

Cross curriculum

These ideas could form the basis of lessons in Geography, Citizenship, Sociology, Science, ICT or Media Studies - or be used as the basis for drama exercises. Hopefully these suggestions, and the others in this resource, will also inspire you to devise more lessons of your own.

Challenging 'heteronormativity'

1 Ask students to imagine that they live in a world where homosexuality is the norm and heterosexuals are in the minority:

- There are very few visible straight relationships and the few straight characters on TV seem to be gross stereotypes of men and women.
- Heterosexual hate crime is on the increase: on the news you heard that a man and a woman had been attacked and beaten in the street for holding hands.
- In many countries in the world it is illegal to have a relationship with someone of the opposite sex.
- In some countries being heterosexual is punishable by death.

2 Encourage young people to think about the ways that heterosexual relationships are constantly affirmed as 'normal' in our society (in advertising, song lyrics and so on), while LGBT relationships are largely invisible.

3 Ask them to look for books in the school library which feature 'minority' characters.

- Can they find any books in the school library which feature LGBT characters?
- How many?
- Why might this group be under-represented?

Ask them to search Amazon and other sites for books featuring LGBT characters which they think could be added to the school library. *Gay's the Word* bookshop¹⁹ can supply details of books aimed at teenager readers that feature LGBT characters.)

4 Celebrities: In a world with Will Young, Matt Lucas and Jake Shears, why are so many LGBT celebrities still afraid to come out?

- Are there far more famous gay men than lesbians?
- Why might that be?
- Why are most LGBT celebrities also white and able-bodied?
- Why is so much attention given to the personal life of any remotely well known LGBT person?

5 Ask the class why, in a society in which LGBT people are widely perceived to have equality with straights, there are things that straight people take for granted that aren't available to LGBT people?

Can young LGBT people talk about their relationships openly or hold hands with their partners in public?

Develop the argument to consider whether this kind of homophobia affects the rest of us in any way:

- The way we express our feelings with our friends.
- The occupations we chose or the leisure activities we take part in.
- The way we dress.

Does this matter?

In what ways would we all benefit if homophobia were truly to disappear?

You could develop the argument further to think about how racism might negatively affect white people or to consider the impact of sexism on men.

¹⁹ www.gaystheword.co.uk

Science and society

Ask students to research the ongoing debate about whether there is a genetic component to being LGB:

- Why is the search apparently concentrated on looking for a 'gay gene' but not for a straight one?
- Does it matter if there is a genetic element to sexual orientation?
- How much of the debate is driven by a desire for knowledge and how much by other interests?

- What are the implications – positive and negative – for LGB people if a genetic connection is proven?
- What are the wider implications for all of us?
- If being LGB is, as some claim, genetically 'aberrant' why does it occur in all societies throughout history?
- Why has it not died out?
- Why are most parents of LGB children heterosexual?

In particular, consider how many of our characteristics – gender, ethnicity, intelligence, ability – are either completely dependent on our genetic make-up or are significantly influenced by it.

Online research

1 Ask students to research Alan Turing – 'father of the computer'.

- How much of what we take for granted today owes a debt to his work? Bear in mind his role in breaking the Enigma code as well as his contribution to the development of computers.

- Has Turing's sexual orientation affected the way history perceives him and his achievements?

Develop this exercise to consider the limitations of online research by focusing on the widely repeated but unsubstantiated claim that the Apple computers logo is a tribute to Turing and the manner of his death.

2 Other figures to research might include Bayard Rustin, the openly gay African-American civil rights organiser, or Billy Tipton, a jazz musician, who married five times and 'fathered' three children and was revealed at the time of her death in 1989 to be biologically female.

- What do their stories tell us about the links between different forms of discrimination and oppression and the limited opportunities available to minorities?

How many LGB people are there?

1 Estimates of the percentage of people who are LGB vary wildly.

- Why do we have no accurate figures?
- Would it be useful if we did?

2 Look at the new UK census form²⁰ Point out that it includes questions about ethnicity and gender but not about sexual orientation

- Why might that be?

You can point out that, although it mentions civil partnership, this only tells us about the (presumed) sexual orientation of people who are in one.

3 Remind students of recent legislation supporting LGB equality and ask:

- If we don't even know the percentage of LGB people in the population, how can we begin to assess the effectiveness of this legislation?

4 Ask the class why we seem more concerned about some 'minorities' than others.

- Does this send a message to service providers and the population as a whole?

The *Avert* website includes a lot of useful material including information about the number of LGB people in Britain and elsewhere²¹.

Comparing homophobia to racism and other forms of discrimination

This exercise is not just about LGB rights but all rights, so that students can apply their morals and beliefs to lots of different equality issues.

1 Most students are very much against racism. Teachers can use racism as a comparison to homophobia.

2 Use cards with statements such as:

"A black person should not marry a white person."

"Two men should be able to adopt a baby together."

"Muslims should only marry Muslims"

"A woman in a wheelchair should not be allowed to have a baby.. "

Students can work through these statements in groups and reflect on their own personal beliefs about what is 'proper' and what is not 'proper' in their own mind.

