



TEACHER STUDY GUIDE



March 3rd – 11th 2012 at the Boston Center for the Arts

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page 3: About the Play, About the Performance, About the Author

Page 4: About the Playwright

Page 5-6: Synopsis, Setting, List of Characters

Page 7: Pre-Show and Post-Show Questions

Page 8-9: Primary Source Materials

Page 10: “Reflections of a Rock Lobster” and Aaron Fricke Press and Resources

Page 11-12: Theme: Acceptance

Page 13: Know Your Rights

Page 14-15: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender in School: The Facts; Teacher and Student Resources

Page 16: Bullying: The Facts; Teacher and Student Resources

Page 17-23: Activities for the Classroom

Additional Information About the Production Can Be Found at

<http://bostonchildrenstheatre.org/season/rocklobster/>

About the Play and Performance

Based on a true story, this World Premiere play REFLECTIONS OF A ROCK LOBSTER profiles a bullied teenager, Aaron Fricke. After being bullied relentlessly, 17 year-old student Aaron Fricke from Cumberland, Rhode Island sued his high school in 1980 for the right to escort his boyfriend to his senior prom. In the tradition of *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, this play deals with issues of bullying and prejudice. Boston Children's Theatre is most proud to bring a story from local history to enlighten today's youth with positive messages of tolerance and acceptance.

Boston Children's Theatre is proud to be the first children's theatre in the country to address this extremely difficult and sensitive subject matter. We are asking our audiences- students, teachers, administrations, parents, grandparents- to join us in saying bullying and intolerance of those different from ourselves make us all the victim. By enlightening and entertaining audiences with positive messages of acceptance, BCT hopes to encourage open discussion about the emotional and physical effects of bullying and how we can all prevent it from happening in our communities.

It has been an honor for Boston Children's Theatre to have Aaron Fricke, now 49 and living in San Francisco, to travel to New England to be involved with the rehearsal process and to see the production when it opens to the public. His presence has been an integral part of the process for both the cast and crew.



Aaron Fricke

About the Author: The play is based on the book by Aaron Fricke, *Reflections of a Rock Lobster: A Story About Growing Up Gay*. Aaron Fricke is a gay rights activist. He was born January 25, 1962 in Providence, Rhode Island. He is best known for the pivotal case in which he successfully sued his high school for not allowing him to bring his boyfriend to the senior prom at Cumberland High School in Cumberland, Rhode Island.

Shortly after he came out in 1980, Aaron began seeing another male student, Paul Guilbert, and the two fell in love. Aaron decided to bring Paul as his date to the prom.

The suit brought by Aaron Fricke against his school is considered a major milestone in the history of gay rights. Each year cases of young same-sex couples being discriminated against by their schools happen around the world, and when these cases are brought to court, the suit first brought by Aaron Fricke and Paul Guilbert is invariably cited by the plaintiff's counsel.



About the Playwright: Burgess Clarke serves as the Executive Artistic Director for Boston Children's Theatre, and is the playwright behind this adaptation and World Premiere of *Reflections of a Rock Lobster*, based on Aaron Fricke's memoir of the same name. Clark read Fricke's autobiographical book while he was still in college and has been looking for the chance to adapt the book into a

play for several years now. The piece seemed the perfect fit for Boston Children's Theatre, which is committed to producing socially relevant new work for young people.

