



THE CURRENT EVENTS CLASSROOM

UNDERSTANDING HOMOPHOBIA/ HETEROSEXISM AND HOW TO BE AN ALLY

Middle and high school students, especially those who identify or are perceived as LGBQ¹ (lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer or questioning), often face ongoing acts of homophobia. As LGBQ students go about their everyday lives in school, they can feel unsafe, miss school, be harassed and bullied, hear anti-gay slurs and other biased remarks and experience discriminatory policies and procedures. Despite the great strides our country has made in public opinion and positive legislation for LGBT individuals—especially around marriage equality—there is still work to be done in both words and deeds.

The goal of this lesson is to contribute to making classrooms and schools more safe and welcoming for all students—including LGBQ students and increase students' understanding of and empathy for how homophobia manifests itself in schools and society. Middle and high school students will have the opportunity to learn more about what homophobia and heterosexism are and how they manifest themselves, read an essay about being an ally and discuss ways they can be an ally, including actions they can take on behalf of their school or community.

[NOTE TO TEACHER: Given the absence of this topic in the curriculum and the disproportionate rates of anti-LGBT bullying and harassment, it is important to educate students about LGBQ people and issues. When discussing any new or sensitive topic, however, there is the potential for some students to react with stereotypes or in disrespectful ways. It is therefore critical that educators carefully review the lesson and assess students' maturity and readiness to engage in the lesson prior to teaching and to establish clear parameters with students that will ensure safe and constructive dialogue. See [Establishing a Safe Learning Environment](#) for guidelines on building safe forums for discussing sensitive issues.

Equally important is to reflect on and consider that you are likely to have students in your classroom who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, or whose parents or family members are LGBQ and it is critical to be sensitive to that and prepared. Further, it is possible that if a student has not shared this previously, she or he may disclose it during the course of the lesson. That information should only come from the student directly. Be aware that young people do not always feel comfortable sharing this information with their friends and family so do not assume that everyone in the young person's life knows this aspect of their identity.

If students or their adult family members ask questions about how to reconcile their religious beliefs with LGBQ people and issues, keep in mind that the relationship between religion and LGBQ identity can vary greatly across time, place and religious denomination. Students and their parents/guardians may say that being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender contradicts what their religion teaches. It is not your job to argue or disagree with them about whether it is right or wrong. Everyone is entitled to their beliefs based

¹ For the purpose of this lesson on homophobia/heterosexism, we use LGBQ for lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer or questioning. For resources on transgender identity, issues and transphobia, see ADL's "[Discussing Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Identity and Issues](#)" and *Current Events Classroom* "[Transgender Identity and Issues](#)."

on their religion and you are not aiming to change their religious beliefs. However, it is important that the student is respectful about what you are teaching and understands that not everyone holds this point of view. The student's religious beliefs should not dominate the conversation or cause other students distress and it is critical that the students abide by the classroom ground rules.

The term LGBQ is used throughout the lesson. For young people, the "Q" sometimes means questioning and often means queer. Depending on the user, the term has either a derogatory or an affirming connotation, as many within the LGBQ community have sought to reclaim the term that was once widely used in a negative way.]

See these additional ADL resources: *Current Events Classroom* "[What Is Marriage Equality?](#)" *Curriculum Connections* "[Unheard Voices: Stories of LGBT History](#)," [Challenging Biased Language](#) and [ADL and the LGBT Community: A Commitment to Equal Rights](#).

Grade Level: grades 7–12

Time: 45–50 minutes

Common Core Anchor Standards: Reading, Speaking and Listening

Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand what homophobia is and will be able to identify and categorize specific examples of homophobia.
- Students will learn about the different ways in which homophobia is manifested in our society on an interpersonal, institutional and internalized level.
- Students will reflect on ways to be an ally to LGBQ people through reading an essay written by a high school student.
- Students will identify ways that they can be an ally to LGBQ people in their school and community.

Material:

- *That's So Gay* - Wanda Sykes video (2008, 3 minutes, GLSEN, www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWS0GVOQPs0)
- [Categories of Homophobia Worksheet](#) (one for each student)
- Straight Girl Stands Up for Gays (Youth Communication, www.youthcomm.org/topics/activism/Straight_Girl_Stands_Up_for_Gays.html?story_id=NYC-2012-05-03), one for each student

Vocabulary:

Review the following vocabulary words and make sure students know their meanings. (See ADL's "[Glossary of Education Terms](#).")

- ally
- bisexual
- bullied
- depression
- gay
- GSA
- heterosexism
- heterosexual
- homophobia

- institutional
- interpersonal
- lesbian
- LGBQ
- marriage equality
- norm
- statistics
- straight
- target
- taunting
- transgender
- transphobia

VIDEO ACTIVITY

Play the video [That's So Gay - Wanda Sykes](#) (3 minutes). After watching, engage students in a discussion by asking the following questions:

- What's going on in the video?
- What message is the video trying to convey?
- What type of bias is illustrated in the video?