3 Consider comparing LGB rights with those of women.

'Gay' people in the media

1 Hand out the worksheet: 'Gay' teletubby probe by Polish government.

Find (or ask students to find) examples like the Teletubbies news story. The report is quite amusing, but what are the more serious implications?

- Is it possible for a Teletubby to be 'gay'?
- How does carrying a handbag make you gay?
- If there is a 'gay' Teletubby, how do we know it isn't Dipsy, Laa-Laa or Po?

- Why do some people feel they have to 'police' images that challenge stereotypical images of gender?

2 What do people mean when they talk about 'promoting' homosexuality?

- You might ask students to design a campaign 'promoting' homosexuality.
- Are there any advantages to being LGB?

3 Consider these headlines

Highest paid baseball star in America comes out...

Shop worker in line for £120,000 after suffering homophobic bullying...

Gay marchers to defy Moscow ban...

Ask students to investigate other stories like these.

- What do the ways in which different publications present these stories tell us about how LGB people are perceived?
- What do they tell us about the media itself?
- How do newspapers, special interest groups and bloggers, for example, present stories to serve their own agendas?

4 Look at a range of different stories.

- Do any stereotypes emerge?
- Is it harder to find stories about some LGB people than other groups, such as women, the elderly or the disabled?
- Why might this be?

20 www.statistics.gov.uk/census/pdfs/2007_test_H1_form.pdf

21 www.avert.org/hsexu1.htm

'GAY' TELETUBBY PROBE BY POLISH GOVERNMENT

By Amy Bourke

The Polish government is currently investigating the Teletubbies over claims of homosexuality.

The popular children's television show, and especially the character of Tinky Winky, has been accused of promoting gay propaganda by the conservative government.

Teletubbies featured four brightly coloured alien characters which are loved by young children.

According to Reuters, Ewa Sowinska, government-appointed children rights watchdog, said she would ask psychologists to advise if the Teletubbies' camp antics could affect children.

She said: "I noticed [Tinky Winky] has a lady's purse, but I didn't realize he's a boy.

"At first I thought the purse would be a burden for this Teletubby... Later I learned that this may have a homosexual undertone."

However, the Polish Parliamentary Speaker Ludwig Dorn said he had warned Sowinska against making any comments which would "turn her department into a laughing stock."

The Polish government has drawn criticism in recent years from the European Union for discrimination against gay people.

The Education Minister, Roman Giertych, has proposed laws similar to Section 28, which would involve sacking teachers who promote "homosexual lifestyle" and banning "homo-agitation" in schools.

The late controversial US preacher Jerry Falwell made similar comments to Sowinska in 1999, prompting a worldwide debate over the sexuality of Tinky Winky.

He claimed that Tinky Winky must be gay because he is purple and has a triangle on his head; both of which are symbols of gay pride.

Amy Bourke, Pink News, May 2007

Challenging myths and stereotypes about LGB people

Many of us worry about how to challenge some of the remarks we hear about LGB people. The following information should help you to address such comments.

Use the prompts under each statement to inform your responses to some of the things that young people say. It will be useful to stress, wherever appropriate, key points such as:

- the similarities between homophobia and other forms of prejudice such as racism
- the fact that, while we are all entitled to our views, we are not entitled to expect others to share them or to exclude others because their lives are different from our own
- the many similarities between LGB and straight relationships
- the way prejudice is often based on misinformation
- that sexual orientation – like gender or ethnicity – is not a choice and that, consequently, homophobia is just as unfair and damaging as sexism or racism.

Remind young people that all members of the school's community have the same right to respect, which includes being accepted and feeling safe. You may want to refer to relevant parts of the school's prospectus, ethos statement, anti-bullying policy or other documents.

See *Safe to Learn (Department for Children, Schools and Families)*²² for more suggestions on challenging homophobic language and behaviour.



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22 www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/tacklingbullying/homophobicbullying/

Being LGB is against the Bible, the Qur'an...

Remind students that being LGB is not a choice. And while we cannot choose how we feel, we can choose how we act.

Point out that, whatever the young people concerned may think, no forms of discrimination are acceptable in this school; on the grounds of faith, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or anything else. You cannot pick and choose which forms of discrimination are acceptable and which are not.

To this day, many members of all faith groups still debate the meanings of their key texts. For example, the Bible tells us not to wear mixed fibres, practice crop rotation, eat shellfish or cross-breed animals of different species, but some Christians happily wear polycotton shirts and own mules without fear of eternal damnation. Many people of faith do not believe that they have to agree with every word of the bible or Qur'an in order to be a follower of their particular faith.

In any case, just because we disagree with people, does that give us the right to bully or exclude them or deny them the same rights as us, even if we believe our faith supports us in feeling them to be wrong?

Just as people have a right to practice their own beliefs without being harassed, LGB people have the right to love who they chose without being attacked for it by others who may disagree with them. Jesus said "love thy neighbour" and most people of faith believe that bullying is wrong, whatever the reason behind it.