A 30 year theatre professional, Burgess was nominated in 1991 and again in 2007 as a "Distinguished Teacher in the Arts" by the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts for encouraging and supporting students with exceptional artistic achievement. Burgess has taught for the University of Hawaii and acted as Director of Theatre for The Mid-Pacific Institute. He also served as Director of Education for the Honolulu Theatre for Youth and was the Director of Theatre at the Perry Mansfield School of the Arts in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, the oldest arts school in the nation. Prior to assuming leadership of the Boston Children's Theatre, Burgess was the Director of Education of the acclaimed Academy of Music Theatre at North Shore Music Theatre in Beverly, MA. From 1988-94, Clark was the National Instructor for the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts/Office of Very Special Arts, working with special populations and those who educate them. Five of his students have won the National Young Playwrights' Award. An award-winning writer, Burgess wrote the Emmy-nominated documentary series *Pets: Part of the Family* for PBS, hosted by Gary Burghoff. He was the recipient of the Beverly Hills Theatre Guild's 2000 Julie Harris Award for his play, *The Ivory Alphabet*. Burgess was also honored at the 15th Annual William Inge Theatre Festival as the "New Voice in American Theatre." In 1999, he was awarded the Vermont Playwright's Award for his drama, *The Touch*. *Purple Hearts* was produced in San Francisco and toured to the Edinburgh Theatre Festival in Scotland where it placed among the "Best of Fest." A member of the Dramatists' Guild, Burgess has won several other playwriting awards, including "Best Play" from the National Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts, the Mary Roberts Rinehart Award for playwriting and a Special Services Achievement Award from the U.S. Army for *Purple Hearts*. Burgess' other works include *Down Came the Rain*, *Relative Strangers*, *The Velveteen Rabbit*, *Island of the Blue Dolphins* and an adaptation of Dylan Thomas' *A Child's Christmas in Wales* originally produced for the National Theatre of the Deaf.

THE PLAY

NOTE: REFLECTIONS OF A ROCK LOBSTER is appropriate for grades 9 - 12 and will be performed by students ages 14 - 19.

SETTING

Cumberland, Rhode Island; 1979-1980

SYNOPSIS

The year is 1980 and 17 year old student Aaron is gay. Being gay makes Aaron different at his high school in Cumberland, Rhode Island. With that stigma, he is subjected daily to violence and rejection-leaving him feeling dejected and with thoughts of suicide. Rising from his despair, Aaron strikes back by suing his Rhode Island high school for the right to escort his boyfriend to the prom. By standing up for his personal and civil rights and for refusing to apologize for who he is, Aaron not only wins in court, but he also wins in the hearts and minds of his peers and his community.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Aaron Fricke: a 17 year old gay high school student

Richard Lynch: Principal of Cumberland High School

Walter Fricke: Aaron's father, a ship's pilot

Loretta Fricke: Aaron's mother, a housewife

Cheryl Fricke: Aaron's older sister

Paul Guilbert: a gay classmate of Aaron's

Claudia Cooper: 17 year old student, Aaron's best friend

Chuck Cooper: Claudia's cousin from Pawtucket

Bob Cote: Aaron's best childhood friend

Marie Cote: Bob's mother

Mrs. Barbara Noelte: Aaron's Spanish teacher

John Delaney: a friend of Paul's who also runs the National Gay Task Force in Providence

John Ward: a Boston attorney who argues Aaron's case against the school

Ronald Chase: an attorney representing the Cumberland High School Board

Judge Raymond Pettine: Judge presiding over Aaron's case

Larry: a Rhode Island State Trooper and Aaron's police escort to the prom

Bea Duvwalge: a cheerleader and student council secretary as well as Bob Cote's girlfriend

Bill Quillar: leader of a group of boys at school who bullies Aaron

Dave: a boy at school who bullies Aaron

Mark: a boy at school who bullies Aaron

Jeff: a boy at school who bullies Aaron

Asher: Aaron's classmate from drama club

Jon: Aaron's classmate from drama club

Anne: Aaron's classmate from drama club

Shelley: Aaron's classmate from drama club

Bishop: Catholic bishop who calls for the boycotting of the high school prom

Bailiff: attends to Aaron's court case

Police Guard: officer assigned to protect Aaron and Paul at the prom

HELPFUL TERMS TO KNOW:

