



Education Department Resource

## Celebrating Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) History Month

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**Looking for ways to include LGBT History in your school curriculum and activities?  
Here are some great ideas to help you get started.**

1. **Make the Invisible Visible.** First and foremost, LGBT History Month is about making the invisible visible. LGBT people already exist in English, Social Studies, Science, Math and Art curricula; the problem is their *invisibility*! Many of the authors who regularly appear on reading lists of American and British Literature, for example, were/are LGBT people: James Baldwin, Willa Cather, Lord Byron, Lorraine Hansberry, Christopher Marlowe, Alice Walker, Walt Whitman, E.M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, Countee Cullen, Hans Christian Andersen, Audre Lorde, Oscar Wilde, May Sarton, and Henry David Thoreau are just a few.\* LGBT historical figures are not limited to writers, however; there are countless historians, politicians, social activists, scientists, mathematicians, artists, philosophers, inventors, even world leaders, who comprise the historical and contemporary LGBT global community. Many of these individuals already appear in school curricula, and knowing about their sexual orientation often can help us to gain a better understanding of their contributions to society.

At the same time, there are many LGBT notables who did **not** receive the recognition they deserved in their time as a direct result of bias against their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. It is especially important to learn about these individuals, as anti-LGBT bias clearly impacted their legacy. A perfect example is Bayard Rustin, one of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s key advisors during the Civil Rights Movement. Rustin was a member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) inner circle and the primary strategist for the 1963 March on Washington. Due to controversy over his sexual orientation, however, his monumental contributions to the Movement often have been overlooked. For more information on Bayard Rustin, see the *Out of the Past* documentary film and GLSEN's companion teacher resource guide.

Similarly, LGBT people and issues concerning sexual orientation and gender identity/expression are integral to lessons already featured in U.S. and Global History curricula. When teaching about McCarthyism, why not include information about the vilification of LGBT people? When teaching about the Holocaust, why not include information about the Nazi persecution of LGBT people and the origin of the pink triangle? When teaching about the social movements of the 1960s and 70s, why not include information about the Gay Rights Movement? When teaching about the European Renaissance, why not include information about cross-dressing on the Shakespearean stage?

**(Great Ideas, continued)**

*\* It should be noted that specific labels and identifications are best understood within their social, cultural and historical contexts. Some individuals who engaged in romantic relationships with others of the same sex, or who built their households with same-sex partners, may or may not have labeled their sexual orientations in our current terms (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) as these specific labels have arisen only within the last one hundred years or so.*

2. **Make the Visible Visual.** Bulletin boards, display cases and murals are great ways to involve students in recognizing the contributions of LGBT people throughout history. You can design your visuals around themes (“Famous Lesbians,” “LGBT People of Color,” “LGBT Scientists,” “LGBT Athletes”) or time periods (“The Modern Gay Rights Movement,” “Gay Medieval History”). Even something as simple as putting up a single poster in each classroom can have a dramatic impact.
3. **Diversify the Library.** Send students on a search for library materials that include information about LGBT people and history. This activity will not only better acquaint them with your school’s library, but also enable them to see for themselves how invisible LGBT people are in most books and resources. If/when you find materials inclusive of LGBT people, set them aside so that you can create a special LGBT History Month display.
4. **Run a Book Donation Project.** Collect and/or buy books on LGBT history. Let public libraries, university libraries and book publishers know that your school is trying to increase its holdings of LGBT materials; they may just give you some of their overstock!
5. **Invite Guest Speakers.** Many students welcome an occasional departure from your class routine, and often respond much more dynamically and empathically to live voices of personal knowledge or experience than to books. Call upon the resources in your community: many local GLSEN chapters and community-based LGBT advocacy organizations have “speakers bureaus” whose members are trained to lead school-based workshops for teachers and students. Try to involve speakers of varying ages, if possible; youth can be particularly effective in reaching their peers, and LGBT elders can bring a broader historical perspective.
6. **Preserve Our Personal Histories.** Connect students to LGBT elders in your local community whom they can meet in order to conduct oral history research. Students can learn interviewing skills, get to know an LGBT person, and document histories that might otherwise go untold. Compile the transcripts into a book that can be donated to your school and local libraries. To find local organizations working with LGBT elders, contact SAGE (Senior Action in a Gay Environment), the nation’s oldest and largest social service and advocacy organization dedicated to LGBT senior citizens. You can find them on the web at [www.sageusa.org](http://www.sageusa.org).
7. **Archive Our Collective Histories.** Another option is for students to research the history of the local LGBT movement, using not only individuals but also local organizations as resources. Start an archive if one doesn’t already exist. Request that your city or town hall use these materials to mount a public display honoring its LGBT citizens, and offer your school’s assistance.