It is also worth remembering that no less a figure than Archbishop Desmond Tutu said "Everyone is an insider, there are no outsiders – whatever their beliefs, whatever their colour, gender or sexuality". See page 18 for examples of LGB members of the clergy.

Gay men are paedophiles

Untrue. Gay men are no more likely to be paedophiles than any other members of the population.

Women become lesbians because they have had bad sexual experiences with men

There is no evidence to support this. If you have a bad experience with someone you may well end the relationship but this cannot make straight people LGB (or LGB people straight.)

Some people may be attracted to different genders during their lifetimes, but this is because they find those individuals attractive, not because they have been 'turned off' one gender by bad experiences.

HIV is gay men's fault

The vast majority of HIV transmissions worldwide are between heterosexual couples. Regardless of our sexual orientation, we can all protect ourselves by practising safer sex.

Being around LGB people can make you gay

Untrue. If being around people of one sexual orientation could make you like them, then wouldn't most LGB people be turned straight, since they have no choice but to spend a lot of time around straight people?

All/only gay men have anal sex

Not true. Many heterosexual couples have anal sex. And quite a few gay men do not.

What consenting couples do in bed is no one else's business anyway. Nobody should have to do something they don't want to do, but this doesn't give us the right to criticise others whose sex lives may differ from our own.

Lesbians having sex with each other makes me feel sick

Other people's sexuality is their own private business. If we don't like it then we don't need to think about it.

It is disrespectful to criticise someone else's sexual orientation just because it is different from our own. Just because you don't agree with someone – or think the same way as they do – that does not give you the right to exclude, bully or insult them.

LGB people should keep their sexual orientation private: we don't need to know their business

LGB people have the same right to be as open (or private) about their relationships as straight people. Saying that you are LGB or talking about your same-sex partner is not doing anything more than straight people take for granted; for example, when they talk about their wives and husbands.

People who fancy the same sex have something wrong with their minds

There is no evidence for this. LGB people are not mentally ill. Sexual orientation is just another form of difference like gender or ethnicity.

Like straight people, some LGB people may suffer mental health problems for all sorts of reasons. One reason might be the fact that they are often excluded or bullied by other members of society.

You can spot someone who fancies the same sex because they act and dress differently to normal people

Some people may conform to stereotypes, whether it is to do with sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity or any other form of identity. Indeed, some people may feel a sense of 'belonging' by sharing certain characteristics with their friends or peer group. However, not all gay men are effeminate and not all lesbians have short hair: some straight men can enjoy wearing flamboyant clothes and some straight women have short hair. You can't tell by looking if somebody is LGBT or straight.

It is normal to make babies through heterosexual sex

Many people, not just gay men and lesbians, become parents through other means, such as artificial insemination, fostering or adoption. Similarly, most straight people often have sex just because they enjoy it, with no intention of creating life. In both these areas – the varieties of ways we become parents and enjoying sex – LGBT and straight people are very similar.

Gay men are more promiscuous than other people. This is why so many of them get AIDS

Some people have more sexual partners than others. This is an individual choice and nothing to do with our sexual orientation. Indeed, many gay men are highly educated about HIV and very responsible about protecting themselves and their partners.

Whatever your sexual orientation, your risk of contracting HIV – or any sexually transmitted infection (STI) – will be increased if you have multiple partners.

People who say they are bisexual are just greedy

Bisexuality – like being lesbian, gay or straight – is not a choice. Some people just are attracted to both genders. Most of these people will happily enjoy long-term relationships with partners of their choice. Many people in relationships – regardless of their sexual orientation – may be attracted to other people, but this does not mean they will act on it.

People become gay or lesbian because they are too ugly to get partners of the opposite sex

There is no evidence to support this. And I'm sure we can all think of some very attractive gay men and lesbians!

Now that gays and lesbians can get married they should stop moaning about homophobia

Although gay men and lesbians can have civil partnerships in this country, this has not stopped many of them facing discrimination and prejudice. The fact that we have laws to protect LGBT people from discrimination – and the police treat homophobic crime as seriously as racist crime – should tell us that, unfortunately, LGBT people, like other minority groups, still have to deal with discrimination and prejudice.

Life is still difficult for many LGBT people: 40% of LGBT people who are bullied at school make at least one attempt to harm themselves.

If gays and lesbians have children they could make the child gay

There is no evidence for this. If children always took after the sexual orientation of their parents then there would be no LGBT children born to straight parents – and yet the vast majority of them are.

Only white people with money are gay, lesbian or bisexual

There are LGBT people in all ethnic groups and all walks of life. A quick search on the Internet will reveal many LGBT people who are neither white nor rich.

Edited and compiled by Mark Jennett

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He has contributed to a range of other publications and written guidance for Stonewall and the Greater London Authority.

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Phillip now works as Sector Development Officer – Young Gay Men at the Terrence Higgins Trust in London. He has written young gay men's website **www.ygm.org.uk**, as well as the first set of national good practice guidelines in LGB youth work. His role at the Terrence Higgins Trust has enabled him to develop national training to youth/education workers on tackling homophobia and raising awareness of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth Issues.

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