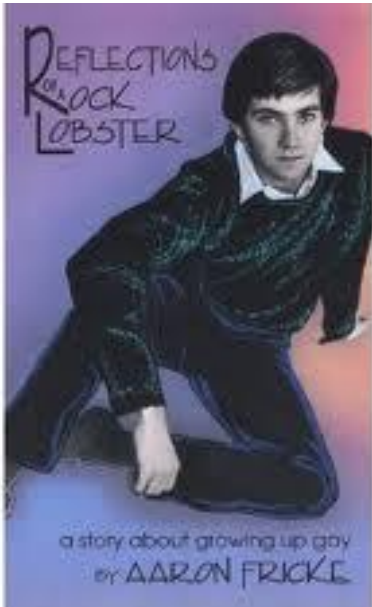
- **Sexual Orientation:** Sexual orientation is a person's emotional, physical, spiritual, intellectual, and sexual attraction and the expression of that attraction.
- **Coming Out:** (Also called "coming out of the closet" or being "out".) Refers to the process during which a person acknowledges, accepts, and in many cases appreciates their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. This often involves sharing of this information with others. The process of coming out to oneself and to others is unique for every individual.
- **Homosexuality:** A sexual orientation in which a person feels attracted to some members of the same gender - commonly, gay or lesbian.
- **Bisexuality:** A sexual orientation in which a person feels attracted to some members of both genders.
- **Transgender (TG):** An umbrella term used to refer to individuals for whom their anatomical sex does not accurately or adequately describe their gender identity. It is a term for designating those who transcend or transgress gender by not looking, acting, being or identifying as traditionally male or female; this umbrella term can include crossdressers, transsexuals, intersex people and other gender nonconformists. Because sexual orientation and gender identity are two separate identity issues, transgender individuals may also self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or heterosexual.

From "Definitions." Youth Pride Inc. Home. Youth Pride, Inc., 2010. Web. 21 Feb. 2012. <<http://www.youthprideri.org/ResourcesPublications/Definitions/tabid/187/Default.aspx>>.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Pre-Show:

- Research the gay rights movement in the United States, as well as major legal precedents related to LGBT discrimination in schools
- Have you ever experienced discrimination in any way? What did you do about it? Who were some safe people you were able to go talk to about it?



- Read *Reflections of a Rock Lobster: A Story About Growing Up Gay* by Aaron Fricke and learn more about his journey through high school as a gay teenager and his life as an activist
- Brainstorm a list of famous gay rights activists and learn more about their work for equality
- What makes someone a leader? Examine a time in your life when you were a leader for something you believed in.

Post-Show:

- Aaron's struggle to take his boyfriend to the prom took place in 1980. What might a similar struggle today look like? What issue would a student find resistance to in his or her high school?
- In the play, Paul tells Aaron to "Be your own hero." What does he mean by this? In what ways can you be your own hero when it comes to an issue you feel passionate about?
- In the play Mr. Lynch is an adult who represents intolerance. Mrs. Noelte represents an ally. Who are the Mr. Lynches and Mrs. Noeltes in your life?
- In the play, Aaron's mother has a difficult time accepting her son for who he is, and ultimately pulls away from him. Have you ever lost the support of a family member or friend because you have been honest about who you are or what you believed in? What happened? What the sacrifice that came with telling the truth worth it? Why or why not?

THE CASE: FRICKE V. LYNCH

In one of the earliest court cases addressing LGBT rights, Fricke v. Lynch was decided in 1980 by a court in Rhode Island. The case was brought forward by Aaron Fricke, then an eighteen-year-old high school student in Cumberland, RI. Fricke's school had prevented him from bringing a same-sex date to his high school prom, leading him to sue the principal (Richard Lynch) and Cumberland High School for the right to attend the prom with a same-sex date. The Judge in the case ruled that the school must allow students to bring dates of the same-sex, and that the school must provide enough security and oversight so that LGBT students are not harassed. The case was one of the first successful victories in the courtroom for an LGBT issue involving young people, and is routinely cited each year in numerous cases surrounding the rights of students to bring same-sex dates to school functions.

From "Ten LGBT Court Cases That Changed the Gay Rights Movement." Change.org News. Change.org, Inc., 2012. Web. 21 Feb. 2012. <<http://news.change.org/stories/ten-lgbt-court-cases-that-changed-the-gay-rights-movement>>.



