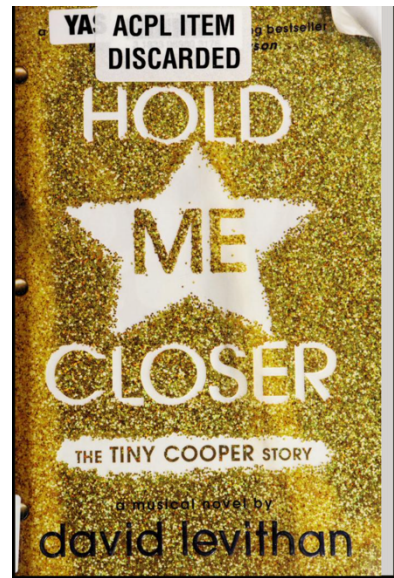


**BOOK REVIEW - *HOLD ME CLOSER: THE TINY COOPER STORY* BY  
DAVID LEVITHAN**

**PARENTAL ADVISORY – EXPLICIT  
CONTENT**

**SEXUALLY EXPLICIT CONTENT  
AVAILABLE AT TEXAS INDEPENDENT  
SCHOOL DISTRICTS**



**BOOK REVIEW**  
*Hold Me Closer: The Tiny Cooper Story*  
By David Levithan

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**TINY:**

I pretend the clouds are in a soap opera . . .

**PHIL:**

I make friends with blades of grass.

**TINY:**

There are clouds in love, clouds in lust . . .

**PHIL:**

I'm afraid the coach will kick my ass.

*Singing this line makes Phil downcast, and Tiny notices. The other players return, and again the stage is full with the comings and goings. Tiny steps downstage to address the audience.*

**TINY** (*spoken*):

Phil became a decent first baseman. I found that my talents at basketball and football—two sports that appreciate size—were not transferable to the baseball diamond. Very quickly, I held the league record for being hit by pitches.

Nothing can cement a friendship like a common enemy. And in Little League we found that in a certain Fascist-forward despot named Coach Frye. I haven't changed his name, because I would love to see Coach Frye try to sue me. Bring

it on, Coach Frye. There's not a jury in the world that enjoyed gym class.

*Tiny sits down on the bench, itchy and restless. The other teammates sit on the bench, too.*

**COACH FRYE** comes out. He's ugly and out of shape. You know those gym teachers who force you to do ten thousand sit-ups even though they themselves haven't seen the lower half of their body in twenty years? The ones who blow their whistles like they're the master and you're the dogs? Yeah, that's him.

**COACH FRYE** (*spoken*):

Alright, you **pansies**. I don't want you to sissy up the field, understood? This isn't a softball team—I want you unloading artillery out there. Billy, you're up.

*One of the boys leaves the bench and goes offstage. The kids' eyes follow him. They start to cheer him on.*

**COACH FRYE** (*yelling*):

Come on, Billy! Did your mom teach you how to hold a bat? This isn't *gardening*. Wait for your pitch and *don't just stand there*.

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That's what this song is about. Normally in a coming-out story, the big scene is when the main character tells his parents. Or his best friend. Or the boy he loves. But ask anyone who's ever been through coming out—and I'm not just talking about coming out as gay here, I'm talking all kinds of coming out. We all know: The first person you have to come out to is yourself. So this scene is just me alone on a stage. Because that's how it was. Me alone, singing to myself, and finally hearing it.

Piano, please.

*Cue piano intro.*

**["I KNOW IT, BUT WHY CAN'T I SAY IT?"]**

**TINY:**

Ever since way back when,  
I've played with Barbies  
and dreamed of Ken.

I've read *Vogue* from cover to cover  
like an unrequited lover  
waiting for his ticket  
to the midnight ball.

My room is full of hoardings  
of original cast recordings,  
singing to me of somewhere,  
and glory, and hope.

Even a blind man can see  
what is going on with me . . .  
but when I reach for the words  
they're not there.

I know it, but why can't I say it?  
Why am I hiding  
the thing I know the most?  
Who am I trying to be  
when I'm denying I'm me?  
Why is the truth  
so stuck inside?

Hiding.  
There's not much chance of hiding.  
And still I'm not confiding,  
afraid of something I can't name.

Careful.  
I tell myself,  
be careful.  
But sometimes  
careful  
cares too much  
about what people think



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**TINY:**

You throw the ball and hope—

**DAD:**

You catch the ball and run—

**TINY:**

You walk wide—

**DAD:**

You walk tall—

**TINY:**

You don't hide—

**DAD:**

You don't fall—

**TINY and DAD:**

Step forward  
and forward  
and never forget  
the person standing next to you.

