



“Seneca Falls, Selma, Stonewall”: The Stonewall Riots in the Fight for Equality

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What were the Stonewall Riots, and what role did they play in ongoing struggles for LGBTQ+ equality in the United States?

OVERVIEW

We, the people, declare today that the most evident of truths—that all of us are created equal—is the star that guides us still; just as it guided our forebears through Seneca Falls, and Selma, and Stonewall; just as it guided all those men and women, sung and unsung, who left footprints along this great Mall, to hear a preacher say that we cannot walk alone; to hear a King proclaim that our individual freedom is inextricably bound to the freedom of every soul on Earth.



President Barack Obama’s soaring words echoed through the National Mall on Inauguration Day in 2013. For his second inaugural address, he joined together text from the nation’s founding documents with sociopolitical movements that reflected the country’s progress since its inception. At Seneca Falls in 1848, the Women’s Rights Movement was launched with the creation of the Declaration of Sentiments, which demanded equality between the genders. In Selma in 1965, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. galvanized citizens across the country in the demand for equal voting rights for African Americans. And in Stonewall, a police raid on a local gathering place initiated the modern Gay Rights movement.

President Obama’s speech was especially important for the LGBTQ+ community, for in that moment, the highest elected official in the country recognized the history of discrimination that confronted LGBTQ+ people—a history that was none too far in the past. Until 1973, homosexuality was considered a psychiatric disorder by the American Psychiatric Association. Since World War II, the federal government consistently sought to deny LGBTQ+ people representation: in 1942, the government began screening military recruits in order to exclude gay men; in 1944, recruits for the Women’s Army Core were additionally screened; and by 1953, homosexuals were banned from being employed by the federal government. To this day, courtrooms across the country still allow what is termed the Gay and Trans “Panic” defense, a tactic which uses the victim’s gender identity or sexual orientation to partially or even fully excuse the violent actions of the perpetrator.

In such an environment, coming out as an LGBTQ+ person has carried the threat of familial or social alienation, potential unemployment, damaging shock or “conversion” therapy, and being abused or killed with impunity. For this reason, many flocked to urban centers that have had a reputation of being more accepting of LGBTQ+ people, such as New York City’s Greenwich



Village neighborhood. But even here, people faced discrimination: in the 1950s and 60s, New York City regularly revoked liquor licenses for establishments with the reputation of serving LGBTQ+ people, and the police regularly raided establishments and arrested patrons under the charge of “unruly conduct.” Often, media accompanied such police raids, threatening to expose people who frequented the establishments. This drove LGBTQ+ people to dangerous, often illegal bars that bribed police officers to avoid raids--places such as the Stonewall Inn.

Opened in 1967, the Stonewall Inn was a Mafia-run bar and dancehall catering to LGBTQ+ people. In order to stay open, the owners bribed the police on a monthly basis, with money procured by selling overpriced drinks and, as some have accused, blackmailing wealthier patrons. Even still, police regularly harassed customers.

On June 28, 1969, four plainclothes policemen entered the Stonewall Inn, intent on shutting down the establishment, perhaps permanently. But, as Anti-war, Women’s Rights, and Civil Rights Movements subsumed the country, those inside Stonewall as well as pedestrians in the neighborhood were less willing to oblige the authorities. As patrons began to be handcuffed and loaded into police vans, a bystander shouted “Gay Power!” Soon, people were resisting arrest and bystanders began throwing coins and bottles at police vehicles. A riot ensued, and the police officers barricaded themselves within the bar, only to be freed when tactical police force units arrived. For the next two nights, the riots continued.

Like the Selma to Montgomery March and the Seneca Falls Convention, the Stonewall Riots spread national awareness of the discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ people. They also inspired many in the community to no longer be ashamed of their sexuality, but to stand up for their rights as equal American citizens. For this reason, it is widely considered the founding moment of the modern Gay Liberation Movement.

In this lesson, Barack Obama’s second inaugural address serves as a launching point for classroom discussions on how the Stonewall Riots might be comparable to other seminal moments in the ongoing fight for equality in the United States. To supplement these discussions, students will analyze Rod Stewart’s “The Killing of Georgie” as a poetic account of LGBTQ+ discrimination in the United States, and compare primary source documents from the Women’s Rights, Civil Rights, and LGBTQ+ Rights movements.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- The historical significance of the Stonewall Inn
- The circumstances that led to the Stonewall Riots, and their lasting effects
- Rod Stewart's "The Killing of Georgie" as a testament to LGBTQ+ discrimination
- The possible connection between the Stonewall Riots and the Women's Rights and Civil Rights Movements
- The historic importance of the Seneca Falls Conference and the Selma to Montgomery March

2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE

- Students will be able to determine the significance of the Stonewall Riots to the history of social justice movements in the United States by analyzing visual sources, reading primary documents, and examining popular music.

ACTIVITIES

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Play **Clip 1, "Seneca Falls, Selma, Stonewall."** Ask students:
 - For what occasion did President Barack Obama give this speech?
 - What is an inaugural address?
 - Based on what you saw in the clip, why might have this speech been historically important?
 - In the speech, President Obama lists "Seneca Falls," "Selma," and Stonewall" as moments in the fight toward freedom and equality. Have you heard any of these terms? What occurred at Seneca Falls, Selma, and Stonewall?
2. Tell students they will be looking at images related to these events, to better determine why each event was important. Show **Image 1, National Women's Suffrage Association**. Ask students:
 - What seems to be happening in this image?
 - What kind of people do you see in this image?
 - Based on the clothing displayed in the illustration, could you estimate when this event took place?
 - What does the text in this image say? What is "Women's Suffrage"?

