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| Using the Curriculum |
| Amnesty International gave the name "Breaking the Silence" to its first international campaign in 1994 on behalf of the rights of sexual minorities. Such a name has an ironic twist when used to describe human rights education about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights. Though teachers, administrators, and textbook publishers are often hesitant to talk about sexual orientation, our schools are hardly silent.  Taunts of "faggot," "lesbo," and "homo" make the hallways a hostile place for many students. A 1993 survey for the American Association of University Women noted that male students in the 8th through 11th grades believed that being called gay was a worse form of sexual harassment than having their clothes pulled off or being forced to engage in a sex act. Parents and pressure groups argue over books in the school library and the curricular content of classes. The American Library Association reports that one of the "most challenged" books of the 1990s was Daddy�s Roommate,a children�s picture book illustrating a loving relationship between a young boy, his father, and his father�s male partner. One fifth grade teacher in California was disciplined for allowing a 15 minute, student-initiated discussion of the "coming out" episode of the television show Ellen, a moment in television history that made the cover of Time magazine.  Some of the sounds "breaking the silence" are coming from students seeking justice and dignity for all regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity. High school students in Bremerton, Washington rejected a proposal to oust student council members who were openly homosexual. A group of Raleigh, North Carolina high school students handed out fliers responding to posters ridiculing gays. In 1993, Massachusetts became the first state to outlaw discrimination against gay and lesbian students in public schools. The measure was signed into law in large part because of work by gay and straight students who held marches and rallies, lobbied legislators, and testified at State House committees. Connecticut, Wisconsin, and California have since followed suit.  This curriculum is intended to further thoughtful examination and responsible action among high school students about LGBT issues. Unlike other curricula, however, this discussion is not in the context of civil or political rights but in the broader context of human rights. These rights, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, include, among others, the right to education, identity, security, assembly, expression, employment, health, and family�all relevant to the current discussion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights.  The activities in this curriculum promote appropriate action in addition to reflection and discussion. Students are asked to take responsibility for the homophobia that causes human rights abuses. This homophobia may be in their schools in the form of harassment or violence against gay students, in their community during referenda elections seeking to deny gays and lesbians their equal rights, or in the world when persons are imprisoned, tortured, and executed for their consensual relationships with adults of the same sex. This curriculum prepares students for responding in meaningful ways to such challenges.  The activities in this curriculum can be taught individually or all together in sequence. The more they are integrated into general classroom investigations of human rights, the better since such integration allows students to see LGBT rights even more clearly in a human rights framework. While this curriculum was written specifically with an audience of secondary school age students in mind, the activities can be adapted for middle school students as well as adults engaged in anti-homophobia training.  As a whole, the activities in this curriculum aim not only to balance examination of and action on behalf of global and local issues, but also to help students understand how the local and global issues are connected. When students and staff create a safe school environment for sexual minority youth, they ensure all students with equal access to education and they engender respect that can contribute to appreciation for the human rights of all. In schools where students and faculty do not feel comfortable bringing up the institution�s homophobia, the activities with an international human rights focus can provide an opportunity for introducing discussion of the rights of sexual minorities that may lead back to examination of the school. In other schools, students may be concerned about their own setting, but lack knowledge about the larger international human rights context for addressing homophobia. In such cases, the activities about the local context can become the springboard for looking at the larger world.  Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rights: A Human Rights Perspective also balances the objective and the subjective. For many teens, sexual orientation and gender identity can be one of the most difficult topics to discuss seriously. However, activities like those featured in this curriculum, role playing and case studies from around the world, allow students to engage in serious discussion about human rights and sexuality without making their own sexual orientation or gender identity the issue. Of course, in many schools, students� real or supposed sexual orientation is often the issue, and young people are ready to discuss the topic with adults who can provide needed information and new perspectives. This curriculum provides both facts and a variety of perspectives on what human rights means for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons.  Drawing on this information and these perspectives, teachers can address another dilemma in teaching about human rights and sexual orientation and gender identity�balancing a safe environment for all students while at the same time encouraging the free flow of ideas and opinions. Again, the activities in this curriculum have been developed with this balancing act in mind. Role plays, for example, allow students to present a variety of viewpoints, including homophobic ones, for discussion and analysis without the discussion devolving into personal attacks. Such methods allow teachers and students to examine and judge ideas rather than each other. Where students and teachers believe they are ready to connect objective discussion to more personal reflection, the activities provide opportunities to do so.  Whether the discussion focuses on human rights abuses around the globe or in the school halls, this curriculum is intended to help students realize their responsibility to take action to promote human rights and respond to their abuse. Through such action, we can insure schools and a world recognizing and celebrating human rights for all. |
| Introduction:  UNDERSTANDING LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER RIGHTS AS HUMAN RIGHTS |
| In 1948, the 56 members of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Recognized as one of the most influential and inspirational statements of human rights, the UDHR proclaims that recognizing the �inherent dignity and . . . the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.�  Human rights are the rights a person has simply because he or she is a human being. Human rights are inalienable: you cannot lose these rights any more than you can cease being human. Human rights are indivisible: you cannot be denied a right because it is �less important� than another right. Human rights are interdependent: all human rights are part of a complementary framework. For example, the right to participate in government is directly affected by the right to free expression, to get an education, and even to obtain the necessities of life.  Human rights are also defined as those basic standards people need to live in dignity. To violate someone�s human rights is to treat that person as less than a human being. To advocate for human rights is to demand that the human dignity of all people be respected. In claiming these rights, everyone also accepts the responsibility not to infringe on the rights of others and to support those whose rights are abused or denied.1  Since the adoption of the UDHR, the concept of human rights has entered international law and popular consciousness in much of the world. At the same time, many governments around the world continue to violate the human rights of their citizens. Consider the following news items from 1998, the year of the UDHR�s fiftieth anniversary:  � In Afghanistan, at least five men convicted of homosexuality were placed next to walls and then buried as the walls were toppled on top of them.2  � In Mexico, the Citizen�s Commission Against Homophobic Hate Crimes documented 125 murders of homosexuals, many including extreme violence. Many of the murders were dismissed by police who refused to investigate them.  � In the United States, Matthew Shepard, a 21-year-old student at the University of Wyoming, was brutally beaten in an attack motivated in part by his homosexuality. His skull was smashed, his face and head mutilated, and his body tied to a wooden ranch fence in freezing weather. He died several days after being found by bicyclists who, at first, mistook his body for a scarecrow.  1 This definition is taken from Nancy Flowers (ed.), Human Rights Here and Now: Celebrating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Minneapolis: Human Rights Resource Center, 1998. This curriculum guide contains more information on the history of human rights and lessons introducing human rights to K-12 students.  2 The bullet points in this and the following two sections are taken from �The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission Celebrates the 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.� Press release, December 1998.  