myself and so many other LGBTQ+ youth can relate with because there's so little guidance available to LGBTQ+ youth. The media I consumed growing up was entirely heterosexual focused, and even now as media becomes more diverse, representation is still lacking and any homosexual relationships that appear will be in the background, filled with stereotypes, and often doomed to come to a tragic end ([more info on this trope here](#)). Most of us are born to straight parents and LGBTQ+ teachers are often pressured to keep their personal lives to themselves, resulting in little to no guidance from LGBTQ+ elders (an issue furthered by the massive loss associated with the AIDS epidemic). The only widely known gay spaces are often gay bars, which are only open to those who are 21+. Rapidly going through relationships in a desperate attempt to find the love we've read about, watched, listened to, and seen our straight peers have.

However, I don't know how much I enjoyed *Hold Me Closer* because it relied so heavily on stereotypes, and I worry that this would be a barrier to students reading this book. The LGBTQ+ community faces a lot of stereotypes; we can't drive, we can't do math, we cuff our pants and wear flannels, gay men speak a certain way, lesbians move in together after the second date, and so many other tropes. While there is nothing wrong with being LGBTQ+ and having stereotypical traits, many youth feel pressured to either conform with these traits to feel accepted and like a member, while others will push these traits as far away from them as possible as they come to terms with their identity. The way *Hold Me Closer* relies on the tropes of a flamboyant gay man loving musical theater with heavy innuendos present throughout the text at times results in it feeling like a mockery.

Now, I do want to acknowledge that *Hold Me Closer* was written by a gay man, and that there is a positive message in the end. I don't think it's a bad book, but I do think it needs to be read with a certain mindset. It's funny because Tiny is so stereotypical while also breaking many stereotypes, like how he was a varsity football player his freshman year of high school. However, it can be interpreted, especially by a younger reader, as yet another example of how all gay men must be this flamboyant, campy, and rambunctious individual. If I was going to utilize this book in my classroom, I would make sure to accompany it with a lesson about stereotypes.

It's these issues which I believe impact the effectiveness of the format of being in a musical script. The format is fun and entertaining, and allows many opportunities for the author to break the fourth wall and inject his personal thoughts, which would be a great opportunity to have a lesson on the format of plays and musicals. Students can get more involved and act it out instead of just reading the text, which would be a welcome change from the typical novel format. It also makes the emotions and feelings of the characters easier to interpret, as it actually tells the reader what everyone is thinking and feeling. However, I would personally feel the need to stop and reflect on the stereotypes present and intensified by the format in order to feel like my students are receiving a positive impact from the story.