

Learning from Harvey Milk: Building Support and Coalitions for Change

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Overview: Students will watch the film *The Times of Harvey Milk*. From watching the film students will gain an understanding of who Harvey Milk was and which events affected his life. Through a class discussion students will gain a better understanding of Harvey Milk's views, his life, and his legacy. Students will then apply what they have learned from the film to think creatively about building coalitions in order to make their school a safe place for all students.

Understanding goals:

By the end of this lesson, students will understand:

- Who Harvey Milk was and the ways in which he impacted the civil rights movement;
- How Harvey Milk built coalitions to affect political change;
- How to build coalitions to support efforts to create safe spaces at school.

Subject Area: United States history, United States government

Connection to California Standards:

This lesson is connected to the following History-Social Science Content Standards for California Public Schools

11th grade U.S. history:

- 11.10 Students analyze the development of federal civil rights and voting rights.

12th grade U.S. government:

- 12.2 Students evaluate and take and defend positions on the scope and limits of rights and obligations as democratic citizens, the relationships among them, and how they are secured.
- 12.3 Students evaluate and take and defend positions on what the fundamental values and principles of civil society are (i.e., the autonomous sphere of voluntary personal, social, and economic relations that are not part of government), their interdependence, and the meaning and importance of those values and principles for a free society.

Connection to National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies:

This lesson is connected to the following standards for CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES:

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic.

- An understanding of civic ideals and practices is critical to full participation in society and is an essential component of education for citizenship, which is the central purpose of social studies. All people have a stake in examining civic ideals and practices across time and in different societies. Through an understanding of both ideals and practices, it becomes possible to identify gaps between them, and study efforts to close the gaps in our democratic republic and worldwide.
- Learning how to apply civic ideals as part of citizen action is essential to the exercise of democratic freedoms and the pursuit of the common good. Through social studies programs, students acquire a historical and contemporary understanding of the basic freedoms and rights of citizens in a democracy, and learn about the institutions and practices that support and protect these freedoms and rights, as well as the important historical documents that articulate them. Students also need to become familiar with civic ideals and practices in countries other than our democratic republic.
- Questions faced by students studying this theme might be: What are the democratic ideals and practices of a constitutional democracy? What is the balance between rights and responsibilities? What is civic participation? How do citizens become involved? What is the role of the citizen in the community and the nation, and as a member of the world community? Students will explore how individuals and institutions interact. They will also recognize and respect different points of view. Students learn by experience how to participate in community service and political activities and how to use democratic processes to influence public policy.

Time: 3 60-minute class periods

Materials:

- *The Times of Harvey Milk* (1984), DVD produced by Black Sand Productions, Pacific Arts, UCLA Film and Television Archive
- Attached handouts which include: Previewing Activity, Viewing Guide, Harvey Milk Timeline, and Building Coalitions

Approaching the Material:

Addressing LGBT-related topics at school, whether in the course of classroom instruction or during a club meeting, can raise controversy. Before screening this film, it is important that you know your rights and responsibilities as a facilitator. In California, teaching about sexual orientation and gender identity is protected and does not require parental permission, as long as you are not discussing sexual behavior or anatomy. See GSA Network's Fact Sheets on AB537 and SB71 for more information (www.gsanetwork.org/resources).

Facilitating Discussions on LGBT Issues:

Agree upon ground rules for discussion as a class. Rules may include an agreement to maintain confidentiality, refrain from using slurs or making personal attacks, and speaking one at a time. Work to establish a forum for a free and respectful exchange of ideas. Do not attempt to change anyone's point of view. Be aware that although you may not have an openly LGBT student in your class, you may have students who are not "out," are questioning their identities, are gender non-conforming, or who have LGBT family members or friends. Likewise, students may be affected by negative or hurtful comments whether or not these comments are directed specifically at them. Resist the urge to put LGBT students, those perceived to be LGBT, or those with LGBT family or friends in the spotlight as "experts." Allow persons in the room to speak only for themselves and on their own terms and avoid inadvertently "outing" someone to their peers. Establish as comfortable an environment as possible. Intervene when conversations become one-sided and pose questions to keep the conversation on track. Be honest about what you do and don't know. Refer to the resources section to encourage further exploration of the topic. Use phrases such as, "I don't know," "That's a good question," "How would we find out?" or "Let me do some research and get back to you on that."

Instructor note: below we will use the following teaching concept that you may or may not be familiar. It refers to getting students "into" a topic, taking them "through" the heart of a topic, and then moving them "beyond."

Into - Opening the lesson (40 minutes):

1. To open the lesson and get students considering the big ideas and questions of this lesson, hand out or project **The Times of Harvey Milk Previewing Activity**. Give students about 5 minutes to read through the statements and mark their response.
2. After allowing time for students to complete their individual handout, ask students to make a public stand about their beliefs and values. This activity is called "four corners" because in each corner of the classroom, you should place a sign stating "strongly disagree," "disagree," "agree," or "strongly agree." Read each statement aloud and as you read the statement, ask students to move to the corner that most closely matches where they placed themselves on the continuum from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." (Facilitation Note: Some students will not want to go to a corner. Encourage them to choose a corner that best represents what they're feeling now and reassure them that their role during the exercise doesn't represent what they will always think, just what they're thinking today.)
3. When students have chosen a corner, ask for representatives from each corner to explain why they placed themselves there. After students from each corner explain their rationale, allow students the opportunity to move corners and change their position. Ask any students who move to explain why their thinking changed.