As these cases highlight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons are subject to human rights abuse in countries in every region of the world. The violations they face include killing as well as imprisonment, torture, and abuses aimed specifically at sexual minorities, such as practices aimed at forcibly �changing� their sexual orientation. These violations of UDHR Article 3, �the right to life, liberty, and security of person,� are only the most extreme examples of violations of the rights of sexual minorities.  Also during 1998:  � In Argentina, Buenos Aires police raided gay bars during October detaining over 100 persons. (Article 20 of the UDHR states that everyone has the �right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.�)  � In Sweden, authorities deported a gay asylum seeker from Iran. Repatriated Iranian gays face possible imprisonment or death in Iran. (Article 14 of the UDHR declares the �right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.�)  � In India, theaters showing Fire, are attacked because of the movie�s lesbian story line. Many theaters subsequently refuse to screen the film. (Article 27 of the UDHR holds that all have the �right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community.�)  � In the United States, two adult men are arrested in Houston under Texas� sodomy law for consensual homosexual conduct in private. Though rarely enforced, about half of all U.S. states have similar laws. (Article 7 of the UDHR states that �All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law.� In addition, Article 12 maintains, �No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honor and reputation.�)  These cases demonstrate how human rights violations of LGBT persons extend beyond their rights to life and liberty and include the full spectrum of rights accorded in the UDHR.  Not all the news fifty years after passage of the UDHR is so bleak, however.  � In South Africa and Ecuador, newly adopted constitutions pledge equality before the law (Article 7 of the UDHR) regardless of sexual orientation. Also in South Africa, the highest constitutional court struck down laws criminalizing homosexuality as a violation of the right to privacy (Article 12 of the UDHR) and because they affected the �dignity, personhood, and identity of lesbian and gay people.�  � In Canada, that nation�s Supreme Court ruled that when the Alberta legislature omitted �sexual orientation� from the province�s anti-discrimination laws, it was violating the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The court ruled that such protection should be read into the law. (Article 8 of the UDHR describes the �right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental human rights granted by the constitution or the law.�)  � In Colombia, the Constitutional Court decreed that private religious schools cannot ban gay students and that firing gay teachers is unconstitutional. (Article 26 of the UDHR says everyone has the �right to education.�)  These last three snapshots from 1998 illustrate that the rights of sexual minorities are increasingly being seen as human rights. Many of those who drafted the UDHR probably would not have considered the rights of sexual minorities in 1948, given the homophobia and general lack of consciousness about LGBT issues at that time.  The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drafted in reaction to the inhumanity committed during World War II. Like Jews, gypsies, and the disabled, gay men and lesbians were singled out by the Nazis for slave labor and extermination. As many as 100,000 gay men were sent to the concentration camps where they were killed or worked to death. They were required to wear pink triangles, a symbol that has since come to stand for the international gay rights movement. Several thousand lesbians, considered �anti-social elements� and forced to wear black triangles, met similar fates. Despite these atrocities, the UDHR contains no specific guarantees of fundamental human rights regardless of sexual orientation.  While subsequent human rights documents have addressed discrimination of other specific groups based on age, race, or sex, no international human rights document explicitly mentions sexual orientation or gender identity. As the examples describing abuses against sexual minorities at the beginning of this introduction suggest, such protection is needed and deserved. For this reason, evolving conceptions of human rights that come to include sexual orientation, such as those in South Africa, Ecuador, Canada, and Colombia, are especially significant.  In theory, general human rights documents protecting the rights of all should also protect the rights of sexual minorities. In fact, many persons opposing specific protections of the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons often argue that sexual minorities are already covered by existing law and thus no further mention is needed. In some cases, general human rights laws have been used specifically to secure rights for lesbians and gays. For example, based on the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, laws against homosexual acts between consenting adults were struck down in Ireland and Cyprus.  While lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons are winning victories based on general human rights law, just as often these laws fail to provide sexual minorities with necessary protection from human rights abuses for a number of reasons. Sexual minorities often fail to report violence against them. They may fear their sexual orientation will be made public, making them or their families targets for further violence. They may fear that their complaints will not be taken seriously or that such complaints will be used as reprisals against them. For good reason, they may lack trust in the authorities who are supposed to protect them. In many countries, police are some of the worst violators of sexual minorities� human rights. For example, as this is being written, Amnesty International reports that Entre Amigos, an organization in El Salvador that provides sex education to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and trans gender persons, as well as the general public, is the target of intimidation and violence, including killings and death threats from members of the National Civilian Police.3  3 Amnesty International Urgent Action, Extra 159/99, Fear for Safety/Death threats, El Salvador, 12 November 1999.  In many countries, sexual minorities are so marginalized, they lack the most basic resources to defend themselves, publicize abuses, or rally support. For example, such an environment made it easier for the President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, to compare lesbians and gays to pigs. In 1996 his government prevented a gay and lesbian organization from participating in an international book fair in Harare, the capital. He said, �I find it extremely outrageous and repugnant to my human conscience that such repulsive organizations, like those of homosexuals, who offend both against the laws of nature and the morals and religious beliefs espoused by our society, should have any advocate in our midst and even elsewhere in the world.�4  Governments also hide their persecution of sexual minorities using the cover of other legal charges. Men and women who are imprisoned, tortured, and even executed for no reason other than their sexual orientation or gender identity are often falsely charged with other crimes such as �vagrancy,� �hooliganism,� and �causing a public disturbance.� In some countries, declaring oneself gay is seen as �causing a public disturbance.� Once arrested, sexual minorities are sometimes subjected to cruel and unusual forms of punishment, including bogus �medical treatments� to �cure� them of their �disease.�  As a result of cultural and religious taboos, some governments are reluctant even to admit the existence of gays and lesbians. Not surprisingly, these same governments are even less willing to protect their human rights. They claim that abuses against sexual minorities are carried out by individuals and that the government cannot control such actions, ignoring that most countries have laws that do protect individuals from persecution based on religion or race by other individuals.  In some countries, protection for gays and lesbians may be labeled a foreign, �western� concept being forced upon them. In other countries, governments maintain the right to discriminate against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons based on religious authority and criminal law. Such laws, however, are vulnerable to challenge under international law. In 1994, the UN Human Rights Committee ruled that laws criminalizing homosexual acts in the Australian state of Tasmania violated Australia�s obligations under Articles 2 (non-discrimination) and 17 (right to privacy) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In 1997, Tasmania repealed its anti-gay law.  One of the most powerful ways to promote the continued evolution of LGBT rights as human rights and to interrupt the cycle of abuses against sexual minorities is through human rights education. Such education includes learning about human rights (for example, violations of rights and international laws protecting rights) and learning how to respect others and support and defend their human rights. Obviously, schools can play a key role in creating a culture that supports the human rights of all, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons. Ironically, schools are sometimes among the least safe environments for LGBT youth.  Human Rights Watch, the largest U.S.-based human rights organization, is currently investi gating whether the treatment of LGBT youth in schools constitutes a violation of fundamental  4 Quoted in Amnesty International, Breaking the Silence: Human Rights Violations Based on Sexual Orientation. London, 1997: 38.  human rights. Their investigation was initiated after a conversation with represen tatives from the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund. Lambda and GLSEN argued that youth under the age of 16 are legally required to attend school and that parents turn over their responsibility for the safety and well-being of their children to teachers and administrators. Schools, therefore, become custodial settings, responsible for the well-being of those placed in their charge. While human rights organizations have paid careful attention to the treatment of those placed in custodial institutions such as prisons and psychiatric hospitals, no human rights organization has looked at schools in the same way using a human rights perspective.  