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Write with Pride: A LGBTQIA Writing Workshop

GRADES 7–12

TYPE
NARRATIVE
POETRY**COMMITMENT**
4 SESSIONS: 2 HOURS
EACH

In this workshop, writing will be used to explore what it means to be a member of the LGBTQIA community in America today. If students identify as LGBTQIA, know someone who does, or are simply interested in the topic, then they surely have a story brewing inside them and now is the time to tell it. With students, you will work on producing memoirs, poems, and essays that either tell your own stories or reveal something about your beliefs. As an optional way to end this lesson students' finished pieces can be made into a published anthology, one for each student.

SESSION 1: LABELS AND I AM FROM POEMS

YOU WILL NEED

- Paper and Pencils, Projector, Internet, Laptop
- Poem Templates — Handout

STEP 1 (15 MINUTES)

Optional: Do Now/Activator

Everyone has to line themselves up in order of their birthday month and day (from January to December) but without talking. Once everyone is in line, each person says their name and birthday and we see if we got the order right.

STEP 2 (20 MINUTES)

Spark Activity

Share the YouTube video clip “Coming Out: I am Gay, I am Human” with students.

Next, give students 5 minutes to freewrite on what labels mean to them, specifically when it comes to LGBTQIA issues (or any other letter they feel should be included in that acronym). Some questions to help students get started:

- How do they make you feel?
- Do you like them? Hate them?
- Does it depend on the label or who is using it?

From there, ask students to discuss their thoughts in small groups with the people at the table and share their writing if they want.

Then discuss the video and student thoughts in a large group:

- What did you think?
- What stood out to you?
- What was the overall message the video was sending?
- Does anyone agree or disagree?

STEP 3 (10 MINUTES)

Community Agreements

At 826CHI, these are sometimes called Writers Promises; promises that writers make to each other so they feel safe, supported, free to be curious, free to take creative risks, free to proudly share their work, etc. You might take a few minutes to brainstorm a list of promises collaboratively and write them on a gigantic sheet of paper, which you'll hang on the wall during each session.

STEP 4 (15 MINUTES)

Mini-Lesson #1: Introducing Portrait Poems

Now that we have seen the video, we are going to write our own “I Am” poems, called portrait poems, so that we can use our writing to become empowered to describe ourselves however we want. This doesn't have to focus solely on LGBTQIA pieces of you or your life, this is any and all parts of you. Show examples of Portrait Poems, of which a variety of examples can be found here:

<http://www.tnellen.com/cybereng/portrait.html>

STEP 5 (30 MINUTES)

Portrait Poem Writing

Now, it's time for students to write their own portrait poems. You can provide templates students can use if they want using the "Poem Templates" handout. Students can write multiple poems exploring different parts of themselves.

STEP 6 (10 MINUTES)

To conclude this portion of the lesson, students who want to share can share a few lines of their poem.

Or, do a **bonus activity**: Write a list poem using one of the following phrases as the beginning of each sentence of your poem:

1. I wish people knew that I...
2. Being myself is....
3. I am proud because...

SESSION 2: MEMOIR

YOU WILL NEED

- Projector, paper and pens, copier, laptop

STEP 1 (20 MINUTES)

Do Now/Activator

Begin by reading the essay “When I First Knew I Was Transgender” by Jazz Jennings from Time Magazine outloud, which can be found online. We recommend previewing and editing this essay for appropriateness and length.

Then, ask anyone if they know what this kind of essay is called (answer: memoir). Give a few minutes for tables to discuss their thoughts on the essay in small groups and consider what the definition of a memoir is and what elements make one up—and to show these elements in the Jazz Jennings story. Students can share their ideas in partners, or small groups.