Aaron Fricke and his date Paul Guilbert at the Cumberland High School Prom, 1980

View the full court case report here: <http://www.aclu.org/FilesPDFs/fricke.pdf>

LETTER FROM AARON AND PAUL TO TEENS WRITING IN SUPPORT OF THEIR CASE

C/O Attorney John P. Ward
2 Park Square, Room 400
Boston, MA 02116

September 1980

Dear Friends:

Thanks for writing and sending us your support. Knowing that you are behind us makes us feel good. We're glad to know that this was as momentous an occasion for many gay and straight people across the nation as it has been for us. We're looking forward to a world where everyone can co-exist peacefully. We're so glad you appreciated our efforts.

Yes, we do have a long way to go, but we're gaining speed and momentum. When the time comes that not one gay man or lesbian must be in the closet, then we'll know we have achieved what we set out to do. It will take some time, but we're sure that we'll all see a day when everyone is on an equal basis. That time may be close or may be distant. We all hope and pray only for the best.

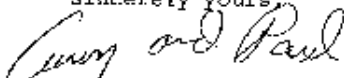
At the present time, Paul is attending the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York and is interested in photography. I had plans of going to college to take up acting, but since my parents split up it has been very difficult to obtain funds. However, we both find things to keep us very, very occupied, and it has become impossible for us to answer each of you individually. Time just does not permit, since we have received hundreds and hundreds of letters. We do read them all from entry to closing. We feel that you are all very special people to share your time with us.

If you are confused at the present time or if you'd like some help, we suggest you contact a gay organization or counseling service in your area. Most of the larger cities have gay youth groups. For information about organizations, counseling and events in your area, call the nearest gay switchboard or hotline. We have copied the list of switchboards from the Gayellow Pages and have enclosed it for your information.

Because you have shown such interest in our case, we are sending you a newsletter which published an article about it. The newsletter is published by the gay legal defense organization of which our attorney is executive director. If you would like to be placed on the mailing list to receive future newsletters, we suggest you write to GLAD directly.

If there's anything else you'd like to share with us, please feel free to write again. Mail can be sent in care of our attorney, whose address is above. Again we thank you so much for your support.

Sincerely yours,



Aaron and Paul

From "GLAD 30 Years | Case of the Month - June." GLAD / Home. GLAD, 2012. Web. 21 Feb. 2012. <http://www.glad.org/30years/case_jun.html>.

“REFLECTIONS OF A ROCK LOBSTER” PRESS

- Link to article about the production in the Boston Spirit:

<http://bostonchildrenstheatre.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Boston-Spirit-Red-Lobster-Article-JanFeb-Edition.pdf>

- Link to video sneak peek of the production

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKa5cKSZd-8&feature=player_embedded



Doug Bowen-Flynn as ‘Principal Lynch,’ Felix Teich as ‘Paul Guilbert,’ and Ian Shain as ‘Aaron Fricke’ in Boston Children’s Theatre’s World Premiere production REFLECTIONS OF A ROCK LOBSTER

“I THINK
YOU JUST BECAME
YOUR OWN HERO.”
-PAUL

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ABOUT AARON FRICKE

- Aaron Fricke’s Memoir, *Reflections of a Rock Lobster: A Story About Growing Up Gay*

<http://www.amazon.com/Reflections-Rock-Lobster-Growing-AlyCat/dp/1555836070>

- Aaron Fricke’s website, with more about his life, work, additional resources, and blog:

<http://redroom.com/member/aaron-fricke>

ACCEPTANCE: BEING YOURSELF, BEING PROUD OF WHO YOU ARE

One of the themes of the play is self-acceptance; learning who you are, taking pride in who you are, and having the courage to stand up for what you believe in, no matter how daunting the obstacles. As a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered (LGBT) youth, this can be especially challenging. Like Aaron does in the play, you may face resistance from your parents, family, and friends, and even your school. Human Rights Campaign, a national organization that advocates for LGBT equality, offers the following tips:

What does it mean to “come out”?

Coming out is the process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates his or her sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share that with others. Coming out is a continuous process and can often be risky or difficult.

Opening up to the possibility that you may be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or even just questioning means opening up to the idea that you’re on a path that’s your own. It’s also why coming out and living ever more openly is a profoundly liberating experience.