Such attention is needed in schools. GLSEN has collected compelling evidence that homophobia in schools is destructive to the education of all students, not only LGBT students who are direct targets. Straight students have been abused after being mistaken for gay, and all straight students are shortchanged a lesson in respect when school culture routinely marginalizes some students because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. In addition to the right to an education (Article 26 of the UDHR), all students in school have the right to be free from violence (Article 3), the right to freedom of expression (Article 19), and the right to freedom of assembly (Article 20). Statistics compiled by GLSEN suggest that violence against LGBT youth is pervasive. Recent school board decisions in Salt Lake City, Utah and Orange County, California to ban gay-straight alliances from meeting at public schools demonstrate threats to the rights to assembly and free expression.  In addition to the unsafe environment for LBGT youth, school curriculum routinely ignores sexual minorities. Writers� sexual orientation is rarely mentioned, even when such information is crucial to understanding their work. LGBT persons are left out of almost every history textbook. Few teachers ask students to consider sexual minorities in the context of lessons about civil or human rights.  Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rights: A Human Rights Perspective is intended to help teachers introduce thoughtful examination and responsible action among high school students about the rights of sexual minorities. Unlike other curricula, however, this discussion is not set in the context of civil or political rights but in the broader context of human rights at the international level as well as at the most local level�school. By learning to examine thoughtfully the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons and by gaining practice in the skills needed to prevent abuses and secure human rights, we can face the fear and shatter the silence that allows sexual minorities to be killed, tortured, and arbitrarily detained in countries throughout the world. We can also create schools where the human rights of all are respected. |
| Activity 1 |
| WORDS REALLY MATTER  Examining Language at School  OVERVIEW  Language shapes how people perceive themselves, others, and the world at large. The purpose of this activity is to help students make explicit the denotations and connotations of the words they see, hear, and use to describe lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons.    OBJECTIVES   * To examine the power of words to shape how we come to understand sexuality * To challenge harmful connotations or stereotypes in language used to describe sexual orientation * To gain sensitivity and multiple perspectives on language used to describe sexual orientation   Age Level: High School to adult  Time: About 60 minutes  Materials:   * [Handout 1: Words Around Us](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/act1/a1h1a.htm) * [Handout 2: Defining Terms](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/act1/a1h2.html) * [Handout 3: GLSEN'S National School Climate Survey](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/act1/a1h3.htm) * [The Universal Declaration of Human Rights](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/appendices/official.htm)   PROCEDURE  Part 1: Collecting data  Important: This part must begin one week before the rest of the activity.  One week prior to the activity, students should work individually to record any example of language they see, hear, or use in school connected to lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender persons during the week. In some cases, language may be used to describe a particular person, while in other cases, it may be used to describe either a real or abstract group of people. In still other cases, the language may be used to describe something that has no connection to people (e.g., a student may hear a classmate describe a homework assignment as "gay"). The language may be positive, negative, or neutral in its connotations.  Distribute Handout 1: Words Around Us and review with students how to collect data.  Students should record the data so they can get a sense of how often words about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons are used. It may not be practical (or safe) for students to record information in the presence of the people using it. In such instances, they should record the information later. They may want to record all the information at once at the end of the day, doing their best to recall as many specific instances of language as possible. At the minimum, students should record information on a daily basis. Waiting until the end of the week will probably lead to forgetting many particular incidents.  Students should record the exact language they see, hear, or use, even though they may be offended or have very strong feelings about the words they see or hear. Stress the importance of recording accurate data.  Under the heading "Who used," students should NOT write anyone's name. Instead they should record whether the language was used by a student, teacher, staff person, or administrator. Under the heading "Where used," students should record in what part of the school the language was used (e.g., hallway, playground, locker room, classroom, cafeteria).  Students should also record under the heading "Intention" the intention of the speaker using the language. Was the language used to describe without placing value on lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender persons? Was it used to hurt, demonize, or portray people in a negative light? Was it used to praise, celebrate, or portray people in a positive light? Was the language used seriously, mockingly, or comically? If students are uncertain or have contradictory ideas about how the language was used, they should note that here.  Remind students to make note of their personal response in the last column labeled "Reactions" in a phrase or two. Tell students that in one week, the class will be compiling all the individually collected data, analyzing it from different perspectives, and drawing conclusions.  Part 2: Compiling and analyzing data  As a whole class, compile the data individually collected by students during the past week. Use a transparency or a large butcher paper version of Handout 1: Words Around Us to record the class data. Ask a student volunteer to state one word or phrase he or she heard during the past week and write that phrase in the second column. Ask for a show of hands by other students who heard the same word or phrase and record that information in the same column next to the word or phrase. Check to see how many days during the past week the word or phrase was used and record that information in the "Word/Phrase" column. This will illustrate how frequently this language is used. Under the column Who used,� record the various types of people who used this language in the past week. Similarly, record where the language was used. Under the "Intention" column, list the ways the language was used. In some cases, the same word or phrase may have been used with different intentions.  After students have volunteered all the examples of language they heard in school, discuss the following questions:   * What words and phrases are most commonly heard at our school to describe lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender persons? * In general, how are these words used? (What is the intention?) * In what parts of the school is the most negative language used? * By whom is the most negative language used? * What is your personal reaction to these data?   Part 3: Defining words  During Part 1 of this activity, students will have recorded a number of words used to describe lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students. Tell students that in the next part of this activity, they will become sensitive to how they use language and to the meanings of words that the class will use to discuss sexual minority youth, including some words that they may have recorded earlier.  Give each student one of the cards from Handout 2: Defining Terms. Ask students to find another person in the class who has a card that makes a match between word and definition.  After all the students have found a classmate whose card makes a match with their own, ask one pair of students to read their word and definition. Follow by asking another pair to read a different word and definition until all seven words have been defined.  Gay  A person attracted physically and emotionally to some persons of the same sex. Usually used to describe men.  Lesbian  A woman attracted physically and emotionally to some other women.  Queer  Differing from the heterosexual norm. Although sometimes used in a derogatory sense, the word is also used without any negative intentions in colloquial and academic settings as an umbrella term to describe gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender persons.  Bisexual  A person attracted physically and emotionally to some men and some women.  Transgender  A broad term used to describe individuals whose gender identity and expression, when measured against conventional notions of sexuality and gender, do not correspond with their biological sex.  Homophobia  A fear or hatred of homosexuality, especially of others but also in oneself.  Heterosexism  An overt or implied bias against homosexuality, stemming from the belief that heterosexuality is superior or the only acceptable sexual expression.  Biological Sex  This can be considered as our "packaging" and is determined by our chromosomes, our hormones, and our internal and external genitalia. Some people can be defined as intersexuals born with biological aspects of both sexes to varying degrees. So, in actuality, there are more than two sexes.  