- Based on this image, what might have Seneca Falls been about?

3. Show **Image 2, Civil Rights Marchers**. Ask students:

- What seems to be happening in this image?
- What kind of people do you see in this image?
- Based on the clothing displayed in this illustration, could you estimate when this event took place?
- What does the text in this image say? What are the protesters demanding?
- Based on this image, what might have the march in Selma been about?

4. Show **Image 3, Gay Liberation Marchers**. Ask students:

- What seems to be happening in this image?
- What kind of people do you see in this image?
- Based on the clothing displayed in this image, could you estimate when this event took place?
- What does the text in this image say? What are the protesters demanding?
- Based on this image, what might have the Stonewall uprising been about?

PROCEDURE:

1. Tell students that in the class, they will be learning about the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York City, and considering why President Obama aligned the event with other fights for equality and freedom in the past. Play **Clip 2, The Stonewall Riots**. Ask students:

- Based on the clip, how would you describe the Stonewall Inn? Who owned it?
- What kinds of people frequented the Stonewall Inn? What does David Carter mean when he says it was open to the “most marginal” groups? Who might “street kids” and “gay runaways” be?

- According to the clip, what set off the riot at the Stonewall Inn? Was it only due to the police showing up to the bar, or did it reflect deeper issues?
- What might David Carter mean when he says the police raid that night “touched something in the collective unconscious”?
- What might Mark Segal mean when he says the police officers “became society” that night? What parts of society might he have been referring to?

2. Pass out **Handout 1 - “The Killing of Georgie” Lyrics** and **Handout 2 - LGBTQ+ Event Timeline, 1940-1973**. Tell students that to get a sense of the discrimination that confronted people

at Stonewall, and LGBTQ+ people across the country, they will be looking at the song “The Killing of Georgie” by Rod Stewart.

3. Have students read the lyrics in Handout 1, and then ask:
 - What story is being narrated in this song?
 - In what ways does Georgie encounter discrimination?
 - Where does Georgie find acceptance and support?
4. Ask students to now read Handout 2. After reading the timeline to themselves, ask:
 - In what ways did the U.S. government discriminate against LGBTQ+ people? Do you think the government’s practices influenced the way American society treated LGBTQ+ people?
 - In what ways did science, especially psychology, discriminate against LGBTQ+ people?
 - What events in the timeline hinted that people were becoming more accepting of LGBTQ+ people? What kinds of people and organizations became advocates for the community?
 - Based on the timeline, do you think the story of Georgie is believable? Could it have happened?
 - What might have been some of the possible results of recording and releasing a song such as “The Killing of Georgie”? What are some ways the song might have affected the LGBTQ+ community? What about people in general?
5. Play **Clip 3, “The Killing of Georgie”**. Ask students:
 - Based on the clip, what might have been the importance of the song?
 - What does Mitchell Morris mean when he says the “ban on representation?” How did “The Killing of Georgie” break that ban?
 - What might Paul Gambacinni mean when he states the song was important because it talked rationally about the “existence” of Gay and Lesbian people? Does the song just acknowledge that LGBTQ+ people exist, or does it do something more?
 - Based on the comments by Jason King, Rod Stewart, and Boy George, how might have the song been beneficial to the LGBTQ+ community?
6. Split the students up into groups, and hand out to each group one of the following documents:
 - **Declaration of Sentiments (1848)**
 - **Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Address at the Conclusion of the Selma to Montgomery March” (1965)**
 - **Harry Hay, “Statement of Purpose—Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles, California” (1969)**
7. Display **Image 4, Activity Instructions**. Have students groups follow the instructions in the image. Then, ask students to present their answers to the class.



SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Display **Image 5, Writing Prompt**. Ask students to follow the prompt, and report their answers to the class.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

1. Research incidents prior to Stonewall Uprisings, including the Cooper's Donuts riot (1959) and Compton's Cafeteria riot (1966). After summarizing what occurred during these events, consider the ways they are similar or different to the Stonewall Riots.



COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading (K-12)

Reading 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

Reading 2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 8: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity 10: Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing (K-12)

Text Types and Purposes 1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Text Types and Purposes 2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge 8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge 9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language (K-12)

Language 1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.



Language 2: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening (K-12)

Comprehension & Collaboration 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Comprehension & Collaboration 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Comprehension & Collaboration 3: Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

Presentation of Knowledge 4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

NATIONAL CURRICULUM STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES – NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change

Theme 3: People, Place, and Environments

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance

Theme 10: Civic Ideals and Practices

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION – NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR MUSIC EDUCATION (NAFME)

Core Music Standard: Responding

Interpret: Support interpretations of musical works that reflect creators’ and/or performers’ expressive intent.

Evaluate: Support evaluations of musical works and performances based on analysis, interpretation, and established criteria.



Core Music Standard: Connecting

Connecting 11: Relate musical ideas and works to varied contexts and daily life to deepen understanding.



RESOURCES

VIDEO RESOURCES

- *CNN Soundtracks* - "Seneca Falls, Selma, Stonewall"
- *CNN Soundtracks* - The Stonewall Riots
- *CNN Soundtracks* - "The Killing of Georgie"

HANDOUTS

- Handout 1 - "The Killing of Georgie" Lyrics
- Handout 2 - LGBTQ+ Timeline, 1940-1973
- Declaration of Sentiments (1848)
- Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Address at the Conclusion of the Selma to Montgomery March" (1965)
- Harry Hay, "Statement of Purpose—Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles, California" (1969)