Youtheatre presents
The Dora Award-winning production

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CLOSET
by Ed Roy

STUDY GUIDE
2003-04
THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CLOSET
by Ed Roy

Directed by Michel Lefebvre
Production Design by Simon Guilbault
Sound Design by Nicolas Basque
Lighting Design by Caroline Ross

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Youtheatre is proud to present The Other Side of the Closet. This extraordinary play tackles the issues of homophobia and anti-gay hostility that are present in our schools and in our society. The show reflects the realities of stories and testimonials from gay and lesbian teenagers who have experienced discrimination, harassment, abuse and hate-motivated violence in our schools because of their sexual orientation. To these students, school is no longer a safe environment for learning.

Theatre is an excellent vehicle for dealing with sensitive issues because it provides a safe zone in which to focus discussion, while protecting individuals who may be experiencing these very realities in their own lives. Since 1968, Youtheatre has been unrelenting in its quest to produce new works, which challenge conventional boundaries, encouraging audiences to reflect upon themselves and the society in which they live. Our major area of focus is the creation, development and production of new works by the finest Canadian playwrights. The Other Side of the Closet was originally co-produced in 1997 with Toronto’s Young People’s Theatre (now known as the Lorraine Kimsa Theatre for Young People). The following study guide was developed by YPT’s Educational Department, which consulted with educators and community experts to create a comprehensive package of educational programmes and resources for teachers aimed at showing them how to use this piece of theatre as a teaching tool.

It is our hope that educators will find the play and the educational programming useful as a support for on-going work they are doing in tackling homophobia and affecting social change. We applaud teachers who have recognized the importance of this work and have embraced their role in protecting and enlightening their students.
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*In Search of a Happy Ending: It Takes Only Two People*  
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INTRODUCTION

WHY IS HOMOPHOBIA IN OUR SCHOOLS A BIG CONCERN?

Statistically, one in ten Canadians is gay. Many educators are simply unaware of the presence of gay, lesbian and bisexual students in their classes because many of these young people are part of an “invisible” population who keep their sexual orientation a painful secret in order to survive in an intolerant heterosexist world; many try to pass themselves off as straight. Growing up as a closeted lesbigay means dealing with the pain of living in a society that hates and condemns people like you; having to hide from that hatred, floundering for an identity, living a lie. You may even hate yourself because you’ve bought into society’s labels- the prejudices and stereotypes, the prevailing negative image of homosexuals as immoral sinners, perverts, sick people, mentally disturbed, transmitters of AIDS, outcasts. It means feeling scared, confused, depressed, desperate, isolated, self-destructive, even hopeless, with no one to turn to for support, guidance or validation and few positive role models. It means living in fear of being discovered – a constant state of yellow alert in which you must monitor what you say and do to protect your hidden identity, your true self; living in fear of the disappointment, rejection, harassment and outright hostility of family, peers, school and community who can’t accept you for who you really are.

“For gay and lesbian youth, the typical stresses of adolescent development take on traumatic, even tragic dimensions. Like their heterosexual contemporaries, they struggle with peer pressure, parental authority, and sexual and personal identity; yet unlike most adolescents, gay and lesbian youth deal with these issues in a hostile world that fears and rejects them. If they are brave enough to reveal their sexual orientation to friends, teachers, or parents, they risk ridicule, ostracism, and violence. If, like most gay adolescents, they try to hide their identity, they live in constant fear that someone will discover that they are gay. And, even if they are successful at concealment, they must live every day as a lie, pretending to be someone they are not and surrounded by homophobic jokes and comments in the classroom, the locker room and the cafeteria. Unlike children of ethnic minorities who may turn to family and community for support, most gay and lesbian teenagers carry the double burden of being part of an oppressed minority and knowing absolutely no one like themselves.”

From Listening to Gay and Lesbian Teenagers by Rita M. Kissen

Suicide is a leading cause of death among adolescents. Teens who take their own lives follow a pattern of isolation, hopelessness and despair, and see suicide as a way to end the pain of their life. The cause of this pain can be family conflict, loss of a loved one, or confusion about sexual identity. Lesbigay teens face a risk of suicide, which is three times as high as that for other teens.

Schools are places where students learn about sexual orientation. Listen to children in the playgrounds, or read the graffiti in high school bathrooms. Derogative, offensive words like “faggot”, “dyke”, “queer”, “lesbo” rear their ugly face everywhere you turn. All students, regardless of their sexual orientation, learn mythology and hatred at school. Educating actively, replacing mythology with knowledge, hatred with respect, is a crucial step in making gay youth feel safer and a little less isolated in THEIR learning environment.

School is a dangerous place to come out. Anti-gay sentiment is rampant. Lesbigay youth live in constant fear of destructive expressions of homophobia-physical, emotional, verbal and psychological abuse, harassment and hate-motivated violence. Prejudice and discrimination caused by homophobia contributes significantly to the problem of school violence and makes our schools unsafe for many of our young people.
WHY AM I AFRAID TO TELL YOU WHO I AM?

In any group of ten people, I am one of you. I grew up in your neighborhood, attended your school, gathered with you in your place of worship weekly, played on your school teams with you, competed with you academically, perhaps even sat at your family dinner table, counted you as a friend. I worry about the same issues as you do...the environment, world peace, the disintegration of the family, the meaning of existence, I dream the same dreams as you do... for a successful career, a comfortable lifestyle, an ability to make a difference in the world... and most of all for the experience of being with another, or being accepted totally for who I am, strengths and weaknesses alike, of learning to share with another all that life has to offer, in the way of pain and joy alike. In the most intimate of relationships... like you, I long to share my whole being... including my sexuality.

Then, why am I afraid to tell you who I am...seeing that we have so much in common? I am different from you in possibly one respect, that of my homosexuality. I am homosexual. My most intimate caring experience will be shared with a member of my own gender. Can you still accept me for who I am? Do you feel so very different from me? Aren't we, after all, more alike than different?

From my earliest awareness of who I was, I knew that my sexuality, like yours, was a given, not a choice. As I watched you struggle with other givens, which made you unlike the majority, I wondered if you too knew the pain of being different, and would understand, and love me anyway.

Because it represents their point of view, this statement was chosen by the gay, lesbian and bisexual students attending the support group offered by the Toronto Board of Education.
Interview with the Playwright: Ed Roy

How did you begin writing *The Other Side of the Closet*?
Young People’s Theatre commissioned me to write a play about homophobia; it was also something that interested me as a gay person who happens to be a playwright. It intrigued me to find out if the situation in schools had changed from my negative experiences 15 years ago. I began my research on homophobia in the school system, and discovered that in many ways the situation is exactly the same, if not more dangerous, than when I was a student. Because the homosexual and bisexual lifestyle is more visible in the media, the stakes for gay students are higher in the classroom today. More visibility does not equal more understanding. With a few notable exceptions, there is virtually no help from victims of homophobia in the school system.

The bottom line is a lack of empathy or understanding for gay students; people forget that they’re talking about or hurting a human being.

What kind of research did you do?
I taught a creative writing class for lesbigay students at the Triangle Program in Toronto. I wanted to find out what those students thought about the situation in schools; their experiences with homophobia and resentment.

How did the students’ experiences compare with yours?
The struggles were much the same. When I was in high school, calling someone a “fag” was the worst insult; it implied that they were different, weird in some way. The way to defend against this was to fight. I fought a lot, never expressed my feelings, rejected intimacy - this was my defense against the possibility of being called a “fag”. Years later, calling someone a “fag” is still the worst insult in the schoolyard.

What did you discover in writing this play?
I originally wanted to write a play that would have a happy, positive ending for the gay character. But life is complicated. Happy endings do happen for some gay youth, but for many, coming out of the closet is a painful and difficult process. Gay and lesbian kids lead an extremely complicated “double life”, and coming to terms with who you are and who you want to be is never an easy struggle.

My plays focus on this “double life”. I believe that all teenagers, regardless of sexual orientation, wear a number of different faces, or masks. They present a different reality to friends, parents, and teachers; somewhere in the middle is the real person. The concept of accepting yourself is a universal struggle, and it’s even more difficult when others do not readily accept your true nature. If you can’t accept yourself, then you have to consider the alternatives- ignore life, run away from your past, dull your senses through drugs or alcohol. Some students feel too alienated to even go on with life. Lesbigay feel this alienation and self-struggle more keenly than straight kids- the play’s ending had to reflect this ongoing struggle.