Coming out and living openly aren’t something you do once, or even for one year. It’s a journey that we make every single day of our lives. Every coming out experience is unique and must be navigated in the way most comfortable for the individual.

Coming Out to Oneself

Often, the coming out journey begins long before you’ve said a word to anyone. The realization that your sexual orientation may be different from others’ may trigger internal reflection that can last days, months or years before you’re comfortable talking about it. The journey is different for everyone. But figuring out your sexual identity can be complicated. It could take several months or several years. You may find it to be a lifelong process. Whatever your experience, it can help to talk to someone else about it. It’s normal to have trouble putting your thoughts into words, but you may find that a trusted friend or relative will listen to you anyway. You might also consider looking into local organizations in your community where you can find support from others who have gone through the same experiences.

Coming Out to Family as Gay

For many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, coming out to their families is a momentous occasion in their lives. Because coming out to your family is a key step in the process, it helps to prepare yourself for how they might react.

Fostering strong, deep relationships with your friends and family begins with honesty. Living openly is important because it allows for closer relationships with the people you care about – and ultimately a happier life for you. For most people, coming out or opening up to someone new starts with a conversation. It's normal to want or hope for positive reactions. Positive reactions can result from your coming out conversation, but they may not happen immediately. Give the person you're telling the time they need.

It may also be helpful to remember that the person you're really doing this for is you. When you're ready to tell someone, consider starting with the person most likely to be supportive.

Coming out will be an ongoing process. It's important to keep in mind, though, that while the facts surrounding your sexual orientation may seem obvious to you, it may represent a significant change from the way your family has always viewed the world. Although you've had time to grow comfortable with your sexuality, you are your family's only source of information on the subject. Try to remain patient with them and answer their questions openly and honestly. The key point to remember is that all relationships, whether they are same-sex or opposite-sex, deserve respect and understanding.

Coming Out in the Workplace as Gay

Coming out to your coworkers can be yet another difficult step. However, should you decide to be open in the workplace, your decision could have a dramatic impact on those around you. For many of your coworkers, you may be the first gay person they've ever encountered. While deciding whether to come out in your workplace, keep in mind that more and more businesses are welcoming gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender employees into the workforce, and implementing policies such as domestic partner benefits, non-discrimination ordinances and inclusive diversity training that protect LGBT workers. However, it's important to keep in mind that not every state has laws protecting people from employment discrimination based on sexual orientation. It may be a good idea to find out about employment discrimination laws in your state and consult your employer's written policy on discrimination before deciding whether to come out to your coworkers.

From "Gay." | Human Rights Campaign. The Human Rights Campaign, 2011-12. Web. 21 Feb. 2012. <<http://www.hrc.org/issues/pages/gay>>.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Aaron Fricke's court case serves as a major legal precedent and has helped to open doors for LGBT students across the country in the continuing struggle to gain equal rights in schools. Check out this excerpt from the Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders (GLAD) website report on LGBT Student Rights in Massachusetts:

LGBT students are often the victims of discrimination and harassment that can lead to feelings of fear, anger, anxiety, depression, and even suicide. For public school students in Massachusetts, there are both state and federal laws, as well as policies established by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, designed to protect LGBT students and to allow them to participate in both curricular and extra-curricular activities free from discrimination and harassment. In particular, as a public school student in Massachusetts, you have the right to:

- Attend school in safety. This means no sexual harassment or harassment/bullying based on your sexual orientation or gender identity or expression by other students or staff.
- Express your point of view, even on controversial issues, and to feel safe in doing so!
- Form a Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) on the same terms as all other extra-curricular student groups and to have your GSA receive the same treatment and privileges, including equal funding and equal access to school facilities.
- To wear clothing and otherwise present yourself in a way that fits your gender identity

GLAD hopes that this publication will help students, parents, teachers and administrators to better understand the rights and protections that exist in Massachusetts for LGBT students. If you find that your rights are not being respected, please contact GLAD's Legal InfoLine, Monday-Friday, 1:30-4:30 pm, at (800) 455-GLAD (4523). GLAD can provide you with additional information and referrals to agencies and attorneys who can help you to fight for your rights. GLAD has listings for over 150 agencies in Massachusetts that provide services to LGBT youth. A partial list of agencies is found in the Appendix, but contact GLAD for additional agencies in your area.