*They make it through. With style.*

**ACT I, SCENE 8**

*Tiny comes downstage again, to allow for the scenery to change.*

**TINY:**

Next up was Phil Wrayson. In order to come out to him, I invited him to the Gay Pride Parade in Boystown. For those of you not from the Chicago area, Boystown is, well, the place in town where boys who like boys go to be boys who like boys and see other boys who like boys. You would think that this destination alone would have been my coming-out statement, but such is the logic of a boy coming out to his best friend that even at a Gay Pride Parade, the conversation needed to be had, no matter how nervous-making it was.

*As Tiny is talking, the stage transforms into a Pride parade, complete with drag queens, leather daddies, gay parents, and (if you can fit them onstage) Dykes on Bikes. Phil Wrayson is right there with them, looking out of place, but not self-consciously so.*

**PHIL** (*coming up to Tiny*):

I'm trying to imagine what the straight equivalent of this would look like.

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**TINY** (*singing*):

I'm going to wash that boy right into my hair  
I'm going to wash that boy right into my hair  
I'm going to wash that boy right into my hair . . .

(*speaking*)

Oh, hi, guys.

*There's silence for a moment. Then the bullies go into full attack mode.*

**["THE NOSE TACKLE (LIKES TIGHT ENDS)"]**

**BULLY #1:**

The nose tackle likes tight ends!

**BULLY #2:**

Don't drop the soap, boys!  
Don't drop the soap!

**BULLY #1:**

He'll penetrate your end zone unless you guard it!

**BULLY #2:**

Don't drop the soap, boys!  
Don't drop the soap!

**TINY:**

Is that it?  
Your biggest fear?  
That all of a sudden  
I'm after your rear?

The locker room isn't porn for me  
because you're all so goddamn pimple-y.  
I want touchdowns, man,  
not to touch you there.  
And if you have a problem with that  
I can't say I care!

**BULLY #1:**

The nose tackle likes tight ends!

**BULLY #2:**

Don't drop the soap, boys!  
Don't drop the soap!

**BULLY #1:**

He's aiming between your goalposts!

**BULLY #2:**

Don't drop the soap, boys!  
Don't drop the soap!

**TINY:**

First of all, the soap is liquid,  
so your warning makes no sense.

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And for someone who's so straight and such  
I think you doth protest too much.

You can keep in it your strap  
'cause you ain't got nothing I want to tap.  
I've come to win the game—  
and hope you want the same.

## **BULLY #1:**

The nose tackle likes tight ends!

## **TEAM (except for BULLIES):**

Who cares, boys?  
Who cares?

## **BULLY #2:**

He wants you to go *long* and catch his pass!

## **TEAM (except for BULLIES):**

Who cares, boys?  
Who cares?

We joined this team so we could play,  
not to hound you if you are gay.  
Welcome, Tiny—ignore the haters.  
They're just inept **masturbators!**

Our nose tackle likes tight ends!  
If you attack him, we will defend!  
Our nose tackle keeps his eyes on the balls!  
Take him on, you take on us all!

*Big dance number with the team protecting Tiny and ostracizing the bullies, perhaps with some towel action in homage to the towel number in the 2008 Lincoln Center revival of South Pacific.*

*At the end, Tiny looks relieved and grateful, proud to be gay and proud to be a part of this team.*

## **TINY (spoken):**

Thanks, guys.

*The football players leave the stage, and Tiny revels in the security of being part of a team. As we head for the last scene in the first act, we feel he's in a pretty good place.*



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TINY:

And love?

LYNDA and THE GHOST OF OSCAR WILDE:

And love.

THE GHOST OF OSCAR WILDE:

The pure and simple truth  
is rarely pure and never simple.

What's a boy to do  
when lies and truth are both considered  
sinful?

*Now it's Tiny's turn to nod.*

TINY:

I was born this way,  
and this is the way I've managed to stay.  
Now I embark on the search for love.  
Yes, now I embark on the search for love!

