

# The Stonewall Uprising

*Compelling Question: How does the Stonewall uprising fit into the larger picture of LGBTQ rights?*

Grade Level		Time	Common Core Standards
K-2	3-5	45 Minutes	Reading: R1 Writing: W6, W7, W8 Speaking & Listening: SL1, SL3 Language: L5, L6
MS	HS		



## Web Related Connections

### Lessons

- [Social Justice Poetry](#)
- [Wedding Cake, Same-Sex Marriage and Discrimination](#)
- [Understanding Homophobia/Heterosexism and How to Be an Ally](#)
- [Unheard Voices: Stories of LGBT History](#)

### Other Resources

- [10 Ways Youth Can Engage in Activism](#)
- [Helping Students Make Sense of News Stories about Bias and Injustice](#)
- [LGBTQ Pride Month](#)
- [Safe and Inclusive Schools for All](#)

## Key Words

activism  
barricaded  
catalyst  
galvanizing  
harassment  
protests  
raided  
refuge  
regulations  
riot  
shunned  
syndicate  
uprising  
warrant

## LESSON OVERVIEW

On June 28, 1969, the Stonewall uprising took place. It began in the early morning at the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City. As was typical during that time period, police officers entered the bar and arrested employees for selling alcohol without a liquor license, roughed up customers, cleared the bar and arrested customers for not wearing at least three articles of “gender-appropriate” clothing. While raids like this happened regularly, this time the LGBTQ community (patrons and neighbors) had had enough and engaged in what began as a spontaneous, violent demonstration that spawned additional demonstrations over several days. Though LGBTQ rights activism existed prior to 1969, many view Stonewall as the beginning of the organized gay rights movement and it is also seen as a symbol of resistance to social and political discrimination against the LGBTQ community.

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to learn more about the Stonewall uprising, reflect on LGBTQ rights and activism prior to and after Stonewall, and curate content around important milestones in the history of LGBTQ rights.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn about the Stonewall uprising of 1969 and its relevance to today.
- Students will analyze the difference between the words “riot” and “uprising.”
- Students will identify important dates and milestones in the history of LGBTQ rights and activism.
- Students will curate content about one important milestone and present that information to others.

## MATERIALS & PREPARATION

- *Stonewall Uprising* video (2017, 3 mins., PBS America, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbSwLOPrzVA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbSwLOPrzVA))
- [Background Information on the Stonewall Uprising](#) (for teacher)
- [The Stonewall Riots: Catalyst for Gay Rights Movement](#) (one copy for each student)

## PROCEDURES

### Video Viewing: [Stonewall Uprising](#)

1. Ask students: *Do you know anything about the Stonewall Inn in New York City?* Explain that June 2019 marks the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall uprising.
2. Show the video [Stonewall Uprising](#) and explain that it is a preview for a longer film. After watching the video, have students turn and talk with someone sitting next to them to share their initial thoughts with each other.
3. Share some or all of the [Background Information on the Stonewall Uprising](#).

### Defining Terminology: “Riot” vs. “Uprising”

1. Explain that in describing what happened at Stonewall, this event is sometimes described as a “riot” and sometimes as an “uprising.” Ask students: *What do you think is the difference between a riot and an uprising?*
2. In two-column format, write on the board/smart board the heading “Uprising” in the left column and “Riot” in the right column. Provide a few minutes for students to look up the two words in print dictionaries (if you have them in your classroom) as well as online dictionaries and apps. Ask them for words and phrases they found for each and record them on the board under their respective headings. If necessary, you can provide the Merriam Webster dictionary definition for both:

**Riot:** public violence, tumult or disorder

**Uprising:** a usually localized act of popular violence in defiance usually of an established government

Ask students: *What are some common words, phrases or concepts for each? How would you describe the difference between the two words?* Explain that an uprising usually has the connotation that the act of violence is in response and resistance to repression or oppression in some way, typically by those in power or government officials. The term riot tends to connote that people are engaging in a much less targeted and organized form of violent protest and that they are to blame.

3. Ask students: *Based on what you know about Stonewall so far, would you describe it as an uprising or a riot?* Have students raise their hands and ask for a few volunteers to explain why they voted the way they did. Explain that they will learn more throughout the lesson and will be asked again to share their opinions at the end of the lesson.