What were your aims in writing this play?
I want this play to open the closets in people’s minds. We are all, regardless of sexual orientation, coming out of closets in one way or another. Any passion you feel that you don’t have the right to reveal, because of condemnation, means you are in a closet...I write for teenagers because they are at a special place in their lives- between two worlds...this is such an impressionable, exciting time of life: it’s when you are finding out who you are amid the pressure to be like everyone else. This is an age where people can get lost...Homophobia makes you feel like you don’t have the right to be here. That’s a dangerous message to send to teenagers.
Interview with the Director: Michel Lefebvre

What interested you about directing this play?
Initially, my response was a very personal one. When Ed told me that he was writing a play about homophobia in the school system, I went back to my own adolescence. I tried to imagine what the impact of seeing a show like this would have been on me, at that stage in my life. In high school in Cornwall, we would never have been given the opportunity to see this kind of hard-hitting show.

I find it interesting how the teenage world has evolved from the late 1960s, at least on the surface. But on the inside, I think the struggles and experience remain the same, regardless of whether you’re gay or straight. Adolescence is a time of questioning the definition of self, the acceptance of self. Those questions were there when I was growing up, and they are still there now. You spend a lifetime finding answers to the questions about identity that emerge in your teen years. This show is a tremendous opportunity to think about these questions.

What is your starting point for this play?
My starting point on any show (be it *King Lear* or *The Other Side of the Closet*) is looking for real human beings to actually speak to one another on stage. This goes beyond “acting”; I am a big fan of two people, face to face, talking to each other. A strong script allows this honesty on stage, and my role as director is to encourage this simplicity. For *Closet* I’m helped by the brilliant set design of Simon Guilbault. This is a bare-boned, sparse set, using only four freestanding columns. When it is lit from behind, the columns show a diffused urban image, but the front surface is mirrored. The audience will see themselves reflected on the stage. Because of the nature of the set, the actors are very exposed. With the additional challenge of playing teenagers for teenagers in the audience, this play has to be incredibly true to life. Reflecting the reality in the audience is both challenging and exciting.

What are the challenges of directing for teen audiences?
Teenagers are potentially one of the more exciting audiences. They’re on hormonal overdrive from the moment they enter the theatre—something about being away from the school building. On stage, you can sense that energy, and you have to meet that energy and stop it in its tracks. Ed has a tremendous finger on the pulse of that teenage energy, and an ear that manages to create a text that is absolutely true. There’s no false theatrical language, and the energy created through the dialogue on stage, can meet and match the energy in the audience.

What is your role in relation to the message of the play?
My role is to make sure that every word uttered is working towards illuminating the message of the playwright. Ed’s decision to write a strong play tackling the issues of homophobia is message enough. Another strength of the show is that no final answers are given. You are required to think, or not, about this issue, and to decide for yourself where the story might go.

At the end of the twentieth century, there is certainly more tolerance of homosexuality in society, but I am not sure that there is more acceptance. This play, and my direction of it, is working towards creating a greater acceptance, by showing us the humanity of the central character. It goes back to essential life-questions, the definition of self, and the acceptance of self. Let me tell you an anecdote. I often go into schools and talk to students about the issues they would like to see in a play. The answers are often the same: drugs, self-esteem, suicide, violence. The topic of homophobia was not coming up. I knew that Ed was thinking about writing this play, so I would suggest the topic. The reactions from students were surprising. There was a livid rejection of the topic, a vocal aggressive “no way”. Of course this made me all the more anxious to pursue the topic, because clearly it does need to be addressed. This play creates a less violent and emotional way to tackle the issue, by creating a safe zone for discussion.
Characters in the Play

Carl, aged 16, is an average all-round guy, who happens to be gay. He is “in the closet”, and is “outed” by his friends one day when they see him leaving a gay bar. Carl tried for a time to deny his sexuality, and then hide it from his friends and family. His life is devastated by the homophobia he encounters at schools once he is “out”. His insecurities and worries threaten to overwhelm him, and he has problems adapting to his new public self. His future is uncertain, despite the support from some friends.

Rick, aged 16, is considered one of the “coolest” guys at school. He doesn’t respect the attitudes or feelings of his girlfriend Paulette, but is willing to lie about his feelings in order to maintain their relationship. Rick will not accept that Carl is gay, and his reaction is a violent one. Rick is a bully and a gay-basher, who cannot contain his anger.

Justin, aged 15, is a follower. He likes to be friends with Rick because of the prestige that the friendship brings. He is initially repulsed by Carl’s homosexuality, but becomes slowly more tolerant. Justin is easily pressured by his friends to think and do as they do.

Paulette, aged 15 is the sole friend who sticks by Carl through his experiences. A little more enlightened than her friends, Paulette has the strength to stand up for her beliefs, despite peer pressure. She has a good head on her shoulders, and can see people for who they really are.

Tara, aged 16, feels particularly hurt when she finds out that Carl is gay, because she had a long-standing crush on him. Tara’s personal prejudices come to the forefront when she abandons Carl. She links up with Justin in part, because she is able to control him.

Antony is a student at the Triangle Program who is out, proud and loud. Even in the face of Carl’s scorn, Antony has enough confidence and self-security to act and be the way he wants to be.

Rachel is another student at the Triangle Program, and supports Antony.

Frank and Marion, Carl’s parents. Both parents are shocked when Carl is outed, but Marion supports him from the start. Frank’s intolerance is a great burden for Carl, and he is unable to deal with it.
Synopsis of the Play

Driving downtown, Rick and Justin hit Church Street to yell at the “faggots” for sport. When they see a person they know exiting a gay bar, the two boys follow him down the street.

Shortly after, Carl arrives at Tara’s and is greeted by the girls. When Rick and Justin arrive, they attack Carl, accusing him of “hanging out with the fags”. They inform everyone of their discovery: Carl was seen leaving a gay bar on Church Street. Carl tries to leave the house, but Rick and Justin fight him. Tara threatens to call the cops, and the two let Carl go, “You’d better run faggot”! Paulette tries to calm Rick down, but his statement, “I don’t have faggots for friends” angers her and she kicks him out of the house.

The next day, school is a buzz with gossip, rumours and chatter. Friends deny knowing him, ex-girlfriends deny dating him, and fights are planned. Carl begins getting threatening phone calls at home; his parents, Frank and Marion are confused. “Are you in some kind of trouble with a gang at school?” Carl tells his parents that he was in a fight and asks them to ignore the phone calls. He denies the truth of the derogatory phone insults and tries desperately to make conversation with his parents at dinner. After supper, he goes to the bathroom and throws up.

Following a fight with his parents when he admits that he is gay, Carl begins having intense, violent nightmares and feels disoriented. Plus the hostility at school has become unbearable. He finally agrees to go with Paulette, now his only friend, to check out the Triangle Program. There he meets Antony and Rachel, both “out” and proud. Carl doesn’t think he’ll fit in, but Paulette assures him “Remember, it’s as weird as you make it.”

As the days pass, Carl cannot deal with his parents’ anger and his own frustration over the fight. He feels alone, isolated, and leaves home. Totally distraught, Carl phones his father, who tries to convince him to come home. Carl tells him, “Fly to the moon…that’s what I’d like to do…or maybe Mars…or maybe just float in the endless vacuum of space.” Frank apologizes, but Carl isn’t really listening. Carl insists, “I don’t belong here anymore.”

Frank blurts out, “Your mother and I love you son…” but on the other end of the line all he hears is a dial tone.

Comments From Students Who Viewed the Play

This play is needed in the fight to eradicate homophobia in schools. One student on my bus who always used the term “fag” in a derogatory manner was visibly affected by the contents of the play. I am sure he will think twice before calling someone a “fag” ever again.

…Gives a realistic view of how homosexuals are treated. Hopefully it opened the eyes of people like “Rick”.

It’s really good that you guys are making us aware of the unjust treatment of homosexuals.

Thank you for putting on a great show. I never thought it was so tough to come out. I realized that I would be like Rick because that was the way I was raised.

A change of pace from the everyday plays that come through our school. This was something realistic.
Clarifying Terminology
Using appropriate language in talking about homophobia
Selections excerpted from documents by: Human Sexuality Program, Toronto Board; Campaign to End Homophobia; Pflag (CND)

HOMOPHOBIA
Homophobia is prejudice and discrimination directed towards lesbians, gays and bisexuals or those who are thought to be. It is based on negative stereotypes and a lack of knowledge. Homophobia refers to the negative feelings and attitudes that some people have towards lesbians, gays and bisexuals. Frequently, people are unaware that they have these feelings, and do not know why they have them or how they are expressed. While homophobia describes individual feelings and attitudes, heterosexism describes institutional policies and practices. There are four distinct types of homophobia:

- **Denial of popular strength**
- **Fear of over-visibility**
- **Creation of defined public spaces**
- **Negative symbolism (stereotyping)**

LESIANS, GAYS AND BISEXUALS
Lesbians and gay men are people who have an ongoing emotional and physical attraction to people of the same sex. Lesbians and gay men are sometimes referred to as homosexuals although many prefer to be called lesbian and gay respectively.

