

LGBT ACTIVISM



LGBT ACTIVISM

Lesson Summary

In this lesson students will look at a key moment in the history of LGBT activism, the Stonewall Riots, and the role of young people in the protests. Using a combination of videos and sources written at the time of the riots, they will consider why these events occurred and what motivated the different actors. It will then look at the contemporary involvement of LGBT young people both in and around Pride parades, asking students to think about the different interpretations of these events and their relevance today.

Learning Objectives

- Learn about the causes of a key moment in the LGBT rights movement, the Stonewall Riots, and develop an understanding of what happened.
- Find out about the role of young people in the Stonewall Riots and what motivated them to be involved.
- Examine and assess the role of the police, government, and protestors during the Stonewall Riots.
- Discover the history of Pride parades, and engage with ongoing debates about what form they should take to best serve young people.

United Nations Sustainable Development Links

- Reduced Inequality
- Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

Curriculum Links

- Citizenship KS 3-4

British Council Core Skills

- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- Student Leadership
- Collaboration and Communication
- Citizenship



LGBT ACTIVISM

Activity One: Stonewall outline

Requires: Slides 2-3

Preparation: Ensure the video on slide 2 can be played

- Begin by asking students if they have heard of Stonewall, and if they know what the origins of the campaign's name is. If anyone has, ask them to explain what they know to the rest of the class.
- Show the class the video on slide 2, which gives a brief outline of the causes, proceedings, and impacts of the stonewall riots.
- Recap with students the information on slide 3.

Activity two: Context of the riot- small group discussion

Requires: Slide 4, worksheet sources 1 and 2

Preparation: Ensure that enough copies of the worksheet are printed for all students

- Split the students into small groups of 3-4, and put the slide 4 questions up. Ask a student in each group to read sources 1 and 2 aloud to their other group members, and then have the groups discuss the questions for a few minutes before coming back together to share answers.

Activity Three: Youth and Stonewall

Requires: Worksheet sources 3 and 4, slide 5

Preparation: Ensure that enough copies of the worksheet are printed for all students

- Source three is longer, so have the class take it in turns reading it aloud (one student per paragraph). Have one student read source 4 aloud.
- Put the questions from slide 5 up on the board, and have the class address them in a group discussion



LGBT ACTIVISM

Activity Four: Stonewall Commemorations and Pride Marches

Using the notes below, run through slides 6 and 7 which briefly examine the development of pride marches/parades.

- Put the questions on slide 8 up on the board, and ask students in their small groups to have a look at sources 5, 6 and 7, which examine the different reasons people attend pride, and the controversies which have taken place over the way that they have developed. Ask students to highlight or underline anything that they think might help them answer these questions. Ask one student from each group to report back their discussion and ideas to the rest of the group. As source 5 and 7 are both longer you could potentially divide these readings between different members of the small group.
- Once the smaller groups have had time to read the sources and discuss these questions, ask each group to report back.

Slide 6

- One year after the Stonewall Riots, LGBT activists in cities across the USA decided to commemorate the events. Activists in major cities like Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia all planned protest marches and events.
- These events were originally known as 'Christopher Street Liberation Day' Marches, and often were announced to be for 'gay liberation.'
- This was still a time when being openly gay was illegal in most of the United States, and homosexuality was classified as a medical disorder.
- These became annual events and soon spread internationally, becoming known as 'Gay Pride' marches.
- In Britain, the first Gay Pride march was organised in London in July, 1972. Around 1000 people attended the demonstration, which ended with a picnic in Hyde Park.
- Although Britain had decriminalised gay relationships in 1969, there had been a 400% increase in arrests of gay people since then, often for harmless acts such as kissing in public.
- The police treated being LGBT as something which was still illegal, many LGBT people's families were unsupportive of them, and bosses and managers discriminated against LGBT employees.



LGBT ACTIVISM

Activity Four Cont.

Slide 7

- Today's pride marches and celebrations often look very different to those of the 1970s.
- In larger cities Pride events combine demonstrations and parades with music festivals and parties. In some places such as Berlin and Manchester, they are major tourist attractions.
- This has led to some controversy- some people within the LGBT community feel that they have lost their character as protests, and that pride festivals with paid entry fees prevent younger and poorer members of the community from taking part.
- Pride marches started off as very explicit protests- against the legal barriers, violence, and other forms of discrimination that LGBT people faced.
- However they also created a situation where gay people could be open about their identity and express themselves in a way that often couldn't in day-to-day life. Some people think that these parades still have a lot of value because of this role.



