

One in ten people are gay



1. Posters

Putting up a sign that welcomes difference can be the first step to allowing difference to exist in your classroom.

While kids seem to observe posters passively, the information sinks in. For the student hungering for other examples of “me” that can’t always be found elsewhere—having simple messages such as these are crucial to self-esteem.

Keep an eye on the integrity of the poster and be sure to reprimand anyone who does not cooperate. Following through is a teacher’s greatest asset.

Many organizations make posters especially for classroom use: <http://www.wayout.org.au/> is one of them.

2. Media Analysis

The GBLTI community is constantly in the news. The Herald Sun’s MX has at least one article/day. Often, there are always events like Jon Amachi (NBA) coming “out”. And Tim Hardaway’s homophobic response that can be brilliant learning opportunities in lieu of any text that also deals with discrimination—and we are pretty fond of those in the English classroom.

You can teach your class to learn to recognize

persuasive, which are often manipulative, methods. You can also discuss the legitimacy of our laws, and political policies in theory and in practice.

3. Text Selection

Just because your prescribed book selection does not include any gay authors, does not mean you cannot bring them into your classroom.

Growing up Gay/Growing up Lesbian is an example of an anthology of authors from canonical to popular; Walt Whitman to Jeannette Winterson. You can discuss good writing as a compliment to the texts you already chose. Introducing authors, who also happen to be gay, is one way to debunk the myth that sexuality is a master status.

There are poems, short stories and humorous freelance journalists like Norah Vincent in the gay community. Kids are open-minded to social justice issues and their trained sense of “right and wrong” can be used to teach them acceptance of difference.

Alternatively, provide a reading list that includes texts about sexuality.

4. Films

From *The Shawshank Redemption* to *Mean Girls*, with the majority of the “out” community in the arts, most films refer to gay people in some regard, frequently to “get a laugh”.

But often, the real message of the comment is ignored. Viewers remember the joke, but the misconceptions that betray homophobic attitudes stick. This is harmful to the gay community.

When ‘Red’ (Morgan Freeman) explains to Andy, “They aren’t homosexuals. You have to be human first” remind the students if they refer to ‘The Sisters’ in *Shawshank* as homosexuals of this line.

5. Language

Check what language your students are using to communicate. Students who express disgust with the word “gay,” need to realize the connotations are serious enough to make others feel uncomfortable; even if that gay person is too shy to admit it, the sentiment is felt. Stand up for them.

Ignoring such comments indicates that such issues are not worthy of acknowledgement—or correction. Not addressing the connotations of slanderous language tells students that “gay people” deserve abuse, and that they will never have any dependable protectors in real life.

“debunk the myth that your sexuality must be your master status.”

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