**(Great Ideas, continued)**

8. **Sponsor a Contest.** Essay, creative writing, or poster contests are great for raising awareness, showcasing student talent, and enabling students to learn from one another. You could propose a contest question (“Why is it important to learn about LGBT history?” or “Why have LGBT people been excluded from the historical record?”) or a theme (“Write a biography of an LGBT historical figure”; “Compose poetry about Invisibility”; “Design a symbol to represent LGBT allies”; “Write a story centered around a quote from a famous LGBT person”.)
9. **Publicize Your Activities.** Include information about LGBT History Month in your school newspaper, radio programming, and announcements. Notify your local media outlets; they can cover your school’s plans for the month, interview participating students and teachers, or write a piece about your contest winners.
10. **Lobby for LGBT Media Programming.** In addition to using the media to publicize your own activities, encourage them to produce LGBT History Month-related programming. Ask local radio stations to showcase out LGBT musicians in their playlist; ask your PBS affiliate to run LGBT-themed programming (many of the videos listed in this resource have aired on PBS); use local cable access stations as venues to air LGBT-specific presentations, panel discussions and events.
11. **Make It Official.** Request that local government officials issue proclamations recognizing LGBT History Month. Such proclamations cost them nothing, and generate important visibility and credibility for your work. Stage a public ceremony for the issuing of the proclamation, and notify the local media.
12. **Find the History Behind a Current Event.** Have students research LGBT issues in the news to find out their origin. Surely students will be surprised to learn that “Gays in the Military” began not with Bill Clinton but with George Washington, who expelled Lt. Gotthold Enslin from the military in 1778. This activity teaches students valuable research skills and helps them to understand that current events are often the product of long and complex histories.
13. **Bring the Teachers Up to Speed.** How much do the teachers on your faculty, especially the history teachers, really know about LGBT history? Share your resources with them so that they will be able to teach effectively, and so that your LGBT History Month initiative can be accomplished across your curriculum.
14. **Movie Night.** Stage free after-school screenings of the films listed in this resource. Or, you could screen the films in the evening, invite people from your local community, and charge a few bucks admission to raise money for your school’s GSA or a local LGBT organization. Hold an informal discussion after each screening. Don’t forget to make lots of popcorn!
15. **Go Beyond October!!!** October should not be the only time we discuss LGBT history. As stated in #1, LGBT history is a part of, not apart from, your current curriculum; it just takes some research and planning to bring it out. Think about ways to incorporate LGBT material throughout the year. If schools only mention LGBT history during October, they perpetuate the marginal position of LGBT people in society. October should **begin**, rather than confine, the discussion of LGBT history.

## **LGBT History - Books**

### American History

- Cowan, Thomas. *Gay Men and Women Who Enriched the World.*
- Feinberg, Leslie. *Transgender Warriors.*
- Jennings, Kevin. *Becoming Visible: A Reader in Gay and Lesbian History for High School and College Students.*
- Katz, Jonathan Ned, editor. *Gay American History: A Documentary.*  
*The Gay/Lesbian Almanac: A New Documentary.*
- Marcus, Eric. *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights, 1945-1990.*
- McGarry, Molly and Wasserman, Fred. *Becoming Visible: An Illustrated History of Lesbian and Gay Life in Twentieth Century America.*
- Miller, Neil. *Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History 1867-Present.*
- Richards, Dell. *Superstars: Twelve Lesbians Who Changed the World.*
- Thompson, Mark. *The Advocate History of the Gay and Lesbian Movement.*
- Yamaguchi, Lynne and Saks, Adrien, eds. *Lavender Lists: New Lists About Lesbian and Gay Culture, History and Personalities.*

