



Education Department Resource

I Just Want to Say

Parents, Students & Teachers Talk About Anti-Gay Bias in our Schools

Resource Guide for Educators

The I Just Want To Say viewing guide is a resource to enhance and extend your appreciation of the video and understanding of LGBT issues. The guide explores three themes: Oppression, Safety and Invisibility. Each theme includes questions to discuss, ideas to investigate, and activities to implement. The guide is meant to be used with middle and high school aged students. Components of the guide may also be useful for faculty meetings, parent workshops, or other community events. We welcome your feedback, questions, and ideas.

Theme 1: Oppression- Homophobia has profound educational consequences for LGBT students. Oppression of any kind limits us all.

"[Homophobic name calling] hurts us all because it hems us into this narrow notion of what it means to be male or female [and] stems off all of our creativity. As a teacher it is about allowing kids to flourish and to nourish that creative spirit. We need to really teach how name calling not only affects gays and lesbians, but it affects us all." (Imani Matthews, HS teacher, NYC)

Discuss:

- What forms of anti-LGBT bias did the students in the video experience? What was the impact on their educational and social experience in school?
- What instances of anti-LGBT bias have you observed in your school environment? What factors do you think are responsible for the bias? What are the consequences for LGBT and all students?
- Read/discuss "The Alarm Clock." What effect might the poet's "rude awakening" have had upon her? How might she have effectively addressed the discrimination? Have you ever experienced or witnessed an "alarm clock" moment? Describe its impact on you.

Investigate:

- Develop a survey and gather data on the nature and frequency of anti-gay or other forms of discrimination in your school. Publish the results and determine an action plan for combating bias.

The Alarm Clock

Alarm Clock
 sure sound
 loud
 this mornin' ...
 remind me of the time
 I sat down
 in a drug store
 with my
 mind far away off...
 until the girl and she was
 small it seems to me
 with yellow hair
 a hangin'
 smiled up and said
 "I'm sorry but
 we don't serve
 you people
 here"
 and I woke up
 quick
 like I did this mornin'
 when the alarm
 went off...
 it don't do
 to wake up
 quick...

**Mari Evans, from
*I Am a Black Woman***

- Interview a classmate, teacher, family member or other individual who has experienced some form of prejudice. Share your reflections with others.
- Read books that chronicle the struggles and experiences of LGBT students. Two suggestions are *Passages of Pride* by Kurt Chandler and *Queer 13* ed. by Clifford Chase.

Implement:

- Organize a panel discussion within your classroom or school like the one in the video. Invite volunteers who have been victims of bias to describe their experiences. Allow time for questions and answers.
- Present the statistics from the video (see box below). Put them on a chart or overhead, but leave out the numbers. Ask participants to predict the percentages. Allow time for discussion before revealing the actual figures. Did expectations match reality? Emphasize the severity of homophobia.
- As an experiment, provide an opportunity for students to experience bias. Pin a ribbon or some other demarcation on a portion of the students and create conditions of exclusion or bias for them. Have them write about/share their reflections/insights. Though this scenario is artificial, you'll be surprised at the intensity of responses! View the "Brown Eyes, Blue Eyes" experiment in the award winning *Eyes on the Prize* video for a more detailed explanation.

The average H.S. student hears anti-gay comments 26 times per day, about every 14 minutes.
Source: Carter, Kelley, "Gay Slurs Abound," in the Des Moines Register, March 7, 1997

53% of students report hearing homophobic comments made by school staff.
Source: Making Schools Safe for Gay and Lesbian Youth, Report of the Mass. Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth, 1993

28% of LGBT youth drop out of school each year-- over three times the national average.
Source: Gibson, Paul, US Department of Health and Human Services, Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide Report, 1989

66.7% of LGBT youth were threatened/injured with a weapon at school in the past year.
Source: The Centers for Disease Control and the Mass. Department of Education, The Massachusetts Youth Risk Behaviors Study, 1995

Gay, lesbian and bisexual youth are 4 times more likely to commit suicide than their peers.
Source: The Centers for Disease Control and the Mass. Department of Education, The Massachusetts Youth Risk Behaviors Study, 1995

Theme 2: Safety- Schools are obligated to provide safe and affirming environments that allow all students to learn and flourish.

"Homophobia is so far reaching in that kids don't feel safe...As a teacher and as a counselor you have the duty to treat all kids equally and to make sure they all get an education, and that cannot happen if you allow homophobia into the classroom." (Martina Navratilova)

Discuss:

- Consider the experiences of the students in the video. In what ways were their rights to safety violated on the basis of their sexual orientation? What role did other students play in this violation? How about school staff, parents, and other community members?
- Has your safety or security ever been threatened in school due to a bias issue? How did you respond? How about teachers, school staff, and family members? How did this affect your attitude toward or your ability to perform in school?
- What policies and/or procedures are in place in your school environment that support the safety of all students? What policies are missing? What steps can we as individuals take in order to further insure safe school environments for all? What can we do collectively as classes, schools and communities?

Investigate:

- Research the policies that are in place in your school with regard to safety, individual expression, sexual orientation and diversity in general. Make yourself aware of the procedures to be taken in the event that a policy is violated. Compare your school's stance to those of other schools and to community, city and state laws.
- Talk to LGBT individuals and read current publications in order to become aware of important events, celebrations and issues relevant to the LGBT community. Consult books such as *The Almanac of Gay and Lesbian America* and *The Gay and Lesbian Encyclopedia*. Being informed will help reduce isolation and invisibility around LGBT issues.