From "GLAD 30 Years | Case of the Month - June." GLAD / Home. GLAD, 2012. Web. 21 Feb. 2012. <http://www.glad.org/30years/case_jun.html>.

Major Findings from the **Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey**:

Students who described themselves as gay, lesbian, or bisexual were significantly more likely than their peers to report attacks, suicide attempts and drug and alcohol use. When compared to peers, this group was:

- over **four times more likely** to have attempted suicide in the past year
- over **four times more likely** to have skipped school in the past month because of feeling unsafe
- over **twice as likely** to have been injured or threatened with a weapon at school

From <http://www.mass.gov/cgly/YRBS09Factsheet.pdf>

LGBT Equality Resources

- ✓ www.glsen.org

GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, is the leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all students. Established in 1990, GLSEN envisions a world in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. GLSEN seeks to develop school climates where difference is valued for the positive contribution it makes to creating a more vibrant and diverse community.

- ✓ <http://chapters.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/massachusetts/resources/article-677.html>

Site for the Massachusetts chapter of GLSEN has contact information for GLBT crisis hotlines, resource centers, local advocacy groups, and legal assistance for LGBT youth.

- ✓ <http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/educator/index.html>

GLSEN's site for educators that includes resources for teachers, lesson plans, and ideas to advocate for equality in your classroom, school, and community.

- ✓ <http://www.youthprideri.org>

Youth Pride, Inc. is an organization based in Rhode Island that includes resources for young people, parents, and teachers dealing with issues concerning today's LGBT youth. The site even includes a resource guide for teens in the process of coming out to family and friends.

- ✓ <http://www.aclu.org/lgbt-rights>

Site for the American Civil Liberties Union and their campaign for LLGBT Rights that includes news updates, videos, a blog, and resources for all ages. Also see their section on LGBT youth in schools at <http://www.aclu.org/lgbt-rights/lgbt-youth-schools>, as well as their LGBT "Get Busy, Get Equal Campaign Page at <http://gbge.aclu.org/>

- ✓ <http://www.hrc.org/>

The Human Rights Campaign is a national organization committed to the fight for equality for all people regardless of sexual orientation. Articles, legislation news, and much more.

- ✓ <http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/safe.html>

The Safe School Coalition website is a comprehensive source for students dealing with issues of discrimination, relationships, and crisis related to sexual orientation. It includes an excellent section for teachers with lesson plans ideas, trainings, and ways to address this issue in the classroom.



Did you know?

Every school, with the exception of some (but not all) private schools, must, by law, have in place an anti-bullying policy. It must be posted on the school's website, and you can also request it from school administrators. It must include:

- A prohibition on bullying, cyber-bullying and retaliation
- Clear procedures for you to follow to confidentially and anonymously report bullying
- The procedures the school will take to respond to and investigate reports of bullying
- The range of disciplinary actions that may be taken against a bully
- Clear procedures for restoring a sense of safety to the bullied student and assessing the bullied student's needs for protection, including protection from retaliation for reporting the bullying
- Procedures to notify parents or guardians of the victim and the bully
- Procedures for providing, when necessary or requested, counseling to bullies and victims

You should make yourself familiar with this policy. It is important to get a sense of what will happen when you or someone else reports bullying so that you can remain in control of the situation.

From <http://www.glad.org/uploads/docs/publications/ma-students-what-to-do-bullied.pdf> and "Anti-Bullying Resources | GLSEN: Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network." GLSEN: Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network. GLSEN, 2003-12. Web. 21 Feb. 2012. <<http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/antibullying/index.html>>.

Bullying Resources:

- ✓ <http://www.stopbullying.gov/>

A national website that includes warning signs, prevention tips, resources, and articles for students, teachers, parents, and community organizers related to issues of bullying and beyond.