### Reading Activity

1. Distribute a copy of the “[The Stonewall Riots: Catalyst for Gay Rights Movement](#)” article and give students 10 minutes to it silently. As they read, have students underline any words, phrases and quotes that stand out to them.

**Note:** You can also assign the reading of this essay the night before for homework.

2. After reading, engage students in a brief discussion by asking some or all of the following questions:

- What did you learn that you didn’t know before?
- Why do you think the customers at Stonewall decided to not to leave after the police raid? Why do you think they fought back?
- How do you think things may have changed for LGBTQ people after Stonewall?
- What do you think led to the Stonewall uprising?
- How has your thinking shifted by reading this article?

### Research Activity: [Timeline of LGBTQ Rights](#)

1. Remind students about the part of the article they read that says, “though the Stonewall uprising didn’t start the gay rights movement, it was a galvanizing force for LGBT political activism.” Ask students: *What do you*

*think this means?* Explain that while there was LGBTQ organizing and activism before Stonewall, the uprising was seen as sparking the movement.

2. Explain to students that as a class, they are going to create a timeline of important dates, milestones and events about LGBTQ rights and activism, with each person (or pair of people) taking a part of the timeline.
3. Have students conduct an initial research in order to come up with a list of important dates, milestones and events in the timeline of LGBTQ rights. At this point, it will just be a list without details. The resources below may be helpful and students can use others as well. This can be done in class if you allow devices or laptops in your classroom.
  - [LGBT Rights Milestones Fast Facts](#) (CNN)
  - [26 gay-rights milestones](#) (Politico)
  - [18 Historic Moments in the Fight For LGBTQ Equality](#) (Teen Vogue)
  - [Milestones in the American Gay Rights Movement](#) (PBS)
4. After students have conducted their initial research, as a class, brainstorm a list of at least 15–20 dates, events and milestones which may include some but not all of the following (note that these are not in chronological order):
  - The Society for Human Rights, the first gay rights organization, is founded.
  - The American Psychiatric Association removes homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses.
  - Massachusetts becomes the first state to allow same-sex marriage.
  - Gilbert Baker designs and creates the first rainbow flag.
  - The “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” law, which prevented openly gay people from serving in the military, is revoked.
  - The raid of the Stonewall Inn and Stonewall uprising takes place.
  - The Supreme Court rules that states cannot ban same-sex marriage; thus marriage equality was recognized as a constitutional right nationwide.
  - The first World AIDS day is held.
  - Harvey Milk is elected as the first openly gay elected official, and becomes a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.
  - The National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights takes place in Washington, D.C.
  - President Bill Clinton signs the Defense of Marriage Act, banning federal recognition of same-sex marriage.
  - President Barack Obama calls for an end to “conversion therapy.”
  - The Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act is signed into law and protects LGBTQ people from hate-based violence.
  - The U.S. House of Representatives passes the federal Equality Act, to clarify comprehensive non-discrimination protections in all aspects of society on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.
5. Assign each student (or pair of students) one of the events/milestones. Have students work on their milestone over the course of a few weeks (classwork and homework) to curate a collection of content around the milestone. The items they should write and/or collect can be digital (using Pinterest, Storify or something similar), print or a combination of the two.

Tell students that all of the projects should have, at the minimum, a short description of the event (4–5 sentences of original writing), the date and some type of visual (original drawing, photograph, etc.). Other items may include one or more of the following; you may require specific categories or a specific total amount of items:

- Videos

- Relevant articles
  - Primary source documents about the event
  - Student's personal reflections on the event
  - Quotes of people who were there
  - Anything else
6. When students have completed their research and content creation about their milestone, have each person (or pair) present their various pieces of information with the class in chronological order. Compile all of presented pieces and create a chronological timeline to be shared, either on a bulletin board, online and/or as a presentation.
  7. Ask students: *What do you hope to see added to this timeline in the future?* Add some items that students hope will be in the timeline in future years and plot where those milestones might take place. Some ideas might include: (1) making sure all states have hate crimes laws and all include gender identity and sexual orientation in their laws, (2) banning all conversion therapy, (3) putting laws in place to prevent employers from firing people from their jobs on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity and (4) enacting LGBTQ rights and same-sex marriage laws in other countries.

### Closing

Ask students to reflect again about the difference between the words “riot” and “uprising” and have them share how they would frame Stonewall and why.

### ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES

- [“9 Battles the LGBT Community in the US Is Still Fighting, Even in 2017”](#) (Global Citizen, June 20, 2017)
- [“50 Years after Stonewall, We’re Still Disagreeing about What Happened There. That’s Why the Archives Matter”](#) (*Time*, April 30, 2019)
- [“An Amazing 1969 Account of the Stonewall Uprising”](#) (*The Atlantic*, January 24, 2013)
- [“LGBT activists remember Stonewall riots 50 years later: ‘We were fighting and it was for our lives’”](#) (ABC News, May 21, 2019)
- [Stonewall Riots](#) (History, August 21, 2018)
- [Stonewall Uprising](#) (Thirteen/American Experience)
- [“The House just passed a sweeping LGBTQ rights bill”](#) (Vox, May 17, 2019)
- [“Memories of That Night at the Stonewall Inn, From Those Who Were There”](#) (*The New York Times*, June 16, 2019)

## Common Core Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
R1: 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.
Writing
W6: Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.
W7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
W8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
Speaking and Listening
SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
SL3: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
Language
L5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
L6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

## Background Information on the Stonewall Uprising

- The Stonewall uprising, also sometimes referred to as the Stonewall riots, began in the early morning hours of June 28, 1969 at the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City. Nine police officers entered the bar and arrested employees for selling alcohol without a liquor license, roughed up many customers, cleared the bar and arrested several customers for not wearing at least three articles of “gender-appropriate” clothing (which was a New York criminal law at that time).
- When raids like these happened in the past, customers would typically leave the premises. However, the LGBTQ community’s anger this time was strong and resolute as they watched customers being taken away in a police van. They began to taunt the police, throwing bottles and debris and as a result, the police officers called in reinforcements. What happened next was a series of violent demonstrations by the LGBTQ community—both customers and neighbors—which lasted several days.
- Prior to and during the 1960’s, our country was a hostile place for LGBTQ people. For that reason, they congregated at gay bars and clubs where they could socialize and express themselves openly. These bars were continually shut down by the police, because the mere gathering of gay people constituted “disorderly” behavior. In the 1960’s, many of these regulations were overturned, but certain behaviors like holding hands, kissing, or dancing with someone of the same sex were still illegal, so police harassment in gay bars continued. In addition to raids and beatings, police sometimes used entrapment by pretending to be a gay man searching for a partner in order to make arrests. Notable riots at gay bars in Los Angeles and San Francisco took place in the 1960’s before Stonewall.
- Many people saw Stonewall as the beginning of the gay rights movement and it was also seen as a symbol of resistance to social and political discrimination against the LGBTQ community. Though activism around LGBTQ rights existed in various ways prior to 1969, the Stonewall uprising mobilized the LGBTQ community towards increased organizing and as a result, several LGBTQ rights organizations were established. LGBTQ rights groups were inspired by other activist movements of the 1960’s, including the Civil Rights and anti-war movements.
- Here are some quotes<sup>1</sup> from people and activists who were there:
  - “Growing up in the 1950s, you conformed to society and what it was...obviously 'no one is supposed to be gay.' I think that was a message that kept people like me in the closet. But, our youth, our generation was a different generation. We weren't going to be conformists to the 1950s. It was a glorious place (Stonewall) to be because we could be open, we could be ourselves, we could dance, we could hug, we could kiss. We could be openly who we were.”
  - “There was supposed to have been a shoe thrown, or there was a brick thrown. Or someone threw off a Molotov cocktail. We were fighting and it was for our lives. We said we want to be treated equally under the law. And if the law doesn't, you have to change it.”
  - “It’s all of us together, women and men, and trans and bi. I felt that our goal was to transform the world.”

<sup>1</sup> Quotes excerpted from Allie Yang, “[LGBT activists remember Stonewall riots 50 years later: ‘We were fighting and it was for our lives’](#)”, ABC News, May 21, 2019.



## The Stonewall Riots: Catalyst for Gay Rights Movement

By History.com on 06.08.2017

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Word Count **898**

Level **MAX**



On June 28, 1969, police raided the Stonewall Inn nightclub. The crowd tried to impede police arrests outside the nightclub in New York City. Photo from Getty Images

In the early hours of June 28, 1969, New York City police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay club located in Greenwich Village in New York City. The raid sparked a riot among bar patrons and neighborhood residents as police roughly hauled employees and patrons out of the bar, leading to six days of protests and violent clashes with law enforcement outside the bar on Christopher Street, in neighboring streets and in nearby Christopher Park. The Stonewall Riots served as a catalyst for the gay rights movement in the United States and around the world.