Gender Identity  This is the individual's innermost concept of self as "male" or "female"-what we perceive and call ourselves. Individuals are conscious of this generally between the ages of 18 months and 3 years (though many researchers report it may be formed before birth). Most people develop a gender identity aligning with their biological sex. For some, however, their gender identity is different from their biological sex. We sometimes call these people transsexuals, some of whom hormonally and/or surgically change their sex to more fully match their gender identity.  After students finish reading the definitions, ask them the following questions:   * How are these definitions different from the use of some of these same words when you recorded them in the first part of this activity? * When is it appropriate to use these words? * What are some examples of inappropriate uses of these words?   Tell students that all these words will be used during this and other activities, so they should understand their meanings. They should also be sensitive to HOW these words are used. None of the words in this exercise should carry a negative connotation or stigma, although when students recorded these words in Part 1 of the activity, they may have been used as insults or put-downs.  Set ground rules about using these words in your classroom, paying attention to why it is important to be sensitive to language as well as to consequences for students who do not respect the ground rules.  Part 4: Generalizing to the larger society  Share with students the findings in Handout 3: GLSEN'S National School Climate Survey. This handout also includes a shorter, one-page summary of the survey at the end.  As a class, discuss the following questions based on the findings of the national survey:   * How does your school compare to the national data? * Why is homophobia so pervasive in schools? * How does homophobia affect lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students? * How does homophobia affect straight students?   To answer the next question, ask students to read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). This document, written in 1948, is still the most commonly accepted statement of all people's fundamental human rights, which they enjoy by virtue of being a person, not because they are granted by a government as is the case with constitutional rights.  � In what ways do the examples of homophobia you documented and which are described in GLSEN's survey constitute violations of human rights-both of sexual minority and straight students?  Ask students to refer to specific articles in the UDHR in their answer. Possible articles describing rights which are violated regularly in schools include:   * Article 1: The right to be considered free and equal to all other humans * Article 3: The right to live, to be free, to feel secure * Article 12: The right to privacy * Article 18: The right to freedom of thought * Article 19: The right to freedom of expression * Article 20: The right to assemble * Article 26: The right to an education * Article 29: The duty to respect the rights of others.   Part 5: Interrupting human rights violations in school  Because the treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth in schools, in some cases, constitutes human rights violations, it is important to interrupt such treatment. That means not participating in such violations and doing what we can to stop others when we see them perpetrating such acts. All students, not just sexual minority youth, have a responsibility to protect the human rights of all students in schools. For straight students and teachers, this means acting as an ally, someone willing to speak up for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth. Taking a stand is not easy, however. In some cases, students might fear for their own safety. In other cases, allies might fear being labeled gay or lesbian.  As a class, discuss some of the examples of homophobia recorded in Part 1 and how students and teachers, individually and collectively, can interrupt human rights violations. As you brainstorm, think not only about how to react to violations as they occur or after the fact, but also about how to create a climate in school that supports respect for and celebration of students' human rights. Discuss the relative risks of the actions generated by students, given the climate of their school.  Using the matrix below, drawn on the chalkboard or on butcher paper, may help the class organize its thoughts. Included are possible responses that students may generate.  Stress the importance of being proactive. Point out that students and teachers have only a limited number of responses AFTER human rights violations of sexual minority youth occur. When students and teachers act BEFORE, they have a wider range of options that can prevent violations from occurring in the first place. |
| Activity 2 |
| ARE GAY RIGHTS "SPECIAL?"  What Does the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Say?  OVERVIEW  In this activity, students collect newspaper articles about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights. These rights may be denied, demanded, or respected. After discussing the articles, students catalog the variety of rights and compare this list with the rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.  OBJECTIVES   * To describe current lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights that have been denied, demanded, or respected * To compare the rights sought by sexual minorities to the rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights   Age Level: High school to adult  Time: About 60 minutes with a week�s worth of preparation  Materials: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) [official](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/appendices/official.htm) or [kids](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/appendices/kidsversion.htm)� version, Amnesty International�s animated video of the UDHR  Subject Areas: Social studies  PROCEDURE  Part 1: Collecting articles on LGBT rights  Important: This part must begin one week before the rest of the activity.  About one week before the activity, ask students to collect articles from newspapers, news magazines, and websites about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights. Articles about these rights might describe how they are denied, demanded, or respected. These articles can describe any part of the world, though most will probably focus on the United States.  The topics of articles might include:   * Local or state initiatives for or against gay rights * Child custody or adoption issues * Same-sex marriage * Gay-straight alliances or curricular issues in schools * Refugee or immigration issues * Sexual minorities in the military, ministry, or some other job * Out or outed celebrities * Gay bashing or hate crimes * Public opinion polls * Reports on gay pride parades or gay pride month * Book, TV, or movie reviews   Part 2: Making a human rights analysis  On the day of this activity, ask students to describe their articles and the rights that were denied, demanded, or respected. Possible rights might include:   * Right to privacy * Right to form a family * Right to employment * Right to housing * Right to an identity * Right to be equal before the law * Right to medical care and information * Right to an education * Right to free speech * Right to assembly * Right to be free of cruel and unusual punishment * Right to a fair trial   Keep track of this list on the chalkboard or butcher paper.  If students are having a difficult time finding articles or come to class unprepared, ask them to describe the rights denied, demanded, or respected in the following situations:   * A mother loses custody of her child in a divorce because she is a lesbian * State legislators discuss amending state law to define marriage as only between a man and a woman * A student is kicked out of the Naval Academy because he admits he is gay * Two male sports celebrities write a book about their relationship * A state review committee demands that health textbook publishers delete any references to homosexuality * A woman kisses another woman on a network television show * A man is "bashed� on a Saturday night by a group of teenagers shouting "faggot" * A teacher refuses to allow students to use words like "fag" or "homo"in her classroom * The police in an Eastern European nation keep a file of men and women they suspect are gay and lesbian * The military in a Latin American nation torture a man because he is gay * The city grants a permit to hold a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender parade * Amnesty International calls for state governments to drop laws that criminalize homosexuality * A lesbian is fired when her boss learns about her sexual orientation * Students at a local high school form a gay-straight alliance   After students have completed their list of rights denied, demanded, or respected, assign small groups of students to look for those rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) either the official version or the kids' version. As an alternative, show Amnesty International's animated video about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The video runs about 20 minutes. Information about obtaining a copy of the video is available by visiting [www.amnesty-usa.org](http://www.amnesty-usa.org/).  Each group should write down whether those rights are guaranteed in the UDHR or whether there is any language that would preclude sexual minorities from those rights. Groups should report their findings to the rest of the class.  A follow up discussion should consider these questions:   * What lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights that were respected are guaranteed in the UDHR? * What lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights that were demanded are guaranteed in the UDHR? * What lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights that were denied are guaranteed in the UDHR? * Were any of the demanded, denied, or respected rights NOT mentioned in the UDHR? * Using the UDHR as a reference, how would you respond to someone who says, "Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people are asking for special rights�? |