Bisexual men and women are people who have an ongoing emotional and physical attraction to people of both sexes.

Heterosexuals are men and women who have an ongoing emotional and physical attraction to people of the opposite sex.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION
Sexual orientation is one of the four components of sexuality and is distinguished by an enduring emotional, romantic, and sexual attraction to individuals of a particular gender. The three other components of sexuality are biological sex (biological status of being male or female), gender identity (refers to a person’s feelings of being either male or female) and social sex role or gender role (behaviours which are learned and culturally defined within a time frame as being masculine or feminine). Three sexual orientations are commonly recognized: homosexual, heterosexual and bisexual.

TRANSSEXUAL
A male or female whose gender identity is that of the opposite sex. It is often described as the state of being trapped in another body. A transsexual person wishes to be of the opposite sex in order to have heterosexual relationships.

TRANSVESTITE
A person who receives erotic pleasure in the act of dressing up as a person of the opposite sex.

CROSS-DRESSER
The act of dressing as a member of the opposite sex. Often done for entertainment, rather than erotic pleasure, lesbians who dress up can be referred to as drag queens or drag kings. It is important to note that the act of going in “drag” is also sometimes a political statement by gay men protesting the socially imposed standards of femininity and masculinity.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

**Personal homophobia** is linked to prejudice or personal beliefs that lesbigay individuals are to be pitied, vilified, hated or denounced. Personal homophobia is experienced as feelings of fear, discomfort, dislike, hatred or disgust with same-sex emotional or physical attraction. Anyone, regardless of their orientation can experience these feelings; when this happens with lesbigay individuals it is referred to as internalized homophobia.

**Interpersonal homophobia** refers to how homophobia is expressed between people. This hatred or dislike may be expressed by name-calling, the telling of “jokes”, verbal and physical harassment, and other individual acts of discrimination. On a fraternal level, interpersonal homophobia involves shunning or ignoring lesbigay individuals. At extremes, interpersonal homophobia results in “gay-bashing” and other forms of serious assault.

**Institutional homophobia** is reflected and perpetuated by any institution or organization, which discriminates against people on the basis of their sexual orientation. Examples include: lack of spousal benefits and unfair (illegal) hiring and firing practices. Institutional homophobia can also be realized through heterosexist practices.

**Cultural Homophobia** refers to social standards and norms, which dictate that being heterosexual is better or more moral than being lesbigay. Setting heterosexuality above homosexuality or bisexuality is another expression of heterosexism.

There are seven categories of cultural homophobia:

- Conspiracy to silence
- Denial of culture

Examples against by assault.

**Verbal**

**Physical**

**Interpersonal**

**Heterosexism**

lesbians, gays and bisexuals. There are four distinct types of homophobia:
Frequently Asked Questions

What causes homosexuality?
The exact causes of sexual orientation (heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual) are still unknown. A person’s sexuality is likely the result of a combination of several factors, including genetic, hormonal, environmental, psychological and social. Over the past 50 years, there have been a number of plausible and implausible theories proposed. Sexual orientation has been related to: genetics, the level of male and female hormones in a human body, problems in parent-child relationships, a reaction to social and environmental events and learned behaviour. All that can be agreed upon by scientists is that none of the contributing factors alone can determine sexual behaviour, and that sexual orientation cannot be changed.

Is homosexuality a choice?
Based on the research done on the cause of sexual orientation, it is clear that homosexuality/bisexuality is not a choice, but is pre-ordained. The only choice is whether or not a gay, lesbian or bisexual person is open about their sexuality.

What percentage of the population is gay?
Ten percent (10%) of the population is gay, lesbian or bisexual. The number was originally determined in studies by Albert Kinsey in 1948 and 1953, and has been substantiated today. Also from Kinsey, we know that 37% of men have had an orgasm with another man some time in their life and 26% of university educated women have had at least one homosexual experience.

Why are there so many more gays, lesbians and bisexuals today than in the past?
There are no more lesbigay people today than fifty years ago, but since the 1970s, it has become easier for North Americans and Europeans to be “out”. Even fifty years ago, the ostracism and condemnation of homosexuals would prevent an individual from revealing his/her sexual orientation.

What does “coming out of the closet,” mean?
This refers to the developmental process when gay, lesbian and bisexual people tell friends and family about their sexual orientation. It can also refer to the personal process of acknowledging one’s sexual orientation and integrating that awareness into one’s life. When someone is “outed” or “forced out of the closet” this means that they did not want to reveal their sexual orientation, but it was discovered by others and made public.

If I have a lesbigay friend, will that change my sexual orientation?
There is no evidence to support the myth that being associated with lesbigay individuals will change another’s sexual orientation. Contrarily, most lesbigay individuals are raised in heterosexual households.

Why do gay men walk & talk that way? / Why are lesbians so masculine?
When dealing with any stereotype it is important to point out the assumed generalization. All gay men do not walk or talk in a particular way. There is a circular logic of stereotyping when it comes to invisible minorities, e.g. “Since I expect gay men to be effeminate, the only men I recognize as gay are effeminate men; thereby all the gay men I see are effeminate.” Stereotypes are over-simplified ideas based on limited experiences. They help us deal with the vast amount of information we can never learn about the outside world. Remember, there are lots of lesbigay individuals who are not “out” and who do not conform to the stereotypes.

What is the relationship between lesbigays and the AIDS virus?
Anyone, regardless of his or her sexual orientation, is at risk of contracting the AIDS virus (HIV) through unprotected or unsafe sex. Unsafe activities, such as sharing needles or sex without a condom, will spread the virus, not a particular type of sexual preference or activity. Proper use of condoms can protect both partners from receiving HIV.
“No one ever asked me if I was gay. It was just known, like it was tattooed on my head. I tried to act ‘’like a man’’, and fight like a man, but it all came down to some assholes shoving my head through a bathroom stall screaming ‘‘Fuckin faggot’’. I went through high schools, but news of my sexual preferences always preceded me. School was a place of fear, of hiding, of hatred. Is it any wonder I left?”

“My friends began to notice that I wasn’t interested in guys the same way they were. One girl really started to bug me about it. She made fun of me a lot. Finally I let a guy take me out. I even had sex with him just to prove I wasn’t a lesbian.”

“During my first years of secondary school, some venomous tongues decided to pin the “fag” label on me. I had not yet told this to anyone, not even admitted it to myself, so I don’t know what led them to that conclusion. I endured teasing, name-calling and the occasional push or shove from other students. Once, I missed four days of school because someone threatened to kick my “faggot ass”. Some of the most difficult episodes of my high school years took place in the classroom, particularly during religion class. Most students were already eager to hate queers, but now they had teachers telling them that hating queers would make them better Catholics, would bring them closer to God. I still remember the collective cheer of approval that followed one teacher’s interpretation of Genesis: “God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.” I wonder if teachers who nurture homophobia ever consider that there are lesbian, gay and bisexual students in their classrooms?

**Student Responses to a Presentation on Sexual Orientation by the Human Sexuality Program, Toronto Board of Education**

“My feelings about today’s discussion are mixed. First of all I have to point out that I’m of the opinion that nature has put us on this earth for a reason and one of our main tasks is to reproduce. I also think that if you allow gay couples to have kids you’re bound to have a whole generation of confused children. On the other hand, how can we ignore such a large percentage of our society and pretend that they don’t exist? But should we change the law to accommodate them? Right now I really don’t have an answer to that.”

“I found the interview with the gay and lesbian speakers was truly interesting. I’ve never talked to a gay person before. It made me realize that they aren’t that much different from the rest of society…they made me realize how mean our society can be and how much we have to open our eyes and change.”

“Personally, I felt really uncomfortable that they were teaching people to accept gay and lesbian relationships. I don’t think homosexuality is a natural relationship, although they said people can’t change their sexual orientation and that it’s not their fault, I don’t believe it’s right.”

“I think gay and lesbians go through more hardships than most people who are heterosexual, but if they are happy that’s what really matters.”

“If I found out that a close friend was gay, I would be shocked. I wouldn’t know if I could be friends with him anymore because I don’t agree with the choice to be gay.”
Why is Homophobia such a Difficult Topic to Discuss?

For some teachers, the issue of homophobia is a Pandora’s Box; it opens more problems than the issue itself. Take comfort in the fact that within most school boards there are support materials and staff to bolster anti-homophobia discussion in the classroom.