### Gay bars: A place of refuge

The 1960s and preceding decades were not welcoming times for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Americans. For instance, solicitation of homosexual relations was illegal in New York City, and there was a criminal statute that allowed police to arrest people wearing less than three gender-appropriate articles of clothing.

For such reasons, LGBT individuals flocked to gay bars and clubs, places of refuge where they could express themselves openly and socialize without worry. However, the New York State Liquor Authority penalized and shut

down establishments that served alcohol to known or suspected LGBT individuals, arguing that the mere gathering of homosexuals was "disorderly."

Thanks to activists' efforts, these regulations were overturned in 1966, and LGBT patrons could now be served alcohol. But engaging in gay behavior in public (holding hands, kissing or dancing with someone of the same sex) was still illegal, so police harassment of gay bars continued and many bars still operated without liquor licenses — in part because they were owned by the Mafia.

### Stonewall Inn

The crime syndicate saw profit in catering to shunned gay clientele, and by the mid-1960s, the Genovese crime family controlled most Greenwich Village gay bars. In 1966, they purchased Stonewall Inn (a "straight" bar and restaurant), cheaply renovated it and reopened it the next year as a gay bar.

Stonewall Inn was registered as a type of private "bottle bar," which did not require a liquor license because patrons were supposed to bring their own liquor. Club attendees had to sign their names in a book upon entry to maintain the club's false exclusivity. The Genovese family bribed New York's Sixth Police Precinct to ignore the activities occurring within the club.

Without police interference, the crime family could cut costs how they saw fit: The club lacked a fire exit, running water behind the bar to wash glasses, clean toilets that didn't routinely overflow and palatable drinks that weren't watered down beyond recognition. What's more, the Mafia reportedly blackmailed the club's wealthier patrons who wanted to keep their sexuality a secret.

Nonetheless, Stonewall Inn quickly became an important Greenwich Village institution. It was large and relatively cheap to enter. It welcomed drag queens, who received a bitter reception at other gay bars and clubs. It was a nightly home for many runaways and homeless gay youths, who panhandled or shoplifted to afford the entry fee. And it was one of the few gay bars left that allowed dancing, if not the only one.

Raids were still a fact of life, but usually corrupt cops would tip off Mafia-run bars before they occurred, allowing owners to stash the alcohol (sold without a liquor license) and hide other illegal activities. In fact, the NYPD had stormed Stonewall Inn just a few days before the riot-inducing raid.

### The Stonewall Riots begin

When police raided Stonewall Inn on the morning of June 28, it came as a surprise — the bar wasn't tipped off this time.

Armed with a warrant, police officers entered the club, roughed up patrons and, finding bootlegged alcohol, arrested 13 people, including employees and people violating the state's gender-appropriate clothing statute (female officers would take suspected cross-dressing patrons into the bathroom to check their sex).

Fed up with constant police harassment and social discrimination, angry patrons and neighborhood residents hung around outside of the bar rather than disperse, becoming increasingly agitated as the events unfolded and people were aggressively manhandled. At one point, an officer hit a lesbian woman over the head as he forced her into the paddy wagon — she shouted to onlookers to act, inciting the crowd to begin throwing pennies, bottles, cobblestones and other objects at the police.

Within minutes, a full-blown riot involving hundreds of people began. The police, a few prisoners and a Village Voice writer barricaded themselves in the bar, which the mob attempted to set on fire after breaching the barricade repeatedly.



The Stonewall Inn in 1969. Photo from Wikimedia.

The fire department and a riot squad were eventually able to douse the flames, rescue those inside Stonewall and disperse the crowd. But the protests, sometimes involving thousands of people, continued in the area for five more days, flaring up at one point after the Village Voice published its account of the riots.

Though the Stonewall uprising didn't start the gay rights movement, it was a galvanizing force for LGBT political activism, leading to numerous gay rights organizations, including the Gay Liberation Front, Human Rights Campaign, GLAAD (formerly Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) and PFLAG (formerly Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays).

In 2016, President Barack Obama designated the site of the riots — Stonewall Inn, Christopher Park and the surrounding streets and sidewalks — a national monument in recognition of the area's contribution to gay and human rights.

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