Implement:

- Declare your school a "Safe Haven." Hold assemblies or town meetings to discuss ways in which your community can increase safety, tolerance, and celebrations of diversity. Revise policies so that they maximally support individual rights. Develop diversity trainings and design proactive responses to problems.
- Make sure that your school has staff members that are trained and available to support LGBT students. Encourage your school to get involved with Project 10 or other supportive programs. Make sure that guidance staff have publications such as *Lesbian & Gay Youth, Care and Counseling* by Caitlin Ryan & Donna Futterman so that they are current and aware of LGBT health issues.
- Start a student crisis hotline or form a gay-straight alliance in your school to increase peer support for LGBT community members. Contact GLSEN to get started with such a project.

- Build a symbolic "Wall of Homophobia" in your school. This idea comes from youth at the Metropolitan Community Church in Charlotte, SC. The wall visually represents the pain and suffering that come from homophobic behavior. Let the wall be an ever-present reminder of the need to break the silence, and protect and affirm all students. For more information on this project, see the box below.

Break Down the Wall of Homophobia

This powerful project is for anyone who has experienced or witnessed discrimination within the school system. Discrimination is defined as physical abuse (red brick), emotional discrimination (blue brick), discrimination by your teachers (yellow brick), or educational negligence (green brick). Please assemble as many bricks as you like as long as they are a true representation of your experiences. Also, the size of the brick does not resemble the severity of the incident.

How to make your brick:

1. Write your negative experience on a piece of paper;
2. Assemble your brick;
3. Place the paper inside the color coded brick;
4. On the broad part of the brick write the name of the school, the city, and state where your experience occurred;
5. Your name is optional, and creativity is encouraged;
6. Have fun, and know you are a part of the solution!

To receive cardboard bricks or to get involved with this project sponsored by Journey: Youth Making a Path, contact Kim Honeycutt, 4037 E. Independence Blvd. Ste. 300, Charlotte, SC 28205.

Theme 3: Invisibility- Invisibility perpetuates homophobia. School communities must break the silence and speak out on this issue.

"Since I've been in school the teachers have not presented one image of a gay or lesbian family unless I brought it in and that has felt awful." (Sol Kelley Jones, 5th grade student, Wisconsin)

Discuss:

- Consider the experiences of Sol, the 5th grade girl from the video. Are images of your family or identity nonexistent in school? What impact does this have on your school experience?
- Discuss the Adrienne Rich quote (see box). In what ways are LGBT people kept invisible within our schools? In what ways are LGBT students forced to hide? How might this affect the self-esteem and academic performance of LGBT students?
- How can we begin to break the silence around issues of sexuality and gender? What can we all do to promote understanding and inclusion for LGBT and all students?

Investigate:

- Read about the experiences of individuals who have battled invisibility. Two good choices are *Am I Blue, Coming Out from the Silence* ed. by Marion Dane Bauer and *The Best Little Boy in the World* by John Reid.
- Learn more about the role of LGBT people throughout history. Watch the video *Out of the Past* by Jeff Dupre or read *Becoming Visible* ed. by Kevin Jennings.

Implement:

- In the video, Sol Kelley Jones asserts that not one image of gays or lesbians has been presented in school. Assess your classroom, library, or school as a whole. Are images of LGBT life included? If not, encourage students to come up with a plan for inclusion. Have them bring in representative images (books, posters, music, etc.) and meet with school officials about expanding resources. Students might also evaluate existing images for misinformation and stereotypical portrayals. These images can be changed or eliminated.
- The video is entitled *I Just Want To Say* after Cassandra Lewis' assertion that there are many facets to her besides her sexuality. Launch an "I Just Want To Say" campaign in your classroom or school. Provide all students with the space and opportunity to express and celebrate the many facets of their identities through written, artistic, and oral expression. Don't allow invisibility, stereotypes or assumptions to permeate!
- Personal stories and first hand accounts such as the ones you saw in the video are powerful tools for building respect and understanding. Encourage your students to write and/or tell their own stories to increase the level of cohesion, tolerance, and support in your class or school community. Consider the account below with your students. This testimonial is powerful because it embeds homophobia/heterosexism within the larger issues of prejudice and human diversity. Make sure to emphasize, though, that no one form of oppression is worse than any other. Challenge students to discuss the difficulties that each of the groups in the testimonial faces, as well as the common struggles we all share. Finally, remember that this is one student's voice and that her/his feelings do

"Invisibility is a dangerous and painful condition, and lesbians are not the only people who know it. When someone with the authority of a teacher describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in the mirror and saw nothing."

--Adrienne Rich

not necessarily reflect those of the entire LGBT community.

ON HARASSMENT AND INVISIBILITY: ONE STUDENT'S STORY

Nobody tells Latino kids in the high school that nobody cares if they're Hispanic so long as they keep it to themselves. Jewish kids aren't told that they're sinners, and they could change into Christians if they wanted to. People don't tell black kids they should put up with racism because they've come so far from when they were slaves. They don't have to defend why there is black history month, or why people want black studies included in the curriculum. People don't say, "That's so Korean!" when they mean something is stupid or weird. People don't tell disabled kids that the community isn't ready to defend their equal rights and inclusion yet. You never hear anyone argue that breast cancer is God's way of killing off the women, and it's a good thing. If a teacher hears anyone use a slang insult for a Chinese kid, they jump on it. When foreign exchange students ask teachers about dating in the school, they aren't sent to see a guidance counselor. But every day in the high school, I hear it's okay if I'm gay so long as I stay in the closet, that I'm an abomination against God, that I can change if I want to, and that people like me shouldn't be taught about in school. I'm told I should be satisfied because our school is far better than it used to be, and that I shouldn't push for my equal rights and inclusion because the community isn't ready yet. I hear, "That's so gay!" all the time, and I hear that AIDS is my punishment for being who I am, like I hear the word "faggot" all the time. It's hard not to walk around angry all the time.

--Anonymous Massachusetts High School Student