



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2023 Volume III: Writing Queer and Trans Lives

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## **American History - LGBTQ Figures and Voices**

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The LGBTQ community has a rich history that is part of the American story—American History. This year-long unit fits anywhere in the continuum of your American History curriculum. Through this unit students will have the opportunity to discover the contributions of the LGBTQ community to major historical happenings that changed the course of history. For example, George Washington’s Continental Army would not have survived the harsh winter during the American Revolution without the help of Prussian war strategist Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben. He was openly gay. However, Washington still sought von Steuben to train his men in effective weaponry use. The men learned how to quickly reload muskets in preparation for fire as well as bayonet use. This training was crucial because the Prussian Army was well known for superior army and battle strength.

The unit is designed to help teachers pair their American History curriculum, which is familiar to most with a pairing of the occurrences of the LGBTQ community whose names and involvement were left out or erased. Students will examine periods like the Harlem Renaissance and the rich contributions of writers, actors, singers, poets and performers—many of whom never expressed their personal lives. Some of the impetus for the products they created like poems and plays were sparked by their hidden struggles. Many times, their personal struggles and the threat of harsh treatment by society if exposed forced the Harlem Renaissance intellectuals to take a stand for the civil rights of others, thus impacting and even changing history for all mankind.

This unit will be taught throughout the year of the eighth-grade American history curriculum. Students will use research to explore the impact and influences of the LGBTQ community on American History from the early 1600s until the mid to late 1900s. Students will discover that much of the information that they need is not located in their Social Studies textbooks. Students will research private correspondence, newspaper articles, interviews, poems, plays, songs, and information that was shared by their confidants. At the end of this year-long process, students will have a more accurate representation of American History as well as societal factors that originally silenced the voices and hid the contributions of the LGBTQ community.

Essential questions for this unit are:

- How have cultural, social and political forces shaped interactions with or impacted the lives of those who are a part of the LGBTQ community?
- Who is responsible for erasure?
- What might erasure look like?

- How high the LGBTQ experience been represented in your classes?
- How well has the LGBTQ experience or accomplishments been discussed in your social studies or history classes?
- How is the LGBTQ community represented in society?
- What areas of the United States are open to/promote LGBTQ rights?
- What areas of the United States are closed to/against LGBTQ rights?
- Who or what determines how the LGBTQ rights are established?
- Do all Americans have the same rights?
- What are some of the things that influence the LGBTQ community?
- What are some of the things that positively and negatively influence the LGBTQ community?
- What changes in governmental laws practices have gone into place to support the LGBTQ community?
- How were laws used to halt or impede the LGBTQ community?
- What events have influenced the LGBTQ plus community/ movement?
- Why do you think that the LGBTQ experience has been represented in a particular way?
- In your opinion, how does society feel about the LGBTQ experience?
- How does the LGBTQ experience compare from the Harlem renaissance era to the 1970s era?
- How does the LGBTQ experience of today compare to the 1800s?
- What are reasons that the involvement of the LGBTQ community, like the influences of minority groups left out of the history books?
- How can erasure be used as a weapon?
- What are the attitudes that support or promote erasure? Can those attitudes still be found in society today?
- How have attitudes surrounding the LGBTQ community changed?

(Developed for Social Studies and American History, grade 8; recommended for American History and Social Justice, grades 8-12)

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