Event Title
Queer Stories: Writing Our Way into Belonging

Event Description
The queer community has gained a measure of acceptance over time and also been dealt crushing blows in today’s sharply divided world. Queer literature allows us to tell our truths, our stories that show who we were, are, and hope to become. Three authentic and uneasily honest queer voices show our power is more in how we receive ourselves than in how the world receives us. Join us to explore stories of lives lived as our authentic selves in a world that does not fully embrace or understand us.

Event Category
Fiction Craft & Criticism

Event Organizer, Moderator, and Participant
- **Jeffrey Dale Lofton**: Lofton is the author of *Red Clay Suzie*, longlisted for The Center for Fiction 2023 First Novel Prize and awarded the Seven Hills Literary Prize for Fiction. He is a Senior Advisor at the Library of Congress; is a contributing editor to WELL READ Magazine; and co-hosts Inside Voices, a podcast that showcases all things literary. *Red Clay Suzie* will be available for the first time in paperback on March 5, 2024. Learn more about Jeffrey at JeffreyDLofton.com.

Event Participants
- **Rasheed Newson**: Newson is an author, a television drama writer, an executive producer, and a showrunner. *My Government Means to Kill Me* is his debut novel. The novel was a 2023 Lambda Literary finalist for Gay Fiction and was named one of the “The 100 Notable Books of 2022” by The New York Times.
- **Bushra Rehman**: Rehman’s dark comedy, *Corona*, is one the NY Public Library’s favorite books about NYC. She’s co-editor of *Colonize This! Young Women of Color on Today’s Feminism* and
author of *Marianna’s Beauty Salon and Roses, in the Mouth of a Lion*, a modern classic about what it means to be Muslim and queer.

**Opening Remarks and Housekeeping Announcement**

Good afternoon,

I’m Jeffrey Dale Lofton, and I’m beside myself with joy to be on the stage with two queer authors with distinctive and inspiring voices: Rasheed Newson, Bushra Rehman, and I will discuss our queer stories and what it means to “Write Our Way into Belonging.”

We want to thank the incredible Association of Writers & Writing Programs for their guidance, support, and kindness. And a special shout-out to Kansas City for hosting us.

We will not read our biographical sketches, because we want to devote that time to the conversation. Our bios are in the outline available for download and on the accessible copies provided. We welcome you to reach out to us if you have any questions following today’s session that we are unable to explore today.

We reserved some time at the end of the session to answer questions.

To begin, each of us will read a brief excerpt from our works to give you a sense of the stories we’re telling that reveal the yearning to belong and the path to acceptance.

Rasheed will begin.

**Authors Read Brief Excerpts**
- Rasheed Newson
- Bushra Rehman
- Jeffrey Dale Lofton

**Possible Moderator Questions**
As a queer person, what does it mean to belong in the world and how does literature amplify both that longing to connect and the connection itself?

What do you think about the concept of inviting in vs. coming out?

Why do we look to others in order to see ourselves?

What responsibilities, if any, do queer writers have to their community?

How do you connect to your community?

What reaction to your writing has, more than any other, made you grateful for the story you created?

What writer did you read in high school or college that influenced your writing and how?

Where/when did you find belonging in books?

I think all of us can recall that phase of our writing before we allowed anyone else to see it. What changed to make you share your work with others?

What impact did you want your work/writing/book to have?

Why is it important that we not leave it to schools to teach history?

When your writing represents a narrow population within what is already a minority, how does that set reader expectations?

**Audience Q&A**