Issues of contention around anti-homophobia education

Talking about homophobia can challenge strongly held beliefs. Teachers may encounter opposition from students, parents and administration around open discussion of the topic.

Contentious perspectives include:

- Religious and moral beliefs
- Firmly held stereotypes
- The “conversion” theory- the idea that lesbigay individuals coerce or recruit heterosexuals
- Myths about pedophilia and sado-masochistic behaviour
- Reproduction as the basis of sexual relationships
- The connection between AIDS and homosexuality

Barriers to an open discussion include:

- Peer pressure
- Use of inappropriate language that alienates others
- Myths and misconceptions about lesbigay behaviour
- Confusion about “homosexuality” versus “homosexual behaviour” (curiosity and experimentation)
- Fear and misunderstanding of bisexuality
- Loyalty to belief systems
- Fear of humiliation or transference (the idea that supporting gays means that you are gay)
- Family pressures / disapproval

Where to start: Assessing the needs of your students

Assess your students’ opinions and attitudes around homophobia before you begin an open-class discussion. Remember, one in ten people are lesbigay. It is very likely that you will have (closeted or not) lesbigay students in the class. Your terminology, approach and choice of language should be respectful of this possibility.

To get a sense of the level of awareness and understanding among your students, consider having a Question Box at the front of the class.

1. Ask your students to write any questions they have about homophobia or homosexuality on sheets of paper, anonymously, and put them in the Question Box. Reading these questions in private will give you a better sense of where your students are at so that you can tailor your programme to their needs.

2. Have students write a response to the following questions:
   - Do you know anyone who is lesbigay? Describe your feelings towards this person.
   - How would you feel or react if you discovered that your best friend or a classmate was lesbigay?

3. Hold a class survey to determine attitudes towards lesbigay individuals and the social “health” of your group. Ask students to place themselves on the following scale and submit results anonymously. A teacher can compile the results and share them with the class.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude towards Lesbigays</th>
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How to Prepare for a Discussion of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Issues:
Suggestions for Raising the Topic and Dealing with it in the Classroom

From Out in the Classroom; Strategies and Resources for Educators Addressing Homophobia in School
by Antonio Gambini and Steve Solomon, Toronto Board of Education

1. Students should be informed beforehand that the topic is going to be addressed/discussed. This allows them to be psychologically prepared for it, to some degree, at least. Some teachers may feel that if no warning is given, those students who are very negative about lesbians and gays will be present, and such individuals could (and often do) disrupt the discussion.

2. It is beneficial to explain to students why you think a discussion about homophobia is important; some sort of rationale for the discussion. This may work to address some of the misunderstandings/myths about lesbians and gays in society, e.g. this topic is being raised because addressing the issue of violence, or equality and human rights, etc.
   - Misunderstandings about homosexuality can lead to potentially violent situations for both lesbian and gay students/staff and this has consequences for the assailant. Given the current discussions taking place on the topic of violence in schools, the topic of gay bashing would be a useful segway.
   - Negative feelings about/towards lesbians and gay men can cause us to hurt people close to us, sometimes unknowingly, who are lesbian, gay and bisexual (but who have yet to disclose this to us) e.g. a friend, a parent, a teacher.
   - With more and more media attention being given to lesbian/gay issues, the classroom offers a forum for students to gain a better understanding of what is being talked about in the broader society.

3. It is important to set parameters for classroom discussion, keeping in mind the balance between freedom of expression and the expression of hate and intolerance. Don’t forget that there are probably lesbian and gay students in the classroom and that they have the right not to be the subject of offensive comments, behaviour or harassment.

   Parameters:
   - Remind students that it isn’t just “what” is said, but “how” it is said.
   - Words like fag, faggot, dyke, lezzie, etc. cannot be used.
   - Statements or questions, which express or condone violence against lesbians and gays will not be tolerated.
   - Students should be encouraged to ask any question they wish to as long as it asked inoffensively and with a spirit of curiousity/interest (as opposed to mocking, making fun of, hatred) in an atmosphere of mutual trust.
   - It may be helpful to speak with the class beforehand and have them begin to formulate questions and talk about what they want to learn.

VIDEO INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC
One safe way to jumpstart a discussion about homophobia would be to view ITS ELEMENTARY; TALKING ABOUT GAY ISSUES IN SCHOOL, an award-winning film by Debra Chasnoff and Helen Cohen. This acclaimed film shows what actually happens when teachers lead class discussions that address anti-gay prejudice in school. Shot in classrooms from primary level to high school across the United States, this film will allow students to watch their peers struggling with difficult questions, and receiving honest and accurate answers. Copies of the film are available at Blockbuster Video and most resource libraries. For purchasing information visit the Women’s Educational Media site: www.womedia.org
Guidelines for Discussion

a. Discussions can be structured in a variety of ways (large or small group, same-sex or mixed-sex group, etc.). As a class, before breaking off into smaller groups or beginning the discussion, establish parameters that will create an appropriate and safe environment for discussion of homophobia. The group must agree:

- to respect each individual’s opinions
- to avoid criticizing or belittling anyone during or after the discussion
- to use proper terminology
- slang or slurs are not permitted when referring to lesbigay individuals.

b. Telling your class that inappropriate language will not be acceptable can silence students in reaction to teacher dominance or might result in confusion if students are unsure of which words to use to present their questions or concerns. One way in dealing with this and to encourage a tolerant atmosphere in the classroom would be to symbolically “rid” the room of negative vocabulary.

i. Give students some slips of paper upon which they write negative words they have used when discussing homosexuals or homosexuality. The words are not shared. Instead they are placed in some type of container and are disposed of. These words are “gone” and are not to be used.

ii. A list of appropriate vocabulary/terminology is then developed by the class. Meanings are discussed and the list is prominently displayed for reference by students during discussions on the topic.

c. In open discussion, be prepared for some strange questions as well as severe resistance from some students. Here are some opening questions and suggestions for leading a discussion.

i. As a group, brainstorm and chart a list of the rights and freedoms each person in your class is entitled to. You may choose to present the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms or the Human Rights Code as a basis for discussion. Post your list and use it as a point of reference in all discussions around the rights and treatment of lesbigay individuals.

ii. How is homophobia linked to racism, sexism, ageism and classism? How are these forms of oppression prevalent in today’s society? What expressions of oppression or harassment have you personally experienced? What was your reaction in the face of oppression or harassment? How did you feel?

Post-Discussion Reflection:
Encourage students to explore a creative means of post-discussion reflection. This could be a private journal entry, an exploration through visual arts (picture, collage, drawing), or creative writing (prose, poetry, article for the school newspaper, letter to a friend), a dramatic monologue, or silent reflection. Take time to debrief after all activities.
**Understanding Prejudice and Discrimination**

Impress upon your students that homophobia is a form of discrimination as pervasive, distasteful and dangerous as racism and sexism. The following activities detail ways to expose and explore stereotypes and to link homophobia with other forms of discrimination. This will emphasize the importance of the issues and the societal context for the problems.

**Definition Activity**
(originally developed by Vanessa Russell and Tim McCaskell, Toronto Board, Equity Studies Dept.)

**Purpose:** To define and discuss as a class, the concepts of stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination, as related to heterosexism and homophobia. Write the following words on the board and ask the group for a collective definition. Make sure that these concepts are understood.

**PREJUDICE:** To pre-judge a group of people without adequate evidence or information and then to form an attitude about the group (liking or not liking them); an attitude.

**STEREOTYPE:** Attribution of the supposed characteristics of a whole group of people to all its individual members; an idea or belief. Ask the group to come up with some of the common stereotypes they hear at school.

**DISCRIMINATION:** Unfair treatment against a specific group of people; an action.

Usually when asked to come up with a definition of “homophobia” people will say that homophobia is a fear of homosexuals, which, of course, is only a small piece of the definition. Ask your students to define homophobia in terms of the above definitions.

**HOMOPHOBIA:** Stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination against gays, lesbians and bisexuals. It is made up of ideas, attitudes and actions.

At this point you may decide to ask the group to define racism and sexism so that they can begin to see some of the similarities among different forms of oppression.

**Racism, Sexism and Homophobia**

**Purpose:** To link different forms of oppression and discuss the concepts of “visible” and “invisible” minorities.

**NOTE!** Sometimes a discussion about different forms of oppression can get lost in a debate about which one is “worse”. This is a very unproductive argument, which will pit different oppressed groups against each other and block the unity needed for change.

**Objective:** To allow students to examine the similarities between racism, sexism and homophobia without ranking them from “best” to “worst”.