### European History

- Boswell, John. *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century.*
- Duberman, Martin, et al. *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past.*
- Faderman, Lillian. *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present.*

### Global History

- Likosky, Stephan: *Coming Out: An Anthology of International Gay and Lesbian Writings.*

## **LGBT History - Films**

- *Out of the Past* (70 minutes)  
1998 film tracing the emergence of gays and lesbians in American history; GLSEN published a companion teacher's guide
- *Before Stonewall* (90 minutes)  
History of the pre-Stonewall LGBT community
- *After Stonewall*  
LGBT history from the 1970s-1990s
- *The Celluloid Closet* (101 minutes)  
1995 Academy Award-winning documentary examining the cinematic representation of LGBT people and themes, based on the 1981 book by Vito Russo and narrated by Lily Tomlin
- *Last Call at Maud's*  
Examines pre-Stonewall lesbian life through a study of a well-known San Francisco lesbian bar
- *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II* (75 minutes)  
Based on the book of the same name

**(LGBT History – Films, continued)**

- *The Times of Harvey Milk* (90 minutes)  
1984 Academy Award-winning documentary on the life and assassination of the first gay man elected to public office in the U.S.
- *Living With Pride: Ruth Ellis @ 100* (60 minutes)  
Explores a century of LGBT history by documenting the life and times of Ruth Ellis, who, before her death in 2000, was the oldest living African-American lesbian
- *Common Threads: Stories from the Quilt* (85 minutes)  
1990 Academy Award-winning documentary which tells the human and political history of the AIDS epidemic through the stories behind panels of the NAMES Project Quilt
- *Voices from the Front* (90 minutes)  
Focuses on the history of the AIDS civil disobedience movement led by ACT-UP

**LGBT History - Websites**

*People With a History*

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/pwh/index.html>

*International Museum of Gay and Lesbian History*

<http://www.gaymuseum.org/>

*Reclaiming History*

[http://www.uic.edu/depts/quic/history/reclaiming\\_history.html](http://www.uic.edu/depts/quic/history/reclaiming_history.html)

*Gay and Lesbian Regional History*

<http://www.conterra.com/jsears/history.htm>

*GayHeroes.com*

<http://www.gayheroes.com/main.htm>

*The Blacklist: LGBT People of African Descent*

<http://www.blackstripe.com/blacklist/>

*The Lesbian History Project* (includes lots of information on notable LGBT people of color)

<http://www-lib.usc.edu/~retter/main.html>

*Transgender Splendor*

<http://www.prairienet.org/tsplendor/tg101/history/index.html>

*Generations: A Cultural and Oral History of Lesbian and Gay Southern Life, 1895-1999*

<http://www.jtsears.com/genover.htm>

*Homorama*

<http://www.homorama.com>

<http://www.homorama.com/homorama/web/index.html?what=directory&topic=53>

*Yahoo! Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals History Links*

[http://dir.yahoo.com/Society\\_and\\_Culture/Cultures\\_and\\_Groups/Lesbians\\_Gays\\_and\\_Bisexuals/History/](http://dir.yahoo.com/Society_and_Culture/Cultures_and_Groups/Lesbians_Gays_and_Bisexuals/History/)

**(LGBT History – Websites, continued)**

*Gay and Lesbian Studies: A Research Guide (New York Public Library)*

<http://gopher.nypl.org/research/chss/grd/resguides/gay.html>

*Bibliography of Gay and Lesbian History*

<http://www.infopt.demon.co.uk/bibhist.htm>

*Gay History and Literature*

<http://www.infopt.demon.co.uk/gaylink1.htm>

*Beginning Library Research on Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Studies (Stanford University)*

<http://www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/ssrg/kkerns/gays.html>

*Famous Gays and Lesbians in History*

<http://www.youth.org/loco/PERSONProject/Resources/OrganizingResources/history.html>