| Activity 3 |
| WHAT IF THINGS WERE DIFFERENT?  Charting the effects of change  OVERVIEW  In this activity, students consider how high school age youth are making a difference for the rights of sexual minorities in school. They also consider how change has a ripple effect to understand how their actions have significance beyond their immediate effect.  OBJECTIVES   * To understand how people in the past and present are working to create a society that includes the human rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people * To appreciate the importance of becoming involved in positive change   Age Level: High school to adult  Time: About 2 hours  Materials:   * Out of the Past video * Out of the Past: Teachers' Guide * [Handout 1: Kelli Peterson and the Fight to Establish a Gay-Straight Alliance](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/act3/a3h1.htm) * [Handout 2: The Effects Wheel](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/act3/a3h2.htm)   Subject Areas: Social Studies, English  PROCEDURE  Part 1: Out of the Past  This section of the activity draws on the video Out of the Past (available from the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network), and in particular the segments featuring Kelli Peterson, a student in Salt Lake City who sought to establish a gay-straight alliance at her high school. For more background on Kelli's story, see Handout 1: Kelli Peterson and the Fight to Establish a Gay-Straight Alliance.  After showing the video, you may want to focus on particular segments using the Out of the Past: Teachers' Guide accompanying the video. The film uses the stories of individuals spanning nearly 400 years of U.S. history to illustrate how gays and lesbians have been part of the past and the role they have played in making history.  Part 2: Charting the Dynamic Process of Change  Out of the Past will help students understand how history is made, in terms of the individuals responsible for actions in the past and in terms of those in the present who preserve and interpret stories from the past. To help students see that one change can have significance beyond that immediate action, use Handout 2: The Effects Wheel as a means of scaffolding this understanding. The effects wheel can be reproduced as an overhead transparency or copied on the chalkboard or butcher paper.  To demonstrate how the effects wheel works, complete one section of the wheel. In the center of the sample effects wheel, write: Lesbians and gays speak out about their lives. Ask students to speculate about the possible effects of such a change, referring to the segment of the Out of the Pastvideo featuring Barbara Gittings. Write one of the ideas generated by the class in the first ring surrounding the center. Students might suggest that lesbian and gay individuals will feel "whole," as Gittings describes. Or they may suggest that a group like the American Psychiatric Association will reconsider its classification of homosexuality as a sickness based on contradictory evidence from the now-public lives of gay people. Then ask the students to consider the repercussions that this primary effect might have. Write one or two of their ideas in the next concentric circle of secondary effects. One possibility might be greater acceptance of lesbians and gays in general society. Another possibility might be rewriting certain legislation that criminalizes homosexuality. Another possibility might be to see homophobia, not homosexuality, as a social problem. Write one or two more of the students' ideas in the outermost circle. These are the secondary effects of a social change.  Give students an opportunity to ask any clarifying questions about how the effects wheel works. Once you are sure they understand how to complete the effects wheel, divide the class into pairs and ask them to complete an effects wheel for one of the changes below. The first five changes describe changes in schooling at the local school level. The second five changes describe changes at the international level. You may want to assign the same change to more than one pair so they can compare their predictions about possible effects stemming from that change.  1. What if a school without a gay-straight alliance formed one?  2. What if the history, literature, issues, and accomplishments of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons were included in the curriculum?  3. What if a state without a LGBT students' bill of rights enacted such legislation?  4. What if no one were afraid to be an ally to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students?  5. What if the most popular person in your school "came out?"  6. What if homosexuality were not a crime in Romania?  7. What if the government of Zambia did not persecute lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender citizens?  8. What if the government of Canada recognized same-sex partnerships for all legal purposes?  9. What if granting equal rights to sexual minorities were a requirement for joining international organizations, such as the European Union?  10. What if police no longer kept "pink lists" of persons they suspect or know to be gay or lesbian?  Each group should complete its effects wheel as a poster. After the groups complete their posters, display them around the room and allow students to take a "gallery walk." At least one member of each group should stay by his or her group's poster to answer any questions that other students may have as they view the effects wheels. Students in each group should take turns fulfilling this responsibility so every student has a chance to view the works of other groups.  After students have viewed other groups' posters, ask the following questions to synthesize what the students learned:   * How difficult or easy was it to identify primary, secondary, and tertiary effects of change? * How, if at all, were the consequences of change at the local school level similar to the consequences of change at the international level? * Given what you saw as the effects of local and international change, why is it important to work for change at both levels? |
| Activity 4 |
| IS IT A CRIME TO BE GAY?  Debating Tolerance in a New Democracy: A Role Play  OVERVIEW  In this activity, students stage a parliamentary committee hearing in the newly independent Eastern European country of Boldovistan. Role playing characters with differing attitudes towards homosexuality, students testify on legislation to abolish laws making consensual homosexual relations between adults a crime. In the process, they compare the differing points of view, attempt to reach a decision on whether government should regulate persons' private lives, and analyze the consequences of different decisions.  OBJECTIVES   * To compare different attitudes towards gays and lesbians * To develop and defend an opinion about legalizing consensual homosexual relations between adults * To analyze the consequences of making homosexual relations a crime   Age Level: High school to adult  Time: About 90 minutes  Materials: [Handout 1: The Situation in Boldovistan Today](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/act4/a4h1.htm)  [Handout 2: Parliamentary Hearing Role Cards](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/act4/act4h2.html)  Subject Areas: Social studies  PROCEDURE  Ask students to read [Handout 1: The Situation in Boldovistan Today](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/act4/a4h1.htm) describing the activity and setting the scene. As presented here, the situation in the fictional country of Boldovistan resembles present-day Romania.  Assign three students to each of the groups who will be offering testimony. Assign six students to sit on the parliamentary committee.  Once the groups are organized and the committee is chosen, hand out the role cards.  Allow approximately 15 minutes for the groups to prepare their testimony. Students role playing committee members should use the time to develop a list of questions to ask each of the parties testifying. They should also look at all the role cards to get a sense of who will testify and the concerns they will present.  Each group should draw lots to determine the order of testimony. After a group makes its presentation, it should then answer questions from the committee.  After hearing testimony, the committee should draw up its recommendations to the government, along with reasons for those recommendations. The committee can work in fishbowl� fashion, debating what recommendations to make in front of the rest of the class.  After the committee reports its recommendations, debrief the activity with the following questions:   * With which group's testimony did you most agree? Why? * With which group's testimony did you least agree? Why? * What do you think will be the consequences of the committee's recommendations? * What other recommendations could the committee have made? * What might have been the consequences of those recommendations? * What decision do you think the committee should make? Why? * Did any of the arguments presented change your own opinion in any way? |
| Activity 5 |