WHAT IS HOMOPHOBIA?

1. Ask students: *Does anyone know what homophobia or heterosexism is?* Come to the definition as:

*Prejudice and/or discrimination against people who are or who are perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBQ). While **homophobia** is usually used to describe a blatant fear or hatred of LGBQ people, **heterosexism** is a broader term used to describe attitudes and behaviors based on the belief that heterosexuality is the norm.*

Explain that the term “homophobia” is used more frequently than heterosexism.

2. Elicit from students that the word homophobia implies fear and hatred whereas heterosexism is an umbrella term for bias and discrimination against people who are LGBQ.

NOTE: To reflect and acknowledge current common usage, the terms “homophobia” is used here. However, since “phobia” implies a fear that is irrational and therefore beyond our control or responsibility, we suggest that teachers and students be encouraged to use the term that is more consistent with the way other “isms” are described (anti-LGBQ bias and heterosexism) and to think of all forms of bias as forces to be resisted rather than tolerated.

3. Ask if there are any clarifying questions.

TURN AND TALK: EXAMPLES AND CATEGORIES OF HOMOPHOBIA

1. Instruct students to turn to a person sitting next to them and respond to this question: *What are some examples of homophobia that you have seen, heard about, experienced or witnessed?* Have the two students in the pair record their combined responses on a piece of paper. Remind them not to use names of people they know or specific situations that could identify individual people.
2. Bring the students back together and have them share aloud the examples on their lists. If something is shared more than once, put a check mark next to the item. Be as exhaustive as possible. The list might look something like this:
 - Saying “that’s so gay”
 - Other slurs and put-downs (e.g. f***ot, d**e, etc.)

- Bullying and harassment in school
 - Not allowed to attend prom or other school events with a date
 - Isolation: Don't have any/many friends
 - Sometimes students who identify as LGBTQ experience depression as a result for how they are treated
 - Stereotypes (thinking all gay men are... or all lesbians are...)
 - Parents/families don't accept them
 - Getting fired from a job because you're gay
 - Not allowed to get married in some states
 - Rejected by religious institutions (churches, synagogues, mosques, etc.)
3. After generating the list, explain to students that now we are going to place all of these examples into certain categories. The categories are ones that most forms of bias and injustice fit into: interpersonal, institutional and internalized. First ask students if they know what these words mean. Take a few minutes to hear their responses and then share the following explanations below.

To help with the explanation, share (or ask for) examples of each, but examples that do not include homophobia.

- **Interpersonal**

The idea that one identity/societal group is better gives permission for people to disrespect or mistreat individuals (jokes, slurs, stereotypes, threats, physical assaults, bullying). *Example: Someone makes a racist joke at a party.*

- **Institutional**

The idea that one group is better than another gets rooted in the institutions—the laws, legal system, police, education/schools, hiring, housing, media images, political power—so that they implement discriminatory or unequal practices. *Example: Women earn less money than men for the same job.*

- **Internalized**

The idea that one group is better than the other gets internalized so that people start to believe the stereotypes, prejudice and negative messages about themselves (that they are weak, not smart or competent). *Example: A girl who is overweight doesn't try out for the basketball team because she thinks she won't be good.*

4. Distribute a copy of the [Categories of Homophobia Worksheet](#) to each student.
5. Explain to students that they are going to work in pairs (same pairs as before) and using all of the examples on the board, place them in categories based on where they think each example belongs. Model an example if necessary. Give students 5–7 minutes for this task.

ALTERNATIVE: You can do this exercise with the whole class, going through the list of examples and having students call out into which categories they belong.

6. Reconvene the class and have students share aloud what they came up with. Engage students in a discussion by asking the following questions:
- What did you notice as you were doing this activity?

- Did we all put the same examples in the same categories? Why or why not?
- Did you and your partner agree or disagree?
- Do you think some of these examples are more serious than others? Explain.
- Do you think some of these examples are more easily addressed than others?
- How do the items relate to each other?
- Did any of the examples fit into more than one category? How so?

INFORMATION SHARING

Explain to students that now they are going to talk about some examples of homophobia and heterosexism based on research and statistics. Tell them you will be reading five statements (some true and some false) aloud and you want them to raise their hands based on whether they believe the statement is “true” or “false.” For each question, ask one or two students to share why they answered true or false. After sharing, tell them the right answer.