STEP 2 (10 MINUTES)

Mini-Lesson #2: How to Write About Memories

Provide two examples where you talk through a memory of your own—one where you’re just listing details in chronological order with no dialogue, and not too much description or emotional narrative. Then, retell the same memory, but this time add some dialogue and some details to make the story more dynamic and talking about how the memory felt. Ask students: which telling was more interesting? Why do they think that telling was more interesting? Spend a few minutes discussing how to make writing about memories interesting. A few suggestions to work towards with your class:

- Write about a larger moment picking 10-seconds of the memory to focus on

- Use dialogue
- Try playing with chronological order
- Use descriptive language
- Talk about how you are feeling as well as what is happening

STEP 3

Memoir Writing

Think about your experience interacting with identity issues in your own life, whether that means you or someone you know. Students should now choose a memory to write about and fill the “Memoir Writing” handout that asks the following:

1. What memory (or memories) will you write about?
2. Where and when did it take place? Describe the place in detail. What can you see? What are the sights, sounds, and smells?
3. Who was there? Write down who they were in relation to you and describe them in detail. What do they look like? How do you feel about them? Have you always felt this way?
4. How do you remember feeling during this memory? Did your feelings change over time?
5. What is the most important part of this story? How will you highlight that in your memoir?
6. What did you learn from the story you are going to tell?
7. Do you or anyone else in the story go through any major or minor changes?
8. What do you want the reader to learn from your story? How do you want the reader to feel when they are done reading it?
9. Do you think your story should be told chronologically? If not, what is the best way to tell it? How can you best hold the attention of your readers?

STEP 4 (15 MINUTES)

During this time, students work on turning their memoir planning sheets into a full-blown memoir piece by expanding their planning into a narrative. Encourage them to open with a single, action-filled moment.

STEP 5 (10 MINUTES)

Students who want to can share one or more sentences from their memoirs.

Bonus Activity: Freewrite answering the following question: What would you change about the way LGBTQIA people are treated today?

SESSION 3: CULTURAL COMMENTARY

YOU WILL NEED

- Paper and Pencils, Projector, Internet, Laptop

STEP 1 (15 MINUTES)

Spark Activity

Read and discuss the article, “I Imagine A Time When You See Me,” by Joshua M. Ferguson, which can be found online by searching for both the author and the article, or a piece of your choosing that uses cultural commentary. You might also consider condensing this article. Continue by discussing with students about different pieces of popular culture—which television, movies, books, etc. they feel

do a good job representing the LGBTQIA experience and those they feel do a bad job .

STEP 2 (25 MINUTES)

Mini-Lesson #3: Writing with Cultural Competency

Discuss cultural commentary, which means being respectful and responsive to the beliefs, practices, cultural and linguistic needs of a diverse group, and its importance in society. Ask students to think about something they want to critique and fill out the “Writing with Cultural Competency” handout.

STEP 3 (15 MINUTES)

Writing Time

Students should begin writing their cultural commentary in the form of an article—much like the one they read.

STEP 4

Students choose between the memoir they began last week or their cultural commentary to keep working and flesh out into a well-crafted piece.

Bonus Activity: Students freewrite about a time they felt different or like they didn’t fit in.

SESSION 4: PEER REVIEW

STEP 1 (15 MINUTES)

Do Now/Activator

Discuss peer review and make a list of agreements for how best to review someone else's work.

STEP 2 (35 MINUTES)

Mini-Lesson #4: Peer Review

Students should partner up and read their pieces out loud to their partners (pencil in hand in case they catch changes they want to make), then their partner fills out a worksheet to answer the following questions:

1. What were three things you loved about your partner's piece? How did the piece make you feel?
2. Were there any parts that confused you?
3. Were there any parts where you wanted to know more?
4. Where could your partner use more detail or description?
5. Did you notice any major grammar errors?

STEP 3

CUPS and ARMS

Students take time to revise their own work. They can also use a “CUPS and ARMS” sheet to target their review.

If time allows, have students share out their work, whether by calling on student volunteers or having students share in small groups.

STEP 4 (OPTIONAL CONCLUSION)

Publish final drafts of student work by binding them together in a chapbook and distributing one to each students.