| WHAT MUST BE DONE TO ACHIEVE EQUALITY?  Evaluating different approaches  OVERVIEW  By evaluating various statements about what must be done to achieve equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons, students consider the responsibility they have to end discrimination. Students also explore the relative importance of changing legislation, changing attitudes, and taking action in order to achieve equality.  OBJECTIVES  To analyze responsibility for ending discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons  To compare the relative importance of different tactics for achieving equality  Age Level: High school to adult  Time: About 60 minutes  Materials:   * butcher paper * [Handout 1: Changing Legislation to Achieve Equality](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/act5/a5h1.htm) * [Handout 2: Changing Attitudes to Achieve Equality](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/act5/a5h2.htm) * [Handout 3: Taking Action to Achieve Equality](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/act5/a5h3.htm)   Subject Areas: Social studies, health education  Explain to students that in this activity they will evaluate different ways to work for the  human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons.  Divide students into small groups. For each group prepare an envelope containing one complete set of statements from Handout 1: Changing Legislation to Achieve Equality, Handout 2: Changing Attitudes to Achieve Equality, and Handout 3: Taking Action to Achieve Equality. The statements should be cut into strips and mixed together before being put in the envelope. If students ask why the statements are printed on different colored paper, let them know you will tell them why at the end of the activity.  Each group should also have one sheet of butcher paper. The paper should be held lengthwise and divided into three columns. The columns should be headed: Essential, Useful, and Irrelevant.  As the group members read each statement, they should try to place it in what they agree is the appropriate column. In essence, group members are answering the question: In order to achieve equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons, which actions are essential, which are useful, and which are irrelevant?  When the group cannot agree, they should save that statement until they have placed the ones about which they can agree. They should then discuss the remaining statements and try to place them under the Essential, Useful, and Irrelevant columns.  Each group should try to reach a consensus. Members may alter the wording of a statement if it helps them to reach consensus. Blank slips of paper can be used to create additional statements if needed. When all the statements have been placed on the newsprint, they can be taped in place.  Groups should be allowed time to look at each other's finished sheets and to identify differences in priorities.  Groups should then return to their own sheet and note whether there is any pattern to how they have placed the different colored statements. At this time, the teacher should draw attention to the significance of the different colors on which the statements are printed.  Point out to the students that statements printed on white paper are about changing laws to bring about equality. Statements printed on blue paper are about changing people's attitudes to achieve equality, while the statements printed on yellow paper are about persons taking direct action towards equality.  Ask students to look at their chart again and discuss the following questions to debrief the activity:  In general, what ideas or concerns guided you as you placed the statements under the three columns?  Point out to students that their answers to this question reveal their theories about how to bring about change for equal human rights.  Was there a pattern for or against changing legislation, changing attitudes, or taking direct action?  Why do you have preferences for working towards change in certain ways?  Make clear to students that there is no single, right way to work towards change. The goal of the exercise is not to determine which method of working for change is best. In fact, students may themselves point out the symbiotic connection, for example, between changing legislation to change attitudes and the need to change attitudes to change legislation. If anything, the activity should help students appreciate that all three strategies are important and that the goal is not to choose one but to balance all three. |
| Activity 6 |
| I Now Pronounce You...  Same-Sex Marriage Legislation  This activity is taken from At Issue: Marriage, Exploring the Debate over Marriage Rights for Same-Sex Couples published by GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network. The complete curriculum is available through the GLSEN Bookstore (800/247-6553 or <http://www.atlasbooks.com/glsen/>).  OVERVIEW  In December 1999 Vermont became the first U.S. state to rule that the benefits and protections of marriage be conferred on same-sex couples. The Vermont legislature is currently deciding whether this decision will be fulfilled through full civil marriage or a separate but equal system, a painfully familiar dilemma within the context of American civil rights history. The Vermont legislature is not the first governing body - regional or national -to grapple with the question of same-sex marriage. Over the past 11 years, more than 20 countries worldwide have enacted some form of legislation that impacts same-sex couples. In this activity, students will apply the history of "separate but equal,"taken from the era of racial segregation, to the question before the Vermont legislature today. Students will then assume the role of advisors, making recommendations to the Vermont legislature based upon international human rights practices and the current regulations of other nations.  MATERIALS   * [Handout 1: Separate but Equal](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/act6/a6h1.htm) * [Handout 2: What Does "Separate but Equal" Look Like?](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/act6/a6h2.htm) * [Handout 3: International Recognition of Same-Sex Relationships](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/act6/a6h3.htm) * [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/instree/b1udhr.htm)   OBJECTIVES   * To understand the recent Vermont decision and the question currently before the legislature * To apply historical learnings about "separate but equal" to the same-sex marriage debate * To consider international human rights practices as one criterion by which a decision in Vermont might be reached * To consider the practices of other nations in formulating a recommendation for the Vermont State Legislature   Part 1: Setting the Stage  Read the overview of this activity to students to provide background information on Baker v. State of Vermont, the landmark 1999 decision that ruled the benefits and protections of marriage be extended to same-sex couples. Emphasize that the Vermont Supreme Court decision establishes the rights of same-sex couples, but not the system by which those rights will be delivered. The Vermont legislature has been charged with this weighty task and is expected to begin hearings in 2000. Thousands of citizens from across the nation have already bombarded the legislature with demands that access to full civil marriage be granted or denied to same-sex couples. Some of those opposed to full marriage rights are pressuring the legislature to implement a "separate but equal" system of registered partnership like the ones adopted by at least seven nations to date (Denmark, Norway, Greenland, Sweden, Iceland, the Netherlands, and France).  Inform students that during this exercise they will be assuming the role of advisory panel members appointed by the Vermont legislature to study the same-sex marriage issue and make informed recommendations. In order to accomplish this task, they will consider three areas:   * Historical parallels to the notion of "separate but equal"; specifically, lessons learned from the era of racial segregation; * The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and just practices within the context of international humanitarian standards; * The practices of other nations that have enacted legislation regarding same-sex unions-learning from their successes and mistakes.   Select six students to act as the Vermont legislature, a group that will be charged with hearing recommendations and raising questions. Divide the remaining students into groups of four and inform them that each group represents an advisory unit that will present its recommendations at the end of the activity.  Part 2: Looking Back, Looking Forth: Historical Parallels to "Separate but Equal"  Tell students that the Vermont case is not the first instance in which a separate but equal� system of justice has been debated. A legal precedent for "separate but equal" - with regard to racial segregation - was established in Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) and was not reversed until the Brown v. Board of Education decision (1954). Distribute Handout 1: Separate but Equal? and allow students time to read the case summaries (if they have not already done so for homework).  Direct the groups toward Handout 2: What Does Separate but Equal Look Like?� Instruct each group to consider the practical or day-to-day ramifications of a separate but equal� system. On the left side of the sheet they should list what "separate but equal" looked like for African Americans living between the Plessy and Brown decisions, paying special attention to the social and emotional consequences of such a system. For example, students might indicate that young people had to travel great distances to reach a "colored" school or that African Americans had to remain thirsty - even with a fountain nearby - until a "colored" fountain could be found. They might also think about what this system looked like for white Americans, who may never have had opportunities to relate to people who looked different from themselves.  On the right side of the worksheet, students should list what "separate but equal" would be like for same-sex couples living under a system of registered partnership instead of marriage. This column will be significantly more challenging to complete as most of us have never been asked to consider the lives of sexual minorities with as much thought as we have been asked to reflect upon the experiences of racial minorities. Students might write that same-sex couples would be limited in terms of where, when, and to whom they could go to secure a separate but equal� partnership license. In addition, couples might find that the alternative designation results in fewer religious leaders willing to perform a ceremony, and fewer friends and family members acknowledging that they are as "married" as different sex couples.  