END OF ACT I

82

ACT II

ACT II, SCENE 1

*Just in case you think, heading into Act II, that this is going to be one of those boy-meets-boy, boy-loses-boy, boy-gets-boy-back stories . . . the playwright must now point out the comedy of your error. Believe me, he had those notions at the start. He thought all he had to do was send love out into the universe and it would come back to him in the form of a perfect guy. A match. A soul mate. Remember the lesson Lynda gave him early on about halves? In the years since, he's forgotten it. It's not enough for him to be gay. He has to have a boyfriend. A you-are-my-everything boyfriend.*

*This is the dangerous thing about musicals. Most of them assume that as soon as you find your voice, you'll use it to sing to someone else. That way, you can get your enchanted evening, your seasons of love, your tale as old as time, your Camembert, your edelweiss.*

*The thing is, in musicals there's not a whole lot of looking (except in the case of Rodgers & Hammerstein's Cinderella.) In musicals, things happen that throw you into love, whether it's gang warfare on the West Side, or a Nazi invasion, or needing a neighbor to light your candle.*

*Real life doesn't provide quite so many openings. No, in real life, you've got to work a little harder to get to love.*

*I was willing to do the work. I was willing to look high and low for the perfect harmony.*

83

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the behavior that results from it. I have seen your manic LOLs, and I'm not laughing. No. This is an intervention. Put the phone down.

*Tiny will not relinquish the phone. He surreptitiously tries to finish a text.*

### THE GHOST OF OSCAR WILDE

*(unaccountably shrill):*

STEP AWAY FROM THE PHONE! PUT YOUR HANDS UP AND STEP AWAY FROM THE PHONE!

*Tiny, not ready for such shrillness, especially from an Irish theatrical legend, drops his phone onto the bed. The Ghost of Oscar Wilde picks it up and powers it off.*

### THE GHOST OF OSCAR WILDE *(back to politeness):*

Good. Now please, allow me to share some hard-won wisdom, from one green-carnation wearer to another.

*Music begins.*

### ["DON'T HIT SEND"]

#### THE GHOST OF OSCAR WILDE:

Take some advice from me  
as I wander around eternally  
thinking of the love I lost  
and all the things it cost.  
I fell for Bosie's bottomy guile  
and lost my wings in a sodomy trial.  
Surrounded in jail by thieves and rakes,  
I had plenty of time to ponder my mistakes.

I can't say I regret breaking nature's laws  
but I do regret not taking a pause  
to see there was far from a surfeit  
of evidence saying the boy was worth it.

Believe me, I understand the urge  
to push all your means to an end.  
But I must intercede here and inform you now:  
Whatever you do, do not hit send!

You think it's a good idea—  
but it's not.  
You think you have something new to say—  
but you don't.  
It's common enough behavior  
to think that words can be your savior  
but they cannot raise the dead  
or change the thoughts inside his head.

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I'm saving myself for someone who treats me  
better!

I'm saving myself for one I won't regret!  
If you want to go all the way,  
I have to know you're gonna stay  
'cause I'm saving myself for someone  
who treats me better.

*As Tiny sings the following, the backup dancers school the exes.*

Keep it in your pants  
and ask me to dance!

Get away from the bed  
and talk to me instead!

We're not going to go there  
until you handle me with care!

## EX-BOYFRIENDS #10/#11/#14

*(trying to fight back against the dancers):*

Horny horny horny!

We're just so

horny horny horny!

## TINY

*(as the dancers put the exes in their place):*

If you're just doing it 'cause you're horny,  
my bush is gonna be thorny!  
I'm telling you—  
I'm saving myself for someone who treats me  
better!

I'm saving myself for one I won't regret!  
If you want to go all the way,  
I have to know you're gonna stay  
'cause I'm saving myself for someone  
who treats me better.

If you want to go all the way  
you better give me the time of day—  
when other people see us together—  
when other people are around.

I'm not a game that you're playing.  
I'm not a lie that you're saying.  
I am worth so much more than that.  
Yes, I am worth so much more than that.

Someday my prince will come,  
and when he does,  
we'll come and come and come.  
But 'til that day I'm saving myself.  
Oh, yes, I'm saving myself from you.

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### **PROFANITY COUNT (and other sensitive words)**

Sex – 6	D*mn – 3	horny– 30
God*mn – 1	Masturbators – 1	gang – 1
Nazi – 1	Sodomy – 1	Drunk – 2
Slut – 2	Depression – 2	Pansie – 1
Gay – 80		

### **RED FLAGS**

Sex/Sexual Content  
Language  
Normalizing  
Drinking

Normalizing a person refers to social processes through which ideas and actions come to be seen as “normal” and become taken-for-granted or “natural” in everyday life. It is a process whereby behaviors and ideas are made to seem “normal” through repetition or through ideology and propaganda. To alter, modify, convert, change, adapt.

### **CONCLUSION**

Not appropriate literary content for K-12 schools