

Lesson 5:

DIALOGUE ABOUT CURRENT EVENTS

Grades 3-8

In the film a number of teachers lead discussions about current events. A teacher of an eighth-grade class at the Manhattan Country Day School had students write their opinions about whether LGBT people should be included in the curriculum and then led a spirited class discussion about the topic. A third-grade teacher at Public School 87 in New York invited a student to read aloud her essay about her family—including her two mothers—and then asked students to pretend to be judges and discuss whether or not lesbian and gay people should be allowed to get married. In the “deleted scene” section on the **It’s Elementary** DVD, disk two, a fifth-grade class discusses the U.S. Bill of Rights in conjunction with the debate over LGBT people serving in the military.

A key component to these discussions is that dialogue is allowed to take place. Remember that your class might include people who have loved ones who are LGBT, people who may be questioning their own sexuality, and people who have been raised with strong anti-LGBT religious beliefs. Leave room for a wide variety of opinions with the caveat that all opinions are expressed respectfully. In your classrooms, as in all of the classrooms highlighted in **It’s Elementary**, students have already received many messages about LGBT people. Classroom discussions are not introducing a new topic; rather they are providing a structured format for having dialogue.

The lesson plan that follows can be modified as needed for different grade levels.

Goals

- Students will develop critical thinking and writing skills.
- Students will increase their knowledge of current events and politics.
- Students will identify the sometimes contradictory values that underlie laws, policies and practices.

Proposed





Teaching Tip

In *It's Elementary*, the principal of Cambridge Friends Elementary

School talks about the fact that there are school and community values, not just individual family values. Teachers can use current events to not just open a neutral dialogue, but to connect LGBT issues to other topics/values discussed in class and to promote acceptance of and fairness for all people.

Objectives

- Students will be able to critically read written material about current events.
- Students will use written and spoken language skills to express their opinions regarding current events.

Time Required

One 30 - 45 minute session.

Materials

Newspaper or magazine article about current events related to LGBT people.

Instructions

- Find at least two newspaper or magazine articles about current events related to LGBT people. Topics might include: marriage equality, the formation of a gay-straight alliance, efforts to include sexual orientation in anti-bullying legislation, or a student who got disciplined for wearing an anti-gay T-shirt.
- Introduce the topic covered in the article by giving a brief explanation of the issue. For example, if the topic is curriculum, you could give a current example of a controversy about teaching material related to LGBT people. If the topic is marriage provide a brief overview of what might be happening in your state regarding this issue and contrast it by describing a place where something different is happening.
- Ask students to read one or two articles about the topic or summarize the content of the articles for the class.
- Ask students to either:
 - » Respond in writing to specific questions about this topic.
 - » Meet in small groups to discuss their own opinions about this topic.
 - » Have a debate by dividing the class into two groups to strategize how to best present arguments on either side of the issue in question.
- Conduct a class discussion about the topic that allows for a wide variety of opinions. Examine ways that the topic being discussed may relate to other topics that have been covered in class—examples could include civil rights, censorship or themes in novels.