

Authenticity and the Right to Tell Trans Narratives

Objective: GSA members will grapple with the complexities of storytelling. They will explore who has the right to tell certain stories and decide if identity is the only form of authenticity.

Things to Prep & Tools Needed:

Materials: smartphone/computer, internet access, paper, pens and speakers.

Time: 50 minutes

All About the Activity:

1. Welcome GSA members and explain that today's meeting will focus on who has the right to tell a story. Can a cis person tell a trans person's story? What does it mean to come from an authentic place? Do people have to identify as something in order to understand it and share a narrative from that experience to others? We will watch and engage with two poems, both exploring trans experiences.
2. Introduce both poems. (2 minutes)
Example: We'll watch [Hir, a poem performed by Alysia Harris & Aysha El Shamayleh](#), in 2010 on HBO's Brave New Voices. While both are young women of color, Alysia and Aysha aren't transgender. Afterwards, we'll watch [A Powerful Poem About What It Means To Be Transgender](#) performed by Lee Mokobe a trans man, an award-winning poet, and a 2015 TED Fellow from Cape Town, South Africa. Let's have notebooks and pens ready to record our thoughts on the differences between their poems and each poem's most powerful moments.
3. Play "Hir." (3 minutes)
4. Play *A Powerful Poem About What It Means To Be Transgender* (5 minutes)
5. Share initial thoughts on the poems. (5 minutes)
6. Ask GSA members the Group Question and save time for a written reflection (30 minutes).

From *Hir*

Melissa
The teacher asks,
And she says nothing because she is not here,
And Melissa has never been here,
Because Melissa is just some abstract jumble of syllables that doesn't fit her position,
She is not what she seems,
She doesn't want to have to explain to her mother for the 232nd time why she doesn't want to wear a dress to prom,
Doesn't paint her face it's cause her whole body is painted on.

From *A Powerful Poem...*

Naturally, I did not come out of the closet.
The kids at my school opened it without permission.
Called me by a name I didn't recognize,

said, “lesbian,”
but I was more boy than girl, more Ken than Barbie
It had nothing to do with hating my body,
I just love it enough to let it go,
I treat it like a house,
and when you’re house is falling apart
you do not evacuate.

Group Question

a) Is it important for people to their own stories? How can folks tell the stories of others respectfully? If at all.

7. Give GSA members five minutes to write reflections. A suggested prompt being: I would trust someone else to tell me story if and only if...

8. Share out reflections in small groups or altogether.

Want to Do More?

- Reach out to your local LGBT center or trans advocacy group. Ask if there is any programming focused on trans folks telling their stories. If so, ask if the group would come present in the GSA or collaborate on producing a [story slam](#).
- Research the Trans Oral History Project and explore their [I Live for Trans Education youth Toolkit](#). Also, [check out their video series and interviews](#) with Miss Major, a celebrated trans activist renowned for her involvement with the Stonewall riots, and trans youth of all ages. What stories from GSA members could be added? Invite The Trans Oral History Project to your school or GSA.

Did your GSA participate in this activity? Tell us how it went and what could have been better! Email us at students@glsen.org

- **Note:** A full version of *Hir* can be found via [Unheard Voices – Understanding Gender Identity](#)