LGBT ACTIVISM

Source 1

An extract from a letter sent by a prominent LGBT activist to Village Voice

It's time for the local elections and, as usual at that time in the Village, homosexuals are being harassed on the streets by the cops, the clubs are being raided, and even the legitimate, licensed bars have been bothered by the cops.

This year, homosexuals are sick of being election issues... The gay crowd put up with it before because we were too weak and unorganized to do anything about it. Now we're finding our muscle and we're not going to be scapegoats and election issues any more.

Letter from Dick Leitsch, published in the July 10, 1969 Village Voice, letters to the editor column

Source 2

According to the police, they are not picking on homosexuals. On these raids they almost never arrest customers, only people working there. As of June 1, the State Liquor Authority said that all unlicensed places were eligible to apply for licenses. The police are scrutinizing all unlicensed places, and most of the bars that are in that category happen to cater to homosexuals. The Stonewall is an unlicensed private club. The raid was made with a warrant, after undercover agents inside observed illegal sale of alcohol.

Howard Smith, "Full Moon Over the Stonewall", Village Voice, July 3rd 1969



LGBT ACTIVISM

Source 3

[People ask] why the raid on the Stonewall caused such a strong reaction...

The answer lies, we believe, in the unique nature of the Stonewall. This club was more than a dance bar, more than just a gay gathering place. It catered largely to a group of people who are not welcome in, or cannot afford, other places of homosexual social gathering.

The “drags”* and the “queens”**, two groups which would find a chilly reception or a barred door at most of the other gay bars and clubs, formed the “regulars” at the Stonewall. To a large extent, the club was for them... “drags” and “queens” had no place but the Stonewall.

Another group was even more dependent on the Stonewall: the very young homosexuals and those with no other homes. You've got to be 18 to buy a drink in a bar, and gay life revolved around bars. Where do you go if you are 17 or 16 and gay? The “legitimate” bars won't let you in the place, and gay restaurants and the streets aren't very sociable.

Then too, there are hundreds of young homosexuals in New York who literally have no home. Most of them are between 16 and 25, and came here from other places without jobs, money or contacts. Many of them are running away from unhappy homes... Some got thrown out of school or the service for being gay and couldn't face going home. Some were even thrown out of their homes with only the clothes on their backs by ignorant, intolerant parents who'd rather see their kid dead than homosexual.

They came to New York with the clothes on their backs. Some of them hustled**, or had skills enough to get a job. Others weren't attractive enough to hustle, and didn't manage to fall in with people who could help them...

Jobless and without skills - without decent clothes to wear to a job interview - they live in the streets, panhandling or shoplifting for the price of admission to the Stonewall. That was the one advantage to the place - for \$3.00 admission, one could stay inside, out of the winter's cold or the summer heat, all night long... [It] saved the kids from spending the night in a doorway or from getting arrested as vagrants...

The Stonewall became “home” to these kids. When it was raided, they fought for it. That, and the fact that they had nothing to lose other than the most tolerant and broadminded gay place in town, explains why the Stonewall riots were begun, led and spearheaded by “queens”.

Dick Leitsch, 'The Stonewall Riots: The Gay View,'

Mattachine Society of New York Newsletter, August 1969

* these terms refer to trans women, and men who looked 'feminine'.

** took part in sex work or street prostitution.

LGBT ACTIVISM

Source 4

The quasi-political tone of the street scene was looked upon with disdain by some... The generation gap existed even here. Older boys had strained looks on their faces and talked in concerned whispers as they watched the up-and-coming generation take being gay and flaunt it before the masses ***Lucian K. Truscott IV, "Gay Power Comes to Sheridan Square", Village Voice, July 3, 1969***

(These written sources were all drawn from David Carter's 'An Analytical Collation of Accounts and Documents Recorded in the Year 1969 Concerning the Stonewall Riots', available from <https://studylib.net/doc/8619407/1969-written-sources-collated>)



LGBT ACTIVISM

Source 5

This is an extract from a blog post by the campaigning group *Young Stonewall*.

IT'S PRIDE SEASON

As Pride season is just around the corner we thought we'd take a look at why these events are still important and why we host our Youth Pride event every year at Pride in London and – for the first time this year – at Manchester Pride.

Pride is a time when LGBT communities come together and reflect on how far they've come as well as acknowledge how much more there is still to do. Sometimes it's a celebration, sometimes it's a political statement and often it's a mixture of the two. Pride marches began in 1969 after the Stonewall riots in New York and now they take place all over the world.