- ✓ <http://www.cfchildren.org/programs/str/overview/>

The Committee for Children's site for STEPS TO RESPECT: A Bullying Prevention Program. This program focuses on bullying discussion and prevention at the elementary level.

ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

❖ ASSESS YOUR CLASSROOM AND SCHOOL CLIMATE: START A GAY-STRAIGHT ALLIANCE AT YOUR SCHOOL

The Facts About Positive Intervention:

- Having a Gay-Straight Alliance in school was related to more positive experiences for LGBT students, including: hearing fewer homophobic remarks, less victimization because of sexual orientation and gender expression, less absenteeism because of safety concerns and a greater sense of belonging to the school community.
- The presence of supportive staff contributed to a range of positive indicators including fewer reports of missing school, fewer reports of feeling unsafe, greater academic achievement, higher educational aspirations and a greater sense of school belonging.
- Students attending schools with an anti-bullying policy that included protections based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression heard fewer homophobic remarks, experienced lower levels of victimization related to their sexual orientation, were more likely to report that staff intervened when hearing homophobic remarks and were more likely to report incidents of harassment and assault to school staff than students at schools with a general policy or no policy.
- Despite the positive benefits of these interventions, less than a half of LGBT students (44.6%) reported having a Gay-Straight Alliance at school, slightly more than half (53.4%) could identify six or more supportive educators and less than a fifth (18.2%) attended a school that had a comprehensive anti-bullying policy.

Check out GLSEN's website at <http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/library/record/2226.html> to find out how you can start a Gay-Straight Alliance at your school.

From "2009 National School Climate Survey: Nearly 9 out of 10 LGBT Students Experience Harassment in School." GLSEN: Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network. GLSEN, 2003-12. Web. 21 Feb. 2012. <<http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/library/record/2624.html?state=research>>.

❖ DRAMA GAME: GROUP YOURSELVES

Have students begin walking around in the room, making sure to cover the whole space. After a few moments, shout “Freeze!” and have students group themselves by various categories, giving them a chance to decide amongst themselves, without talking, which groups to make. The following prompts may be used:

1. Group yourselves by what color you are wearing today
2. Group yourselves by what kind of shoes you are wearing today
3. Group yourselves by how tall you are
4. Group yourselves by eye color

Once the series has been completed, take a few moments to talk with students about their experience during the game. A few key questions are:

1. How did you decide what group you belonged to? Did you decide for yourself or let others decide?
2. Did you ever feel out of place or unwanted in a group?
3. What was hard or uncomfortable about this for you?
4. What did you do if you felt like you didn’t belong to any of the groups? Did anyone choose to stand by themselves? Why/why not?

This activity is a wonderful way to gauge the thoughts and feelings of your students in a low-pressure, non-judgmental way and is best employed as a lead-in to a discussion about GLBT rights/bullying.

Exercise borrowed from:

Rohd, Michael. *Theatre for Community, Conflict & Dialogue: The Hope Is Vital Training Manual*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998. Print.

❖ DRAMA GAME: DEFENDER

Students should walk around the space without talking and without making contact with one another. After a few moments, ask the students to silently choose someone in the room who they will consider their “personal defender”. In addition, ask students to silently choose someone in the room who they will consider their “enemy”. After a few moments, ask the students to keep moving around the space and tell them that their goal is to try and stay as close to their “personal defender” as possible” and at the same time as far away from their “enemy” as possible. Let this play out for a couple of minutes, and remind students to be mindful as they move around the space. It is normal for students to pick up the pace as play continues; often students are running by the end.

This exercise is a great ice-breaker to thinking about the themes of allies and bullies. Have a short discussion with the students afterwards. How did you feel trying to stay close to your protector? How did it feel trying to keep distance between you and your enemy? Often, a student will discover that they were both someone’s enemy and protector. How does this relate to relationships and dynamics within a school day? This is a wonderful game to lead-in a discussion of the pressures that students face in their daily lives at school.

Exercise borrowed from:

Rohd, Michael. *Theatre for Community, Conflict & Dialogue: The Hope Is Vital Training Manual*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998. Print.