**Format:** Start by getting students to brainstorm all the similarities between the three forms of oppression. They should come up with things such as:
- each involves stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination
- each involves a targeted group with less social power
- each involves feelings of anger, pain and frustration
- they all lead to feelings of self-hatred by oppressed groups, etc.

Next tell students they need to look at some of the differences. Draw a vertical line down the center of the black board and label one side Visible and the other Invisible. Locate women, African-Canadians or other “visible” minorities, Jews, Lesbians and Gay men.

Ask how this difference has affected the way each group has historically dealt with oppression. For example:
- members of some groups can individually hide, while others cannot
- some have attempted to assimilate, others have felt it more productive to isolate themselves
- some groups have mixed experiences and strategies. Ask students to think about how oppression may accumulate over generations for some groups and not for others.
“Isms” and Assumptions- Making the Links

Purpose: To enable students to start making the links between heterosexism, sexism, homophobia and racism.

Divide the board into four columns. At the top of the first column, write the word MAN. Ask students to generate as many derogatory terms for men as they can think of. Repeat the exercise for three more columns headed WOMAN, GAY MAN and LESBIAN.

Debriefing: Ask participants what they notice about the lists, including the size of list, type of words, what the words imply; if there are any words missing, if there are any groups missing, etc.

- What should be apparent is that the list for lesbians is very small (speaks to lesbian invisibility). The derogatory words for men often refer to their mother (Son-of-a-bitch), or imply that they are less like a man and more like a woman (Cocksucker). The list for women implies that women are less like humans and more like animals (Bitch, dog, pig). The list for gay men usually has terms that imply a greater sense of femininity (Fairy).
- Additionally, terms that are elicited are usually about white people (Dumb blonde) and, even with an ethnically mixed group, rarely do racist terms appear. This speaks to our internalization of “white as the norm”. Similarly, terms for the differently abled do not usually appear (Gimp) reinforcing the notion of “able-bodied” as the norm.
- Comment of the fact that when asked to assign derogatory terms to men and women, participants assumed that they were derogating straight men and women, even though this was not the instruction.

Stereotypes and Sex-role Stereotypes

Purpose: To examine stereotypes and sex-role stereotypes in relation to homophobia and heterosexism.

A stereotype is an over-simplified idea of something, based on limited experience. When we generalize qualities of a small sample group and apply them to an entire group, we are using stereotypes. Stereotypes are learned behaviours, and are supported by three factors: education, experience and mass media. Stereotypes can give people a feeling of security, a sense that a complex situation is understood by simplification. Stereotypes provide the illusion that we know our way around in what would be unknown territory. When the stereotypes we hold to be true are attacked or challenged, we view this as a personal attack and often actively defend our stereotypes.

Intrinsically linked to heterosexism and homophobia are sex-role stereotypes. Sex-role stereotyping is the assumption that males and females are limited by gender in their interests, capabilities and accomplishments. It is the assumption that being a man or woman biologically limits what one can do as a human being. The effects of sex-role stereotyping can be seen throughout society, when individuals follow sex-role behaviours to avoid ridicule (especially seen in children: boys who hide their love of dolls, girls who feign interest in “girly” things).

Ask students to make a list of:
- All the things that only males can do, are supposed to do, are expected to do or be most likely to do
- Make the same list for females

NOTE! Explain that these two lists should reflect what students have been taught, either directly or indirectly by parents, teachers, siblings and friends. The lists should not reflect what students actually know to be true.

From the lists, compile a master list on the board. Discuss the ways that sex-role stereotyping hurts all human beings; men and women. Ask students to give examples of ways they have stepped outside of traditional sex-role stereotypes in their lives.
Forces that Shape our Attitudes, Values and Beliefs

• With your class, discuss and create a web chart of all the external and internal forces that shape our personal attitudes, values and beliefs. How much of an influence are friends, family, school, religion or culture? As a group, rank these forces in terms of power or degree of influence.

• How does the media impact a young person’s attitudes and beliefs?

The Impact of Oppression

Talk about the negative effects and prevalence of oppression and discrimination in society (any daily newspaper will present numerous international examples). How are forms of oppression linked?

• What forms of oppression are prevalent in today’s society?
• What experiences of oppression or harassment have you personally experienced?
• What was your reaction in the face of oppression or harassment? How did you feel?

How are negative or violent expressions of discrimination and oppression a problem:
• To individuals
• To a school
• To a society

Create a collage of newspaper and magazine articles collected over a period of one month that depict the realities of:
• Hate motivated crime or violence
• Prejudice and discrimination
• Oppression

How many of these stories center on homosexuality?

“Teachers can, with casual remarks, reinforce the idea that gay, like other natural human differences, is honorable and worthy of respect.”
Don Clark, Loving Someone Gay

“Nothing is to be gained by hysterical reactions, anger, tension or a wall of silence and a great deal can be lost. The fact is our gay children need our support, not our condemnation or avoidance of the issue.”
Betty Fairchild, Now That You Know
Activities Around the Issues of Homophobia

Famous People: Separating “the person” from “the label”

Purpose: To encourage students to explore the accomplishments of lesbigay individuals throughout history.


Write the above names on cue cards, and distribute them to students. Have each student research and prepare a brief biography or list of achievements for one person. Present their findings.

Present the class with the complete list of names and inform them that all these famous people were lesbigay.

- How does this revelation change their point of view? Or does it?
- What questions or comments surface?
- Why didn’t we know about the sexual orientation of these individuals?

The Meaning of Words

In her article, “What Do We Say When We Hear “Faggot?””, Lenore Gordon writes;

Discussions about the meaning of homophobic words can often be quite consciousness-raising. When I hear a child use the word “faggot”, I explain that a faggot, literally is a stick used for kindling. I also explain that gay people used to be burned in medieval times simply for being gay, and they had to wear a bundle of sticks on their shirts to indicate that they were about to be burned. (At times, gay men were used as the kindling to burn women accused of witchcraft.) After the discussion that ensues from this revelation, I make it clear that the word is not to be used again in my classroom, and it rarely is.

Explore the meaning and entomology of words associated with anti-homophobia education. Where do the words “gay” and “lesbian” come from?

Scenarios

Purpose: To examine forms of harassment, sex-role stereotyping and prejudice in school-related scenarios.

Read one of the scenarios to the class. As a group, discuss:

- What is wrong with the situation?
- How would you react if you were the individual being singled out?
- If you were an observer to this situation, would you intervene?
- How could you intervene to aid an individual in that situation?
- What would happen if nothing at all were done? Is this right? Why or why not?
**SCENARIO 1:** Kate is trying to concentrate at batting in P.E. class and tries to ignore a bunch of guys who are commenting on her body. Eventually, one of them says, “Forget her- she’s not interested in guys.” Later, she swings and a strike is called. The same guy yells out, “Strike out dyke!”

**SCENARIO 2:** Ben is a student in your class; he is also a star performer in the local figure skating show. One of his friends tells you that he is afraid that his name will be in the local paper and everyone will think he’s gay.

**SCENARIO 3:** In a class discussion, Carol declares that according to her religion, homosexuality is sinful. Other students jeer and refuse to listen.

**SCENARIO 4:** Max is playing the role of Romeo in a production of *Romeo and Juliet.* One of his classmates call out, “faggot”. The rest of the group repeats the remark. Max doesn’t know whether to laugh it off or join in the next round of insults directed at someone else.

**SCENARIO 5:** Jason is sitting in an assembly looking in Mark’s direction. “Watch out faggot,” Mark says, “If I catch you staring at me once more, I’ll make sure you never see anything else.” Jason is very frightened; he’s also sure that he’s never looked at Mark other than casually. He’s afraid Mark and his buddies will gang up on him.

**Media Representations**

How are lesbigay youth, and the issues that concern them, portrayed or represented in the media? What images of lesbigay youth are seen in advertisements, television, film, or music videos? How are lesbigay issues dealt with in mainstream media?

- Design a logo or saying to promote anti-homophobic sentiment.
- Search for lesbigay-friendly magazines, musical artists, newspaper columnists and television shows.
- Create a collage from newspaper/magazine clippings on lesbigay issues. (The fact that this may prove difficult to do could be a spin-off discussion.)
- Look at Lesbigay characters on popular TV shows (such as Ellen, Friends, Will and Grace, Queer As Folk, Larry Sanders, Rosie O’Donnell). Some network executives have said that gay characters on sitcoms are the 90s equivalent of the “wacky neighbour” character from the 80s. How are these characters portrayed? What are their characteristics? Are their issues dealt with on the show?
- Compile a package of heterosexist ads from magazines and newspapers. How does institutionalized homophobia manifest itself? What companies present images that are lesbigay-friendly?
Quotes from the Play: *The Other Side of the Closet*

These quotes from the play may be useful to generate discussion or explore through role-playing. Identify the characters and the situations in the play from which these lines were spoken.