As the fantastic 2014 film *Pride* shows, (anyone else sob their way through to the end?) these events (which can be very emotional) are extremely important to lesbian, gay, bi and trans people, as well as the allies, friends and families who support them.

In the UK today, lesbian, gay and bi people have full legal equality, same-sex couples can get married and employers have a legal duty to tackle discrimination at work. So why do over 750,000 people still gather in London each year to raise awareness of LGBT issues?

Here's a great quote from someone who attended our Youth Pride event in London last year, which shows exactly why these community events are so important:

"I felt much more confident in being myself and to be open with my sexuality, especially being around others whom identify with the LGBT+ community, and it was amazing to see so many different groups and people in support of pride watching the parade; it made me feel we are going in the right direction."

Although we've come so far in the UK, there is still so much more to do. Pride events help remind us all that although we can and should be proud of our sexuality and gender identity, there is still work to be done until all lesbian, gay, bi and trans people are accepted without exception.

<https://www.youngstonewall.org.uk/our-work/blog/why-do-we-still-bother-pride>



LGBT ACTIVISM

Source 6

A quote from an LGBT newspaper article encouraging people to attend the second annual protest in 1971.

"We urge every homosexual who possibly can to take part- march, cheer, yell, or whatever. Experience the thrill of freedom, pride in yourself, and love - in a way that few of us have ever felt before."

Advocate, 1971 (quoted in Pride Parades: How a Parade Changed the World, by Katherine McFarland Bruce)

Source 7

Extracts from a 2010 article in Red Pepper which challenged Manchester Pride's approach.

PUTTING THE PROTEST BACK IN PRIDE

Its critics say Manchester Pride is the most commercialised such event in the country, hosting its parade as part of a private, ticketed 'Big Weekend' event. Increasing numbers in the LGBT community are deeply critical of the 'corporate friendly' image they say it promotes at the expense of politics, community and its liberation roots.

Alan Bailey, NUS [National Union of Students] LGBT Officer, explains: 'LGBTQ people don't have liberation. Despite some legal victories, we must still fight...'

'Prides started as protests but now many charge entry, some just to take part in the parades. They "pinkwash" the real issues we still face.'...

Manchester has hosted LGBT festivals and marches for decades, including an annual event formerly known as Gayfest or Mardi Gras.

In 2003, Manchester Pride Ltd took charge of the event, introducing barriers to close off the village surrounding Canal Street – the heart of Manchester's gay community – to non-ticket holders. The ticketing was ostensibly to raise money for charity, but Manchester Pride Ltd was not officially granted charity status until 2007, and overlaps between board members and Canal Street Business Association members, bar owners and promoters continue to raise eyebrows...



LGBT ACTIVISM

Source 7 cont.

Entry to the parade is for registered organisations and applications may be refused if they 'do not support the values and ethos of Manchester Pride'. Two years ago, members of the NUS and Queer Youth Network parade entries were informed they were in breach of this regulation for holding placards that read 'Pride is a protest' and 'Stonewall was a riot'. They were told to leave them behind or leave the parade...

In 2008, the NUS and Queer Youth Network marched under the banner Pride is a Protest, inspired by activists in Birmingham who created an overtly political march when the city's official Pride was cancelled. In Manchester, the first act of the group was to picket the birthday balloon launch of Pride with placards and banners reading 'Queer fightback!' and 'Pride as a protest or pride as a corporate sham?'...

Manchester Pride organisers are, it appears, taking note: they have now introduced some more diverse and widely publicised events in the lead up to the Big Weekend. Last year, a community float also allowed people not part of an official group to join the parade, and the NUS was allowed an overtly political entry – complete with radical banners.

David Henry of Queer Youth Network broadly welcomes the changes. 'Some of the things Pride are doing outside the village are really great – positively on the edge of the mainstream and yet still endorsed by them. We applied for their community funding grant and got money for a portable PA, which will go on more radical marches, so I suppose they are also funding radical voices indirectly.'...

(Siobhan McGuirk , *Red Pepper*,
<https://www.redpepper.org.uk/putting-the-protest-back-in-pride/>)



THANKS TO FUNDERS AND PARTNERS:



MANCHESTER
CITY COUNCIL



MANCHESTER
HISTORIES



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



**HERITAGE
FUND**



Loreto High School Chorlton



youth focus NW
Improving the lives of young people

Written and compiled by Dr Daniel Edmonds, danieledmonds237@gmail.com