4. Debrief the activity by asking students the following questions:
 - *What questions were particularly hard for you to answer?*
 - *In terms of how the class divided among corners, which response most surprised you?*
 - *What do these questions have to do with civil rights struggles?*
 - *What do you think these questions have to do with the life of Harvey Milk?*

Connect students' answers to their focus for watching the film *The Times of Harvey Milk* and the focus for the film: Harvey Milk's political career and his work to build coalitions in support of LGBT rights. For example, ask students to keep their answers in mind as they watch the film. They will find that Harvey Milk faced many of the same questions. They should compare how they answered these questions to how Harvey Milk answered them. Let them know that Harvey Milk's example may change how they think about some of the questions and their answers.

Through - Viewing the film and discussion (80 minutes):

1. Distribute ***The Times of Harvey Milk Viewing Guide*** to students. As students view the film students should take notes on the topics listed on the Viewing Guide. (Note: Due to the length of the entire film, this lesson will only focus on sections of the film and the viewing guide is based on these sections.)
2. Play the film from the beginning to 28:13 and the fast forward to 33:55 and play until 48:10. (The total runtime is 43:13)
3. After the film review the **Viewing Guide** (attached) with students. Discuss question number 3, from the Viewing Guide with students. Ask students to share what five events they thought affected Milk's life.
4. After students have shared, either project or distribute the **Harvey Milk Timeline** and review the major events of his life with the class. (*Note: if you have additional time in class you may have students create a timeline on the board with the events they wrote down on the viewing guide before reviewing the attached timeline*)
5. Next, use the discussion questions to facilitate a class discussion on the issues presented in the film. You may have students break into small groups or work individually before the whole class discussion.

Discussion Questions:

- Why do you think Harvey Milk pursued a career in politics? Why did he decide to run for office a fourth time after three other defeats? What were his goals and why?
- A martyr is somebody who suffers persecution and death for the people, a cause, a country, or an organization. Was Harvey Milk a martyr? What other historical and political figures do you know who were martyrs for a cause? Why might you call them martyrs?

- Harvey Milk’s “time” came right after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Do you think LGBTQ issues are part of that movement? What are some differences between the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s and the coalitions that Milk was organizing? What did Harvey Milk do for present day LGBTQ rights?
- Harvey Milk frequently predicted his own demise and said, “If a bullet should go through my head let that bullet destroy every closet door.” What did he mean by this? Why was it so important to Milk that LGBTQ people “come out of the closet”?
- On election night, Harvey Milk reminded his supporters that, "This is not my victory -- it's yours. If a gay man can win, it proves that there is hope for all minorities who are willing to fight." Do you agree or disagree, and why?
- Harvey once said, “All young people, regardless of sexual orientation or identity, deserve a safe and supportive environment in which to achieve their full potential.” Do you think our school achieves this vision of a safe and supportive environment for everyone? Explain why or why not.

Beyond - Coalition Building (60 minutes)

1. After discussing the film, pass out the **Building Coalitions** handout and review the assignment with students. The assignment asks students to think about how they can work to make their school a safer place and asks them to walk through the steps to create coalitions to bring about change.
2. Have students brainstorm changes they would like to see happen at their school or within their community.
3. Then place students into small groups of three or four students, based on the ideas that they brainstormed. In their groups students should agree upon a change that they’d like to see happen at their school and then work through the handout together.
4. After students are done have them share their plans with the class. Encourage students to ask questions or give feedback on each others’ ideas.
5. For homework students should create a campaign poster for their cause. Show students examples of other campaign posters to help them with their homework.

The Life and Times of Harvey Milk

Previewing Activity

Name: _____

Date: _____

Period: _____

Directions: For each statement below, indicate whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree by placing an X on the line. Be prepared to share your reasoning.

1. All Americans deserve the same rights.

strongly disagree disagree agree strongly agree

2. I would work with others to fight for our rights if they were being threatened.

strongly disagree disagree agree strongly agree

3. You need a lot of money to win a position in public office.

strongly disagree disagree agree strongly agree

4. I would defend the rights of my friends and family even if I knew I could lose my job by doing so.

strongly disagree disagree agree strongly agree

5. I would be scared to seek support from people who disagree with my beliefs.

strongly disagree disagree agree strongly agree

6. I would not let someone's sexual orientation sway my vote.

strongly disagree disagree agree strongly agree

7. I would risk my life to defend my rights.

strongly disagree disagree agree strongly agree

The Life and Times of Harvey Milk **Viewing Guide**

Name _____

Per. _____

As you watch the documentary please take notes on the following:

1. What words seem most powerful/poignant to you in Harvey Milk's taped will? How does he sound when he talks about the possibility of his death? Ex: activist, target, movement.

2. Who is Harvey Milk?

3. What are 5 events that shaped/impacted Milk's life?

4. List words that people who knew Milk used to describe him.

5. What rights did he fight for?

6. What was the Briggs initiative and what were Milk's views, actions and responses?

7. A **coalition** is an alliance or union between groups, factions or parties especially for some temporary and specific reason. With whom did Milk build coalitions?

8. List words or slogans and look for signs used in the campaigns. Ex: "No on 6".

4. How would you publicize your cause to the greater school community?

5. Would funds be needed for your cause? If so, how would it be funded?

6. What would be your next step in implementing change? What strategies would you use?

Individual Homework: Create a campaign poster for your cause. Use words and images to capture your viewers' attention and gain their support.

Your campaign poster must include the following:

- an illustration or symbol
- a slogan (ex. "Yes We Can!" or "We Can Do It!")

Your campaign poster will be graded on the following:

- neatness and creativity
- mechanics and grammar
- relevance of the slogan
- the cause represented is clear