“A fag cop...is that legal? ... But he didn’t act like one.”

“I guess fags gotta have relatives too.”

“It means he’s sexist, and I don’t find that very attractive.”

“Hey, if me or any of my brothers ever told our parents that we were gay, we’d be booted out on our ass before we knew what hit us.”

“Look, this may be hard for you to understand, but I really care about my uncle. And I know he’s been hurt by a lot of ignorant people, who don’t know or care about what a great person he is. They just hate him because he’s gay. And that’s why I can’t stand to be around anybody who talks about other people as if they’ve got no right to be alive just because they’re different. It shouldn’t matter if a person’s gay-straight-black-asian-tall-short-cross-eyed-three-headed-buck-toothed, or part-amphibian. People are people and they deserve to be treated with respect.”

“Are you afraid if you told someone how you really felt they’d reject you?”

“Don’t make him bleed Rick, you could get AIDS.”

“I’m sick of feeling like I don’t belong anywhere.”

“I don’t think that I’m going to fit in if all the guys act like that.”

“I don’t have a problem with who I am- been there, done that- if that’s a problem for some people, too bad for them. I figure as long as I’m not hurting anybody, people should mind their own business and I’ll mind mine.”

“These quotes from the play may be useful to generate discussion or explore through role-playing. Identify the characters and the situations in the play from which these lines were spoken.

“Its just too freaky...guys wearing dresses...and having sex with other guys.”

“You’re all acting like idiots over something you don’t know anything about.”

“Lesbo alert, lesbo alert!”

“Not all lesbians look like pro-wrestlers with boobs. What about K.D. Lang?”

“Listen my mother can’t even hear the word homosexual without crossing herself...My mother would have a heart attack if I told her I was a dyke...I bet she’d immediately call a priest to perform an emergency exorcism...She believes that people like that live in a state of sin because its against the will of God.”

“You should have heard my dad last summer when he saw that Gay Pride Day parade they had on the news...why do they have a friggin’ Pride Day in the first place is what I want to know.”

“Once he was labeled a fag nobody talked to him and I watched how people treated him... I called him bum-boy-Bosco like everyone else. What are you looking at me like that for? I know it sucks but what else was I supposed to do?”

“You don’t understand! I can’t walk down the halls without being called something- you don’t have a clue what it’s like- I mean I can’t fight everybody, believe me I’ve tried.”
Activities Focusing on the Youtheatre Production
Discussing and Evaluating Specific Production Elements:
The Components of a Theatrical Production

Using the play, THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CLOSET in your classroom programme can create a “safe zone” for talking about the issues surrounding the play. Please refer to the “Guidelines for Discussion” page in this study guide for ideas and suggestions in fostering a safe learning environment in which to deal with sensitive issues.

Talking about the “world of the play” rather than real life can encourage students to probe into deeply held myths, stereotypes and misconceptions. Drama allows for role-playing without peer pressure or condemnation. Encourage your students to explore issues from a variety of points-of-view.

**IMPRESSIONS:**

- What did you like about the play? Why?
- What surprised you? Impressed you? Challenged you to think differently than you have before?
- What was something you learned from this play?
- Did any of the characters remind you of someone you know? In what ways?
- Which characters changed in the play? How?
- How realistic were the teenage characters?
- Which characters were the most believable? Why?
- What role did the “voice-overs” of the parent characters play?
- What do you think the future holds for the characters?

It is important that students understand that evaluating a piece of art is subjective and every audience member will have his/her own personal feelings about the show.

- Encourage your students to be specific in their comments about the production.
- Discuss the production by talking about the success of the work done in different areas of the production.

Below is an outline of questions appropriate for a detailed examination of the production.

**a. THE SCRIPT:**

Playwright Ed Roy wrote THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CLOSET based on interviews with lesbigay youth who experienced homophobia and discrimination within the school system and society. The characters are invented by the playwright, and given life by the performers.

- Comment on the effectiveness of the script in opening up the issue of homophobia.
- What did the playwright hope to accomplish with this play?
- How successful has he been?
- What message does the play deliver?
- Discuss stylistic choices made in the writing that you found powerful (e.g. use of monologues, voiceovers, parallel conversations, etc.)
• The story is presented as a one-act play. Discuss the plot and the character development by examining the scope and limitations of this theatrical structure. Could this story be expanded into a two-act production?

b. DIRECTION IN THE SHOW:
The director makes choices in:
• Interpreting the script
• Fleshing out the characters
• Creating the world of the play
• Deciding how the story is to be told

S/he establishes a style in which the play is to be presented, and creates “stage-pictures” for the audience.

Talk about your impressions, as an audience member, of the “world of the play”, the casting, and choices made by the director in staging the show. Did the design and direction work well together? Was the staging and use of set effective?

c. THE DESIGN OF THE SHOW:
Thinking back on the production, discuss how particular design elements: the set (scenery), props, costumes and lighting worked to:
• Bring the story of life
• Create mood or atmosphere
• Add to the quality and impact of specific scenes or the production as a whole.

d. BRINGING THE CHARACTERS TO LIFE:
• As a group, recall and list all the characters in the play. Who was your favorite character?
• What did you like about the actor’s performance and interpretation of the role?
• How did the costume and design help to define that character?
• What special talents did the actor bring to the role?
• What are the advantages and disadvantages of “doubling” – having characters play more than one character in the production?
• How would playing multiple roles be demanding from an actor’s point of view?

Activities that Focus on Characters and Issues

ATTITUDES
Access the attitudes of the characters from THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CLOSET by placing each on the scale below. (Carl, Rick, Justin, Paulette, Tara, Frank, Marion). Complete the activity as an individual or small group task and then create a diagram together as a class. Discuss and support your choices.

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Teacher-in-role
Drama is a powerful tool for exploring multiple perspectives around sensitive issues and providing students with creative thinking and problem-solving opportunities. It can also be a dangerous tool, if not used sensitively by an experienced drama practitioner. Before beginning drama work, students need to be prepared and informed with anti-homophobia background work, such as outlined in the study guide up to this point.

It is important to build in checks and controls so that students with homophobic attitudes are not allowed to spew forth venomous remarks or to role-play gay characters. They are likely to delight in the opportunity to send up or mock gay characters. **In order to prevent dramatizations that reinforce negative stereotypes, we suggest that the teacher plays the challenging roles** and that the drama activities be carefully selected and structured to steer students towards positive insights and understanding of feelings, attitudes and behaviours of both victims and the perpetrators of homophobia.

The following activities focus on the two central characters, Carl and Rick, but can be modified to fit any character in the play.

**Carl**

“I was having the kinds of thoughts and feelings that everybody says you’re not supposed to have…the thoughts weren’t scary but the idea of anyone finding out I was having them was. So I tried to stop myself from having them.”

“I’ve been having these dreams…I wake up covered in sweat…I just want to jump out of bed and run as far away as I can…I want to run back in time before this ever happened…But the future keeps pulling me forward…I’m being dragged along…out of control…I know I have to hold on…to something.”

**Spectrum of Difference**
This activity presents the realities of Carl’s life at school, and then explores the steps required to make his school environment a positive one. Divide the class into two groups: one group creates a tableau of a scene depicting Carl’s situation at school once he was “outed”. The other presents a scene in a welcoming school environment, free from homophobia.

The other groups should then explore the spectrum of differences between these two tableaux. Talk about what has to happen to turn the situation in the first tableau into that of the second. What are the realities that are keeping the tableaux apart? Each group is asked to present a tableau that depicts a scene in the process of change at school that would be needed to create the “ideal” school environment in tableau #2. Share the work of different groups and then decide how to sequence the scenes that have been created.

**Whisper Tunnel**
Create a tunnel by lining up the students in two parallel rows facing one another. This tunnel represents the voices of support and encouragement that Carl so desperately needs. One student plays the character of Carl and walks down the tunnel and back again. The other students must whisper words of advice, support and encouragement to the student playing the role of Carl. Each student in the line must think of a voice, which answers to one of Carl’s many problems or concerns. Give several students the opportunity to play Carl. Reflect on the experience.
Role on the Wall
As an extension of the “Spectrum of Difference” activity, divide the class into 5 groups. Provide each group with a large sheet of chart paper and a set of different coloured markers. The group draws a rough outline of a human figure to represent the character of Carl. To this drawing they will add words, phrases, and images that create a collective representation or understanding of the character as a person.

The information that should be written:
• Inside the figure: (the internal world of the character) personal feelings, problems, struggles, concerns, statements of self-concept, hopes and dreams, etc.
• Outside the figure: (the external world of the character) behaviours, how s/he appears to the outside world, other peoples statements/feelings about the character, relationships with others, etc.

