David Levithan’s “Every Day” forces the YAL audience to examine societies’ preconceived notions of age, race, gender, sexuality and socioeconomic class. The 16-year-old fantastical protagonist “A” switches bodies on a daily basis with someone his own age. Observing these fluid daily experiences challenges the reader’s (and by extension society’s) perceptions and expectations of teens, while also revealing a first person’s alien experience with minority, gay, depressed, alcoholic, narcissistic, and obese attributes. The result is that A is not one social identity but rather every social identity. A uses this rapidly acquired experiential knowledge of human commonality to navigate each day and ultimately concludes that it’s “only the finer points that gets complicated and contentious, the inability to realize that no matter what our religion or gender or race or geographical background, we all have about 98 percent in common with each other” (Levithan 77).

Rhiannon, the object of A’s obsessive yet juvenile love, could be simplistically viewed as a non-marginalized, white, heterosexual, “normal” female teen, but this would miss the point that her experience is as unique and meaningful as any other. Her complex multilayered identity allows her to understand the world in a way A cannot. Rhiannon is attracted to what A can teach her about others but astute enough to realize A can “never see things over time” (Levithan 107) and is therefore missing out on the significant portions of life that occur beyond the 24-hour clock. Even though A inhabits thousands of unique people and has access to their memories, the experience is devoid of the quality of one life truly lived over time. For example, after A inhabits Rhiannon’s body for a day, she reflects surprise at how little A knows out about her, “I would have thought that you would’ve found out more about me […] but I’m not sure that’s true” (Levithan 204). She knows A has “observed” (Levithan 107) from the inside but lives on the outside of each individual’s continuous story.

More specifically, A challenges traditional societal limitations placed on gender identities and the roles that they inhabit. A does not identify with a single gender, feeling “both and neither” (Levithan 254) and experiencing attraction to individuals rather than sexual orientation, “I have never fallen in love with a gender. I have fallen for an individual” (Levithan 142). A feels most comfortable in the transgender character Vic because Vic is “living within the definition of his own truth, just like me” (Levithan 253). Because A is presented as a “soul” rather than a specific gender, race, or sexual orientation, the reader is freed to accept A’s abstract reality and apply it without judgment to our shared societal perception of identity. By taking this approach, Levithan is able to present a first person experience that conflicts with societal understanding of gender in a non-confrontational or threatening way.

This novel is a valuable teaching tool for high school students and could be used beyond the theme of social identity to explore the multilayered fundamental experiences of teens as observed in 24-hour segments. The novel would obviously be useful in an inclusive LGBTQ unit, but care should be taken to make sure it is not read by some teens to lessen the value of their heterosexual experience. A claims to be very open and accepting of people, yet continually undermines Rhiannon’s identity as a heterosexual female. A “notice[s] she’s less affectionate” when A is in a “girl’s body” (Levithan 225) and states that “it’s interesting to me that this is the thing she’s hung up on” (Levithan 205). Despite A’s tacit disapproval which is primarily based in a selfish need for connection, the fact that Rhiannon is not attracted to A when A is in a girl’s body or an obese boy is not a character flaw. It is part of Rhiannon’s social identity. Just as A can be attracted to all genders, Rhiannon can validly be attracted only to good looking boys. In this respect, a teacher could explore the ways that even A’s love could be viewed as judgmental and unwilling to consider the equal validity of Rhiannon’s own identity and personal life journey.