The group of six representing the state legislature should participate in this activity, but should generate questions raised by the separate but equal� issue that they can later pose to the advisory panel. For example:   * If same-sex couples receive full marriage rights, then how are they harmed by a separate designation for their relationships? * If there is no difference in the benefits conferred, then why should we [the legislators] entertain the notion of a separate system for conferring those rights?   Part 3: An International Human Rights Perspective  Ask groups to turn next to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Emphasize that, as opposed to civil or legal rights, human rights are defined as those basic standards people need to live in dignity. Human rights are the rights people have simply because they are human.  Ask groups to consider whether or not they feel that the spirit of the UDHR compels governments to extend full marriage rights to all people, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender couples. Instruct each group to survey the documents and discuss this question. Groups will likely notice that Article 16 asserts the right to marriage and family; encourage groups to look for other articles that might also relate to the issue of same-sex marriage, such as the right to equality (Article 1), freedom from discrimination (Article 2), and other relevant articles. Remind students that their ultimate goal is to make an informed recommendation to the legislature, so they should take notes and begin to articulate their thoughts. As stated earlier, the six legislators should discuss the documents and record important questions in anticipation of the presentations to come.  Part 4: Think Globally, Act Locally  Tell students that many countries have been grappling with the issue of same-sex marriage for years. Each group will therefore be asked to study the same-sex union practices of two or three nations in an attempt to understand better the issue at hand and to make a more informed recommendation to Vermont lawmakers. Cut Handout 3: International Recognition of Same-Sex Relationships into strips, one country per strip - 12 countries are represented here, though there are at least a dozen more that have enacted some sort of same-sex couple legislation. Distribute two or three strips (countries) to each group for consideration. Instruct students to discuss the pros and cons of each country's laws and to extract ideas that can be incorporated into their presentations to the legislature. The six legislators should review all 12 summaries and search for patterns, confusions, and potential problems that they can later bring up. It is important for all groups to note that no country has yet provided full marriage equality. While registered partnership provides most of the benefits, it differs from marriage in that:   * registered partners usually cannot adopt non-related children, or even each other's children * registered partners usually cannot have an "official" church wedding in the country's established national church * one of the two registered partners must be a citizen of the country in which the partnership is contracted * registered partnerships are not recognized outside of the country in which the partnership is contracted (except for the small union of Scandinavian nations)   These issues - particularly adoption, citizenship, and movement between countries - should be given special attention during small group discussion and the presentations that will follow shortly.  Part 5: Group Presentations  In preparation for their presentations, give each group some time to review its notes and develop recommendations. Inform each group that they will have five minutes to present, and that their recommendations should include learnings from each of the three tasks they were asked to complete. Direct groups to decide if they will elect a spokesperson or divide the presentation amongst group members. When the groups are ready, ask the six legislators to sit at the front of the classroom in order to preside over the proceedings. Make sure that each advisory group keeps to its five-minute limit and allow the legislators to pose only two or three questions to each group.  When all the groups have presented, direct the six legislators to retire to their chambers (the corridor outside your classroom will do) in order to draft a plan based upon the advisory panel's recommendations. While they are working, conduct a debriefing conversation with the class. Ask them to comment upon what they have learned and the process in which they have participated. Ask students what they think the Vermont legislature should do based on their new knowledge. When the six legislators are ready, invite them in to share their plan. Encourage students to follow the news and look for updates on the situation in Vermont. You might also want to have them formally write up the plan and send it directly to Vermont lawmakers. |
| Activity 7 |
| YOUTH DEALING WITH HOMOPHOBIA:  STORIES FROM REAL LIFE  What Can We Do?  OVERVIEW  In this activity, students listen to the concerns of real teenagers dealing with homophobia or read testimonials from gay and straight students and teachers about dealing with homophobia. All of the stories illustrate how homophobia contributes to a climate of hostility, making adolescence especially hard to navigate. The activity concludes with a discussion of what can be done to make schools less hostile to gay and lesbian youth.  OBJECTIVES   * To put a human face on the issue of homophobia and its effects on gay and straight students * To consider how to create an environment that respects all persons regardless of sexual orientation   Age Level: High school to adult  Time: About 45 minutes  Materials: [Handout 1: Testimonials](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/act7/a7h1.htm)  Subject Areas: Social studies, English, health  PROCEDURE  Testimonials are a way to put a human face on the issue of homophobia and the resultant isolation, fear, depression, and anger that its victims report. By hearing the voices and stories of real people, homophobia is moved from the intellectual to the personal domain, and it becomes increasingly difficult for compassionate human beings to ignore or discount the need for anti-homophobia education in their schools. Ideally, you should gather a panel of people from your local school or community who can speak directly about their experiences with homophobia. Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) is an organization with groups in many communities in the United States that may be able to assist in putting together such a panel. Allow panel members to speak about their own experiences and follow up with questions and answers from students. You may want to discuss possible questions with the students ahead of time.  If you are unable to bring together a panel, students should read Handout 1: Testimonials for homework or in class. Ask them to highlight a word, phrase, or passage that particularly moves or strikes them as they read each story.  Begin class by asking students to write for five or ten minutes about the meaning of their highlighted text. Ask students to share their writing.  Use the following questions to continue discussion:   * In what ways do these young people experience isolation and loneliness? * In what ways are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender teenagers "invisible?" To each other? To their friends? To their parents? To the community? * What role do parents play in their children's acceptance of self? * What role do other lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people play in the acceptance of self? * What role do friends play in the acceptance of self? * Who else plays an important role?   To move the discussion toward responsibility for creating a positive school environment for students--both gay and straight--facing homophobia, ask the following questions:   * In what ways do these stories describe what could happen to a student at your school? * What could be done to make school a more positive place for the students telling these stories? * What could you do to make school a more positive place?   Encourage students to follow through on suggestions for promoting tolerance at school. Possibilities might include:  Not laughing at homophobic jokes  In this case, students could role play how they might respond the next time they hear an offensive joke. What would they say to the person telling the joke?  Supporting a LGBT friend  Again, students could act out skits of how they might respond to someone coming out, or they could write an entry in their journal about what they would do.  Providing information for LGBT students  Books about homosexuality are hard to keep on school library shelves. Many students, too embarrassed to check them out, take them instead. A group of students could talk to the school librarian about good books for gay and lesbian teens. As a class project, students could raise the money necessary to buy these books for the library.  Promoting dialog between LGBT and straight students  Some schools have gay-straight alliances that work to promote tolerance. Organizations such as the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) can provide more information about forming such a group. |
| Activity 8 |