Voices in the Head
This activity is useful in helping students reflect on the dilemmas a character must face in making a difficult choice or decision. A scene is dramatized then frozen at a moment of conflict or tension. Student observers step into the scene and voice aloud the different thoughts going through the mind of the characters in the scene. The comments reflect the inner voice or the conscience of the character at that moment in time.

This activity helps students to become aware of the complexity of a problem, and allows them to influence the imminent action. As students call out the character’s thoughts, they slow down the action of the drama, allowing a moment of reflection or analysis of the tension in the scene.

Explore the inner thoughts and conflicts Carl may feel when he is considering committing suicide. Arrange the students in a circle around a chair. The teacher, representing Carl, sits silently in the chair. Students speak as the voices of people in Carl’s life; family, friends, students from school, teachers, etc. How will these “voices in the head” influence the decision made by the character?

Regrets
The following activities are based on the premise that Carl commits suicide out of depression and despair. The final scene of the play is open ended. The audience must decide whether Carl takes his life.
• Imagine the impact Carl’s suicide would have on his family, friends and school. What does the future have in store for Carl’s parents, or Rick, or Tara? How would each react to Carl’s death? Create a dramatic monologue or a piece of creative writing entitled, “Regrets: I Wish I Had…” and write as if in the role of one of the other characters in the play.
• Script and present a meeting of several key characters after Carl’s death. Has his death changed their outlook and opinions?
• Write or role-play a discussion between Paulette and her uncle Greg after Carl’s suicide. Include issues such as blame, prevention, did/does Greg contemplate suicide, etc.
• How would the events of Carl’s “outing” and eventual suicide be reported in the media?
• As a class exercise, create a documentary about Carl’s life and situation, exploring the conflicts and issues faced by a young gay person in the face of homophobia, and the tragedy of his death. Suggest what can be done to protect lesbigay youth and prevent such a tragedy in the future.

Writing “in role”
In the role as Carl, write a series of diary entries at key points in the story. Write a letter to another character.
Rick

“I don’t have faggots for friends.”
“Friends? Are you nuts?… the guy’s a freak. No, he never said a word to me about it. Think I would’ve been hanging out with him if he did? Can you imagine what his parents would say if they found out?”

Character Collage
Using the character of Rick, make a collage, which represents or depicts your impressions of this character as a person. You may wish to use newspaper or magazine clippings as well as your own symbols and drawings. Things to include: pictures, words, phrases and images. What are the dominant images? Create a title for your collage- a statement, which describes the person, perhaps by completing the phrase: “This is a person who is…” Be prepared to describe your collage, giving reasons for the choice of images and items selected for each character.

Character Profile
Create a character profile for Rick (or one of the other characters in the play) by speculating on details about this person’s life and personality. Start with the truths about the character that you have discovered from the play and then flesh out the character as you imagine him/her to be. Compare your profiles with those of other students and discuss similarities and differences in choices made.

• Name
• Age
• Physical description
• Favourite:
  TV programme
  Clothing
  Hangout
  Book
  Song/music
  Celebrity
  Car
  Thing to do on a Saturday afternoon
• Family situation- description, quality of relationships, family dynamics
• Friendships/relationships
• Greatest achievements
• Best subject at school
• Dislikes
• Fears
• Hangups
• Aspirations
• Likely future occupation
• Top 5 things on this person’s mind
• Personal qualities or attributes, plus actions and behaviours that demonstrate these qualities
• A word or phrase this character would use to describe themself
• Someone this person reminds you of
• Ways in which the character is like/dislike you
• Your personal impressions of this character (what you admire or respect, advice you would give)
Hot Seating
Flesh out your understanding of characters through “hot-seating”, an activity that encourages reflective awareness of human behaviour and insight into the relationship between attitudes and behaviours. The teacher sits at the front of the class and assumes the role of Rick. The rest of the class asks questions of him/her to discover and explore: his personality and disposition, inner thoughts, feelings, opinions that may not have been voiced in the course of the play, attitudes and feelings about relationships with others.

The teacher, in the hot seat, responds as he/she thinks the character would. When a response is given that a class member feels is “out of character” or incongruous based on the information supplied in the play, that person calls out, “Hot-seat”. S/he explains why the response is inappropriate and the class decides who is right.

Status and Power
Rick is a popular guy at school; a leader amongst his peers. This is one reason why his opinions about homosexuality and his rumours about Carl are accepted and followed. Paulette has the strength to stand up for herself, but Tara and Justin are followers. How has Rick achieved this status?

To explore the concepts of status and power, play a game of “chairs”. In a large space in the room, place a single chair. Prepare 30 (or enough for all students) small cards of paper, with numbers from 1 to 10 written on them. Hand out the cards to all students, instructing them to look at the card, but not to reveal their number to anyone. Randomly choose two students, and place them opposite of each other, equidistant from the chair.

Instructions:

“You want this chair more than anything else. This is your dream, all that you want. Your right to this chair is dependent on your rank or status in society. Your rank in society is your number; 1 is the lowest status and 10 is the highest. You must choose a character and assume behaviour true to your status. Barring physical contact, you must convince the other person that you deserve the chair. Remember, with status comes priviledge/or lack of priviledge.”

Try this with a number of pairs, and at the end of each improvisation, ask the class to guess what status number each person had.

Follow up with a discussion on status and power:
• What was it like to be a “one” (or “ten”)?
• How did it feel to be of lower “status” than the other person?
• If you have high status, do you automatically have power?
• Who in today’s society has low status? High status?
• Can you change your status?
• How is “power” or status measured in youth culture today?
• How does a person “earn” his/her status?
• How is peer pressure related to status and power?
Forum Theatre
Another way to explore peer pressure is through forum theatre. Revisit scenes from the play in which the teenage characters must deal with a conflict or a moment of decision-making that involves peer pressure:
- Rick is trying to talk the guys into a trip to Church Street for some sportful gay bashing. The group must challenge him and talk him out of it.
- At the concert, Paulette is angry at the attitudes of others towards her uncle. She must convince the others that they are wrong.
- At Tara’s house, Rick and Justin confront Carl after discovering him at a gay bar. Paulette supports Carl and tries to convince the others that their attitudes are immature and wrong.
- At the dance, Tara and Justin are pressured by Rick to confront and fight Carl. Justin and Tara must resist the pressure to conform.

Have one group role play the scene for the rest of the class. Observe the scene, and at any point, the teacher or observers may stop the action and replace a person in the drama to try an alternative course of action or a different way of dealing with the dilemma or conflict. The goal is to explore multiple perspectives that will steer the drama in a more positive direction, and to attain resolution for the characters involved. Discuss and reflect on the experience.

Reactions
When Carl comes out of the closet, the negative reactions and actions of his family and friends send him into a headspin. The irony is that, really, nothing has changed, he is still the same person. It is their perception of him that has changed, coloured by homophobic attitudes.

In an individual, private way (journal writing, reflection), consider what your reaction would be if a friend revealed him/herself to be lesbigay. How would your relationship with that friend change? Why?

Having worked on an anti-homophobia unit at school, have your attitudes changed?

An Anti-homophobia Action Plan
Carl is abandoned by his support network of family and friends, and he is also abandoned by institutions that should help him, such as school.
- Did “the system” fail Carl? Did his family, his friends?
- Why is it that so often it takes a catastrophe for people to notice and address a problem?

As a class, brainstorm ways of addressing homophobia in your school.
- Write up an action plan of initiatives that can help make your school a safe, supportive and inclusive learning environment for all students.
- Create your own class policy statement for fair treatment of lesbigay students.

Making Personal Connections
The playwright, Ed Roy believes that we are all coming out of closets. Any passion you feel that you don’t have the right to reveal means that you exist in a form of closet. Some students may be able to share the reluctance they feel about their “closet” activities. This may be best accomplished in a journal or in a sharing session with chosen partners.
Recommendations for Educators

Portions adapted from “Homophobia In Our Schools” Workshop, Peel Equity Group Support

- Examine your own feelings and attitudes towards homosexuality and bisexuality. Develop insights into possible fears and misconceptions. Books, lectures, and consultations with gay, lesbian and bisexual teachers, professionals and agencies may help with the process.
- Begin with the never-ending process of questioning the assumptions associated with heterosexism, sexism, ageism and patriarchy.
- Become aware of the oppression gays, lesbians and bisexuals face. For instance, imagine how you would feel if your romantic, sexual and love feelings were the cause of derision, hatred, disgust and violence from people around you, very frequently from your own family and friends.
- Increase your awareness of gay, lesbian and bisexual resources in your community. The gay community is frequently the greatest source of support for lebigay individuals.
- There are unique positive aspects about being gay, lesbian or bisexual. Become aware of them and develop the capacity of helping your students to discover them. For example it takes great strength and mental health for gays, lesbians and bisexuals, to function in a homophobic society.
- Transfer your student to a gay, lesbian or bisexual positive teacher/counselor if you are unable to establish a positive relationship.
- The gay, lesbian, or bisexual adolescent is not your only concern; the homophobic environment in which he/she lives is also your concern. Inclusive curriculum and inclusive classroom practices is a good beginning.
- Encourage your school/guidance offices to display pamphlets listing resources for gay, lesbian and bisexual youth.
- Do not simply try to help lesbians, gays and bisexuals cope with harassment and prejudice. Be their advocate and help them to obtain their rights and self worth.