❖ DRAMA GAME: VALUES CLARIFICATION

Place three different signs in three different areas of your room: one that says “Agree”, one that says “Disagree”, and one that says “Unsure”. Explain to students that you will be reading a list of statements one by one, and after each one asking them to move to the area of the room that corresponds closest to their own feelings on the statement. After everyone has moved to a corner, ask for a few volunteers from each group to say why they made the choice to stand where they did. After everyone who wants to share has gotten the chance to, move on to reading the next statement.

Begin with a few warm-up statements, ones that do not carry a lot of weight. It is important to let the students get comfortable with the game with some lighter topics, in order that they not be thrown into the issues at hand too abruptly.

Examples of Warm-Up Statements:

1. I like pizza.
2. History is my favorite subject in school.

After a few of these, try some statements that address the issues of LGBT youth and/or Bullying:

1. I know someone that is lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered.
2. I worry about my own or someone I love’s safety in school because of their sexual orientation.
3. Gay marriage should be legal.
4. I see discrimination in my community.
5. I have been bullied.
6. I have contributed to an environment of fear or isolation for someone who is LGBT.

These questions can be adjusted to the needs of your individual classroom and you are free to generate as many more applicable ones as you like.

The key to this game is to allow students to express their feelings about a particular issue or issues in a way that does not single them out or cause them to feel judged. All three corners of the room- Agree, Disagree, Not Sure- are valid options and no one should feel that there is a “right” or “wrong” answer. As a teacher, this is a great way to learn how your students feel about a specific topic and pave the way for a safe, open, and accepting class.

Exercise borrowed from:

Rohd, Michael. *Theatre for Community, Conflict & Dialogue: The Hope Is Vital Training Manual*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998. Print.

❖ ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: JOURNAL WRITING EXERCISE

Read the following exchange from the play:

PAUL

Truth or harmony.

AARON

(startled)

What?

PAUL

What do you value most? Truth or harmony?

AARON

I don't know.

PAUL

Most people in this world value harmony. Don't fight. Don't make waves. Don't rock the boat. But my friend John, he says that if you want to live a happy life, you've got to live in truth, first. He says, "It is better to be hated for what one is, than loved for what one is not." That's a quote. Andre Gide.

Write a journal entry about a time when you chose truth over harmony. Was it a difficult decision to make? Did you regret choosing truth over harmony? Who were some people that helped to make it easier for you? Who is someone whose support you may have lost because of your decision to choose truth? What advice would you give to someone who wants to choose truth but is afraid to?

❖ SOCIAL STUDIES/HISTORY: ACTIVIST RESEARCH PROJECT

Continuing with the idea of choosing truth over harmony, allow students to choose an activist, someone who chose truth over harmony, to research. They will write a paper about the person they research, and in addition, create a piece of visual art, a dance, a poem, or a performance piece that expresses what they learned from the life of their activist.

Alternately, have students research a court case that serves as a major legal precedent for civil rights in the United States. After learning about them on their own, have students present their case to the class and create classroom collection of core values based on the rulings of the court cases.

❖ CLASSROOM DISCUSSION: CAN IT HAPPEN TODAY?

Here are some recent court cases that deal with continued discrimination against students in high schools across the country because of their sexual orientation, race, or religious beliefs:

- A Mississippi student wins case against her high school's cancellation of the prom due to her request to bring a girl as her date and wear a tuxedo from 2010:

<http://www.aclu.org/blog/lgbt-rights/victory-constance-mcmillen>

- This website documents the struggle that Mississippi high school students faced in 2008 when they decided to have the first ever interracial prom. There is a wonderful documentary by Morgan Freeman about this event as well:

<http://www.promnightinmississippi.com/the-film>

- Here is a thought provoking piece about Muslim women being denied the right to wear their headscarves in schools and workplaces across the country:

<http://www.aclu.org/pdfs/womensrights/discriminationagainstmuslimwomen.pdf>

As a class, research instances around the country today in which students are being discriminated against because of their sexual orientation, race, or religious beliefs. Is there anything you can do as a class to show your support for these individuals that are fighting for equal rights? Is there an issue at your own school or in your community that you can help shed light on?