| RIGHTS ABUSES AROUND THE WORLD  What Can We Do?  OVERVIEW  In this activity, students read an Urgent Action information sheet from Amnesty Interational and a petition about human rights abuses against sexual minorities outside the USA. This activity helps students understand how to write on behalf of prisoners of conscience or against human rights abuses. The activity concludes with students writing a letter on a currently active Amnesty International case.  OBJECTIVES   * To understand the oppression faced by gays and lesbians in other parts of the world * To develop and implement appropriate strategies for addressing human rights abuses in the world   Age Level: High school to adult  Time: About 45 minutes  Materials:   * [Handout 1: Romanian Urgent Action Case](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/act8/a8h1.html) * [Handout 2: Sample Letter](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/act8/a8h2.html) * [Handout 3: Gay Romanians Have a Long Way to Go](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/act8/act8h3.html) * Handout 4: Current Urgent Action Case\* * [Handout 5: Editor's Feedback Form](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/act8/a8h5.html) * [Handout 6: Petition Form](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/act8/a8h6.html)   Subject Areas: Social studies, English  \* To obtain a current case, look at the Amnesty International USA OUTfront Website at [www.amnestyusa.org/group/outfront](http://www.amnestyusa.org/group/outfront) or the Urgent Action Office, specifying a LGBT case, at email: [sharriso@aiusa.org](mailto:sharriso@aiusa.org). Tel: (303) 440-0913.  Part 1: How to take effective action  Distribute copies of Handout 1: Romanian Urgent Action Case to students. They can read this in class or as homework in preparation for this class.  Ask the following questions:   * Why would the Romanian government care about a letter from an Amnesty International member in the U.S.? * What would make a letter effective?   Explain that prompt, brief, and courteous letters are most appropriate. Distribute Handout 2: Sample Letter on the Romanian case. Ask students to highlight words or phrases that illustrate courtesy. Discuss why it is important to maintain a polite tone even if we are angry at human rights abuses.   * How might the Romanian government act if this letter were not courteous and respectful? * What might be the consequences for the prisoner of conscience?   Handout 3: Gay Romanians Have a Long Way to Go describes the individuals and the social context involved in this case. You may want to assign it to students to give additional background.  Part 2: Taking action now�Letter writing  Ask students to read Handout 4: Current Urgent Action Case, obtained from the OUTfront Program or Urgent Action Network of Amnesty International USA. (See footnote on page 71.) Using the Romanian letter as a model, students should write a brief and courteous letter to the officials listed in the Urgent Action.  After students have completed their letters, ask them to work in pairs to edit them. The pairs should take responsibility for editing the letters to make them polished enough for sending to a head of state. To facilitate peer editing, each student should fill out a copy of Handout 5: Editor's Feedback Form. Students should return the original letter and the form to their partners, answering any questions the partners might have about comments or suggestions.  You may also wish to review the draft letters before students write their final drafts, using the editor's feedback form or writing your comments directly on the students'drafts.  Students should write a final draft of their letters incorporating their partners'editing comments.  A note about sending the letters  Encourage students to send their letters by post or email. Explain that in most cases, students should not expect a response to their letter, even if they requested one. The power of Urgent Action letters comes in numbers. When thousands of people write on behalf of others' human rights, governments listen.  Some school boards and principals are concerned about students mailing letters to foreign officials. For most students, there are absolutely no repercussions to exercising their right of free expression to officials in other countries. Students who are citizens of these other countries or who have relatives there may not want to send their letters in order to protect their safety and that of family members. Letters should be sent only with the consent of the students who wrote them. For students who are not sending their letters, stress the value of this activity as an exercise in learning how to write a formal letter using careful language and persuasive supporting evidence.  Part 3: Taking action now Petitioning  Ask students to read Handout 6: Petition Form to the United States Secretary of State.   * Why would the Secretary of State care about a petition about human rights abuses in Uganda against gays and lesbians? * What would make a petition effective? * What language in this petition is effective in conveying a courteous tone? * What language in this petition is effective in conveying what the petitioners want to see happen?   As a class, using the language from the letters to El Salvador, write a petition to the president of El Salvador. Ask for a volunteer to write a final copy of the petition on the computer and print it with lines where others can sign.  As a whole class, brainstorm how to get signatures on the petition. Distribute copies of the petition to students who are interested in collecting signatures. Signed petitions should be sent as a packet.  Updates on Urgent Actions  To find out if the situation on this Urgent Action has changed or to learn more about the most recent Urgent Action cases, visit the Urgent Action website at [www.amnesty-usa.org/urgact](http://www.amnesty-usa.org/urgact). For specific information about Urgent Action cases related to sexual orientation, go to: [www.amnesty-usa.org/write.html#outfront](http://www.amnesty-usa.org/write.html#outfront). The website of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission also posts information on how to take action against current abuses of sexual minorities' human rights. Their address is [www.iglhrc.org](http://www.iglhrc.org/). |
| Activity 9 |
| TAKING THE HUMAN RIGHTS  TEMPERATURE OF YOUR SCHOOL  OVERVIEW  Participants evaluate their school's human rights climate using criteria derived from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The subsequent discussion builds towards identifying areas of particular concern and developing an action plan to begin addressing them.  OBJECTIVES   * To examine thoughtfully and critically the human rights climate at students' school * To connect the need for a safe school environment to international standards of human rights   Age Level: Middle school to adult  Time: 1-2 hours  Materials: [Handout 1: Taking the Human Rights Temperature of Your School Universal Declaration of Human Rights](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/act9/a9h1.htm)  Subject Areas: Social studies  PROCEDURE  Ask students to evaluate their school's human rights climate, i.e. "take its temperature," by completing Handout 1: Taking the Human Rights Temperature of Your School. Prior to completing the survey, students might conduct research into school conditions, using the topics in the survey as a guide. Each student in the class should complete the survey individually. Although students are asked to think about their school's entire human rights climate, they should especially think about the school's climate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students as well as straight allies and other students--gay and straight dealing with homophobia.  Collect the surveys and compute the average response to each question. Post the responses on a chalkboard or newsprint version of the survey.  Discuss the findings from the survey:   * What are your reactions to the results of the survey? * How did your own evaluation compare to the class averages? * What might account for any differences between individual responses and class averages?   Draw on the following questions to move from analysis and evaluation to the development of an action plan:  Looking for patterns   * In which areas does your school appear to be adhering to or promoting human rights principles? * In which areas do there seem to be human rights problems? * Which of these are of particular concern to you? Elaborate on the areas of concern, providing examples and identifying patterns in human rights violations.   Looking for explanations   * How do you explain the existence of such problematic conditions? * Do they have race/ethnicity, class, gender, disability, age, or sexual orientation dimensions? * Are the issues related to participation in decision-making? Who is included and who isn�t? * Who benefits and who loses/suffers as a result of the existing human rights violations?   Looking at yourself   * Have you or any of your fellow community members contributed in any way to the construction and perpetuation of the existing climate (e.g. by acting or not acting in certain ways, by ignoring abuses or not reporting incidents)?   Looking at others   * Were those completing the questionnaire representative of the population of the school? * Would you expect different results from a different group of people? * In what ways might another group's responses differ and why? * Should these differences be of any concern to you and to the school community? * When determining which human rights concerns need to be addressed and how to address them, how can you be certain to take into account the perspectives and experiences of different people?   Looking ahead   * What needs to be done to improve the human rights climate in your school? * What action(s) can you and your group take to create a more humane and just environment where human rights values are promoted and human rights behaviors practiced?   Review survey item #25, stressing the importance of assuming responsibility and action. Then, as a group brainstorm possible actions that individuals and groups might take to improve the human rights situation. See Activity 1, Part 5, p. 13, � Interrupting human rights violations in school� for one way to structure this part of the activity. The class should try to develop a short list of options for action. For each action, students should identify goals, strategies, and responsibilities. |
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| Appendices: |
| Universal Declaration of Human Rights:  [Official Version](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/appendices/official.htm)  [Kids' Version](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/appendices/kidsversion.htm)  [Abbreviated Version](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/appendices/abbreviated.htm)  Recommended:  [Books](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/appendices/recbooks.htm)  [Videos](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/appendices/recvideo.htm)  [Websites](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/TB3/appendices/web.htm) |