Visual Show of Support for the Sexual Minority Youth

- Don’t act shocked when a student comes out to you. Act interested. This is the best way to become informed- by listening.
- Lose all biases you may have about any group of people. In education, we need to deal with all minorities equitably.
- Have cards that list phone numbers on hand and in open areas so that students can pick them up without asking.
- Provide positive role models- acquaint yourself with historic figures that are of the sexual minorities and mention this fact when discussing their impact on your subject area.
- Put articles on the bulletin board showing positive images of homosexuality.

What You Can Do

- Don’t assume everyone is heterosexual.
- Recognize that heterosexuality isn’t any more natural than being gay, lesbian or bisexual.
- Don’t regard being gay, lesbian or bisexual as an “alternative lifestyle”.
- Don’t assume that all gay, lesbian or bisexual people have the same needs or lead the same lives.
- Recognize the social constructions of gender and challenge gender stereotypes.
- Don’t pathologize being gay, lesbian or bisexual by looking for its causes.
- Develop an inclusive vocabulary by learning proper terminology.
- Confront homophobic remarks and statements.
- Create a positive atmosphere by learning the differences between tolerance, acceptance, celebration and advocacy.
- Do your homework. Don’t expect gay, lesbian or bisexual people to do all the work. Educate yourself!
FILMS:  
Out David Adkin (Director) 1993, 73 min.  
One of Them Elise Swerhone (Director) 1999, 25 min.  
In Other Words Jan Padgett (Director) 2001, 27 min.  
School’s Out Lynne Gernie (Director) 1996, 24 min.  

(available for screening at the Cine Robotheque, Montreal)


Just For Fun (Canada) 1993, 24 min.
(Dramatic film which confronts the issue of “gay bashing”)

www.nfb.ca/celebratingdiversity For Teachers- How to use these films to start a discussion.

WEBSITES:  
www.iomag.com InsideOut Magazine (made for teenagers)  
www.oasismag.com Oasis Magazine  
www.bidstrup.com/cool Resource material  
www.safersex.org Great links to other sites  
www.youth.org Daily updates and chat rooms  
www.pflag.ca Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays  
www.ppt.on.ca/teach.html T.E.A.C.H. Teens Educating & Confronting Homophobia (a volunteer outreach group of teens)

READINGS:  
Bridges of Respect: Creating Support for Lesbian and Gay Youth  
by Katherine Whitlock  
Positively Gay Betty Berzon (ed.)  
Like Coming Home: Coming Out Letters Meg Umans (ed.)  
Revelations: A Collection of Gay Coming Out Stories Curtis Wayne (ed.)  
Testimonies: A Collection of lesbian Coming Out Stories Sarah Holmes (ed.)  
How To Be A Happy Homosexual by Terry Sanderson

BOOKS:  
Revolutionary Voices: A Multicultural Queer Youth Anthology by Amy Sonnie  
The Shared Heart: Portraits and Stories Celebrating Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Young People by Adam Mastoon  
Homophobia: How We All Pay the Price by Warren Blumenfield  
Rights of Passage: Struggles for Lesbian and Gay Legal Equality by Didi Herman  
Young, Gay and Proud Sasha Alyson (ed.)  
SUPERSTARS- 12 Lesbians Who Changed the World by Dell Richards  
Transgender Warriors (Making History from Joan of Arc to RuPaul) by Leslie Feinberg  
Outing Yourself by Michelangelo Signolie  
When Someone You Know is Gay by Susan and Daniel Cohen

YOUNG ADULT FICTION:  
with Gay or Lesbian themes  
Hey Dollface by Deobra Hantzig  
Bad Boy by Diana Wieler  
Night Kites by M.E. Kerrs  
Annie On My Mind by Nancy Garden  
Independance Day by B.A. Eckers  
Athletic Shorts by Chris Crutchers  
S.P. Likes A.D. by Catherine Brett  
Cherokee Bat and the Goat Guys by Francesca L. Block  
***A Boy’s Own Story by Edmund White

"With A Boy’s Own Story American literature is larger by one classic novel.” -The Washington Post
DEBATING THE CURRENT HEADLINES

Language and attitudes reveal what society thinks about lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgendered people. Silence about homophobia can imply that discrimination, bullying and violence are acceptable. At school, many homosexual youth feel isolated because the reality of their lives goes unmentioned.

#1 Longing to Become A Father
Reading: *Gayby Boom* by Margaret Philp The Globe and Mail, May 3 2003 (Page F4)

Brainstorm:
- What are some of the social obstacles gay men must overcome (from the general public and within the gay community)?

- Are there negative implications for children raised by homosexual parents? In your opinion, do they outweigh the good?

- Do you think that it is fair that lesbian mothers coming out of failed heterosexual marriages should loose the custody of their children?

Essay: *Laws have been overhauled to allow same-sex couples to adopt children in almost every province.* On the grounds that it is unconstitutional to discriminate against persons based on their sexual orientation, write an essay on why homosexual couples have the right to parent children.

# 2 Canada Reads
Reading: *B.C. Banned-books Case Reaches Supreme Court* by Kirk Makin The Globe and Mail, June 11th, 2002 (Page A10)

Brainstorm:
- Do you believe that tolerance and acceptance of all forms of family life should be taught to children beginning at the tender age of 5? Why or why not?

- In today’s multicultural society, religion has been pushed back further into the home. Do you believe it is right that a few parents use their personal religious beliefs to dictate what a large number of students can be taught? Explain.

Essay: The courts will look at the grey area between *the power of parents and school boards and a teacher’s obligation to provide moral guidance.* There are some issues that parents are ill equipped to talk about with their children and schools often pick-up the slack. What are some of the issues you would like your teacher or school to address? What topics are you not comfortable with?
# 3 Prom King and Queen

Reading: *I was Jumping Up and Down and Everybody was Cheering* by Graeme Smith
The Globe and Mail, May 11th, 2002 (Front Page A1)

Essay: Marc Hall *seeks a declaration that gay couples be allowed at Catholic school functions in the future.*
Whether religious or not, how would your school react to a gay couple attending the prom?

# 4 To Wed or Not to Wed

Reading: *In Search of a Happy Ending: It Takes Only Two People* by William Johnson
The Globe and Mail, May 5th, 2003

Brainstorm:
- Traditions change to accommodate new realities. What are some of the major changes that have been made in Canadian society during the last century? (Think of specific social movements that have occurred and civil rights that people now have in 2003.)

- Is the B.C. Court of Appeal proposing to change religious doctrine to include the acceptance of same sex unions? What is its main objective? Explain.

Essay:
Do you believe that by legalizing same sex marriages that the traditional, heterosexual bond of marriage will be weakened? Given that Quebec has the highest rate of common-law unions in all of Canada, should it be a couple’s choice to get married or not?
The dozen or so other homosexuals orbiting me socially are all perennial singles, whose significant courtships range from two months to two years. I wonder if the straight imprint has given these “late-developer” relationships more solid foundations? Does that make reformed straight guys a better catch for men seeking a long-term partner? I’m not going back in to the closet: I’ve come too far on my own journey out, but I’m more than a little scared of what’s on the other side! If you enjoy the Strexit blog, please follow me and click ♡ or applause below, so others can find it by your recommendation. Thanks for reading! Read the Strexit blog from the very beginning! Strexit Volume One: Coming out to myself available on Kindle. The first volume of Strexit articles is now available from Amazon. Follow Team Sleepless in Seattle and others on SoundCloud. Create a SoundCloud account. Sign in. Produced by #RadioRace team Sleepless In Seattle: Rachel Stevens, Producer Brie Ripley, Producer Ryan Sparks, Mix Engineer Isolde Raftery, Our Guts & Glory Editor Chris Cunningham, Incredible Composer. Special thanks to Alyssa (Alex).