1. **Statement on LGBTQ Students in School:** Almost 75% (3 out of 4) of LGBTQ students were verbally harassed (e.g. called names or threatened) in the past year because of their sexual orientation.
True. GLSEN reports that 74.1% of LGBTQ students are verbally harassed (e.g., called names or threatened) because of their sexual orientation and 55.2% because of their gender expression ([The 2013 School Climate Survey Executive Summary](#), GLSEN, 2014).
2. **Statement on Employment:** In 29 states, it is currently legal to fire or refuse to hire someone based on his or her sexual orientation.
True. Only 21 states and D.C. have laws prohibiting workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation. Federal legislation that would cover all 50 states has been introduced in Congress but it has yet to pass ([Employment Non-Discrimination Act](#), American Civil Liberties Union).
3. **Statement on Marriage Equality:** Half of the 50 states still do not have marriage equality.
False. In 37 states plus D.C., same-sex couples have the freedom to marry. That means 13 states do not currently have marriage equality ([States](#), Freedom to Marry, 2015).
4. **Statement on Hate Crimes:** In 2013, about 10% of all hate crimes reported in 2013 were motivated by sexual orientation bias.
False. 20.8% of all hate crimes were motivated by sexual orientation bias ([Hate Crime Statistics, 2013](#), Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2014).
5. **Statement on Other Countries:** Being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender is illegal in 76 countries.
True. This means that more than 2.7 billion people live in countries where being gay is a crime (“[More than 2.7 billion people live in countries where being gay is a crime](#),” *The Guardian*, May 16, 2014).

After going through this process, engage students in a discussion by asking the following questions:

- What is your reaction to the information you heard?
- What was surprising?
- What wasn’t surprising?
- Do you think progress has been made around LGBQ people’s rights?

- What do you think still needs improvement?
- What other questions do you have?

READING ACTIVITY: BEING AN ALLY

1. Have students silently read the student essay [Straight Girl Stands Up for Gays](#), explaining that the essay was written by a high school student. Give students about 10 minutes to complete their reading.
2. Engage students in a discussion by asking the following questions:
 - How did Kelly first get interested in LGBQ rights?
 - What was the main message of the article?
 - What is the purpose of the Day of Silence? What do you think about it?
 - Was there anything in the article you strongly agreed with? How about strongly disagreed with?
 - What did Kelly discover about some of the students and adults in her school?
 - What new questions did the article raise for you?

ALLIES AND ACTIONS

1. Ask students: *What does it mean to be an ally?* Come to the definition of **ally** as:
Someone who speaks out on behalf of someone else or takes actions that are supportive of someone else.
2. Ask students: *What kind of ally behaviors did Kelly share in her essay?* If they don't remember them all, remind students about the different things that Kelly described in her essay. Then ask: *What can we do in our classroom or school to make it more safe and welcoming for LGBQ students?* Brainstorm a list of ideas, which could include the following:
 - Don't call people homophobic names.
 - Don't say "that's so gay."
 - Have an assembly about LGBQ issues and people.
 - Create video PSAs about homophobic slurs.
 - Start a GSA at our school.
 - Vow to challenge anti-gay slurs when you hear them.
 - Talk to parents about their language and attitudes about LGBQ people.
 - Read more books that include gay or lesbian characters.
3. If students suggest confronting homophobic language, use ADL's [Responding to Bigoted Words](#) for strategies and suggestions.
4. Based on what ideas they generate, consider turning those ideas into projects that a group of students or the whole class takes on as a class or school-wide project.

CLOSING

Distribute index cards or *Post-it® Notes* and ask students to write down one positive thing they can do about homophobia. Collect the papers and depending on the response, read them aloud or hang them on a wall for students to view.

ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES

- [2013 National School Climate Survey](#) (GLSEN)
- [A Survey of LGBT Americans](#) (Pew Research Center)
- [Employment Non Discrimination Act](#) (ACLU)
- [Facts about Discrimination in Federal Government Employment Based on Marital Status, Political Affiliation, Status as a Parent, Sexual Orientation, or Transgender \(Gender Identity\) Status](#) (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission)
- [Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network \(GLSEN\)](#)
- [Human Rights Campaign](#)
- [LGBT In Changing Times: Attitudes, Experiences and Growing Acceptance](#) (Pew Research Center)
- [Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays \(PFLAG\)](#)

COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS

Content Area/Standard
Reading
Standard 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
Speaking and Listening
Standard 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners building on other’s ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
Standard 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively and orally.

CATEGORIES OF HOMOPHOBIA WORKSHEET

Directions: Using the explanations of the following categories, record examples in categories based on where they think each example belongs.

Interpersonal: The idea that one identity/societal group is better than others gives permission for people to disrespect or mistreat individuals in the other group (jokes, slurs, stereotypes, threats, physical assaults, bullying).

Institutional: The idea that one group is better than another gets rooted in the institutions—the laws, legal system, police, education/schools, hiring, housing, media images, political power—so that they implement discriminatory or unequal practices.

Internalized: The idea that one group is better than the other gets internalized so that people starts to believe the stereotypes, prejudice and negative messages about themselves (that they are weak, not smart or competent).

Interpersonal	Institutional	Internalized