

Gayle E. Pitman

# THE STONEWALL RIOTS

Coming Out in the Streets



## OVERVIEW

*The Stonewall Riots: Coming Out in the Streets* highlights the objects, places, and people influential to one of the most impactful moments in the LGBTQ+ rights movement in the United States. This guide is meant to support students in understanding the complexities of historical injustice, resistance, and community activism as related to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning uprising on June 28 and 29, 1969. While the latter nights are notorious for the clashes between LGBTQ+ communities and police, resulting in violence and anger, the text focuses on the historical timeline that fueled this uprising and eventually sparked a revolution. The historical and sociological impacts of location, race, class, media, stereotypes, and approaches to activism are all captured through the lens of images and objects pertinent to New York City, the Stonewall Riots, and the LGBTQ+ community.

## BEFORE READING

### Terminology Checkpoint

Language is constantly evolving to represent the various viewpoints, peoples, and experiences of a given social world respectfully. The identifying language referring to the communities most influential to the Stonewall Riots has evolved since 1969. In this text LGBT is used to refer to the communities involved in the Stonewall Riots during that time in history, where LGBTQ+ is used to refer to contemporary times (page two).

**L:** Lesbian **G:** Gay **B:** Bisexual **T:** Transgender

**Q:** Queer/Questioning **+**: more identities

While learning about historically marginalized communities it is important to have a personal understanding of these individuals. Ask students to interview an individual who identifies as L, G, B, T, or Q+. Students can seek out individuals through local LGBTQ+ organizations, family, and/or friends, or the educator can contact

individuals with specific knowledge or experience teaching about LGBTQ+ history to be interviewed by the class. Make sure students ask their subject about their knowledge of terminology and LGBTQ+ history, including the Stonewall Riots.

### Respect Check

Using a person's chosen name and desired pronouns is a form of mutual respect and basic courtesy. Discuss the importance of pronouns and their vital role in self-identification using the following resources from GLSEN:

- **Developing LGBTQ-Inclusive Classroom Resources**  
[glsen.org/article/pronouns-resource-educators](https://www.glsen.org/article/pronouns-resource-educators)
- **Misgendering and Respect for Pronouns**  
[glsen.org/article/misgendering-and-respect-pronouns](https://www.glsen.org/article/misgendering-and-respect-pronouns)
- **Pronouns: Little Words that Make a Big Difference**  
[glsen.org/article/pronouns-little-words-make-big-difference](https://www.glsen.org/article/pronouns-little-words-make-big-difference)

## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### SETTING THE SCENE: *Introduction*

- Why did the author choose to communicate the story of the Stonewall Riots through objects? Why not people? Explain your answers.
- Who was involved in the Stonewall Riots? Which communities, organizations, and groups?

### BEFORE THE RIOTS: *Objects #1-15*

- Describe Greenwich Village in the mid-1800s and the building that now houses the Stonewall Inn. What might it have looked like, smelled like, felt like, or sounded like on that street?
- What is the supposed meaning behind the name the Stonewall Inn? Why would a name be so important to the LGBTQ+ community during this time in history?
- Bars and social clubs were, and still are, important to LGBTQ+ communities. What purpose did these spaces serve for this community before the Stonewall Riots? Why were many of these spaces secret and/or “underwraps”?
- In the eyes of police and politicians during the early 1900s, what was the purpose of police raids on gay establishments?
- How did police raids impact the gay community during this time? How did perceptions of social class, race, sexuality, and gender presentation effect the impact of police raids on different individuals?
- What role did the media play in furthering negative views of LGBTQ+ people during this time?
- Do you know of any words that were once considered to be profane or obscene and are now commonplace in any language? Explain.
- Describe some of the early LGBTQ+ or Homophile activist groups during the 1950s. What were their objectives? How were they formed? Who were their members?
- Who orchestrated the Tay-Bush Inn raids in San Francisco on September 14, 1961? Why was this event pivotal to the gay rights movement in San Francisco? In the US?
- Why is *The Ladder* article important in the context of the LGBTQ+ rights movement? How does voice, media, and community shape a movement?
- Why was the April 17, 1965 picket at the White House critical to gay activism? Which community groups led this charge? Describe the scene.
- The East Coast Homophile Organization (ECHO) was a collaboration of The Daughters of the Bilitis and the Mattachine Society. This group organized annual reminders and pickets. What was the message of these reminders?
- There were two major US riots in response to police raids and mistreatment of LGBTQ+ people that predated the Stonewall Riots. Describe these riots. What communities led the response to mistreatment from police? Where did these riots occur? For high school educators, ask students to consider how the larger social and political climate was influential to the LGBTQ+ movement at this time.
- Transgender people and drag queens were harassed and violated during the latter police raids, and this atrocious behavior was sanctioned under Section 240.35, subdivision 4 of the California Penal Code: “Being Masked or in any manner disguised by unusual or unnatural attire . . . in a public place, with other persons so masked.” What is wrong with this law? If we were to create a law or rule, how would we ensure we are being kind and caring to all identities in a community, city, state, country?
- How did the leaflet disseminated by PRIDE (Personal Rights in Defense and Education) help to organize LGBTQ+ people in LA in protest of police raids? How did this community activism impact LGBTQ+ media today?

## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### BEFORE THE RIOTS: *Objects #1-15* (Continued)

- How did the photo of a bartender refusing to serve gay men in New York City influence legal changes regarding gay people during this time?
- Who was Fred McDarrah? Why was he important to the media messages regarding LGBTQ+ people during this time?
- Who was Ed “The Skull” Murphy? Why was he important to the Stonewall Inn? The Stonewall Riots?
- What does the dress hanging in the window of the Stonewall Inn symbolize for the LGBTQ+ community?
- How is the broken parking meter a symbol of the Stonewall uprising and historical injustice?
- Why do you think the protestors and drag queens used humor in response to NYPD police tactics? How do you think this response came to be?
- Fred McDarrah’s photo of protestors outside of the Stonewall Inn on the second night of the uprising is an iconic image of the LGBTQ+ movement. Why do you think this is? What does it represent? What feeling does it communicate?

### THE RIOTS: *Objects #16-28*

- Why is the police hat an important image when thinking about the beginnings of the Stonewall Riot on the night of June 28, 1969?
- How do power dynamics play into the role of police during the Stonewall Riots? What sort of power did the Tactical Patrol Force wield? How did the politics of police power impact how the TPF engaged in Stonewall?
- Who is Stormé DeLarverie? What does the story of Stormé DeLarverie reveal to us about Stonewall and history in general?
- What was the purpose of the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop? Who founded it?
- What inspired Dave Van Ronk’s allyship during the Stonewall Riots? Why is he considered an ally?
- Who was Marsha P. (Pay it no mind!) Johnson? How is her story integral to the LGBTQ+ rights movement throughout history?

### AFTERMATH: *Objects #29-36*

- The *New York Times* printed one of a handful of articles describing the events of the Stonewall Riots. The text describes this story as “Dry and boring.” If you were to write a news article about the Stonewall Riots, whose perspective would you write it from? How would you make it accurately reflect the events and historical implications of the LGBTQ+ movement?
- How did the Mattachine Society message posted on the Stonewall Inn lead to a more radical LGBTQ+ uprising following the Riots?
- Following the riots, *Village Voice* ran two stories telling of the events. Although this paper is now an LGBTQ+ affirming paper, at the time the article was littered with mockery and stereotyping of gay people. How did the public respond to these articles?
- Describe the disagreement between LGBTQ+ activist groups following the Stonewall Uprising. What types of protest approaches were being phased out? Why?
- Why are the degrading news articles following Stonewall critical to shifts in the LGBTQ+ movement?

## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### LIBERATION: *Objects #37-47*

- How did the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) form? What was their political platform/approach?
- Compare and contrast the political approaches of the GLF and the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA).
- What was a Zap as it relates to the GAA?
- What does the story of Diego Vinales reveal about the intersections of sexual identity, race, and immigration status? How were the raids common in the Sixties and Seventies indicative of racial injustice toward LGBTQ+ folks?
- What was the original meaning behind the phrase “Lavender Menace”? How did Rita Mae Brown and the Radicalesbians use this language to support Lesbian voices in the LGBTQ+ and Feminist movements?
- How did the Christopher Day Liberation March differ from past Annual Reminder Protests prior to the Stonewall Uprising?
- Why is Brenda Howard important to the LGBTQ+ Pride parades held every year across the world?
- What was the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR)? What impact did this group make on LGBTQ+ liberation? Who were the activists leading this cause?
- Who was Silvia Rivera? What truths did her “Y’all Better Quiet Down” speech reveal about the divisions between LGBTQ+ people?

## ACTIVITIES

### Language Arts

- Find a current article discussing LGBTQ+ individuals or groups. In small groups, have students critically examine the language of the article. Then regroup as a class and have students share what they've learned.
- Have students watch *The Wizard of Oz* in class or on their own at home. Then have them write an essay, analyzing how the characters represent historically marginalized groups and the importance of the movie to the LGBTQ community.
- Margot Avery had a view of the Stonewall Uprising from her apartment. Witnessing this event at ten years old gave her a new perspective on life. "I began to understand that people can have different kinds of relationships . . . and that men who loved men and women who loved women were horribly mistreated," she said. Have students write about a time where they gained a new perspective on a complicated issue or topic.
- Discuss as a class the importance of a name. What does a name communicate? How is it understood by different communities? Have each student make a name collage. The collage should include meaningful images and tell a story. Students can use their given name or a chosen one. A chosen name is something an individual chooses for oneself and would like to be referred to as.

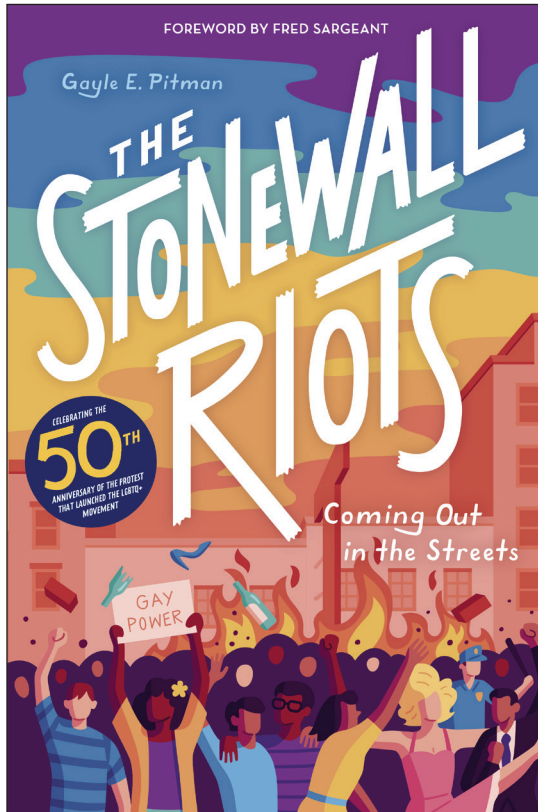
### Activism

- Have students form activist groups around a specific cause of their choice. Ask students to write a mission statement for their groups. They can refer to the Purpose of the Daughters of Bilitis on page twenty for inspiration and listen to a sound clip from Phyllis Lyon at [glsen.org/activity/unheard-voices-stories-and-lessons-grades-6-12](https://glsen.org/activity/unheard-voices-stories-and-lessons-grades-6-12). Have students come up with a plan for how they would communicate their mission and disseminate information about their cause. If students are interested in bringing their cause to a wider audience, share GLSEN's Days of Actions resources with them so that they can organize their own school-wide day of action.
- Short and sweet slogans can have a tremendous impact on social movements. Discuss as a class the importance of the "Gay is Good" slogan important to the LGBTQ+ movement and the origins of affirming slogans. Ask students to create picket signs, buttons, or T-shirts for a cause they are passionate about. Then have them present the finished products to the class, explaining how the design represents the mission and manifesto of the cause.
- Ask students to consider the medium through which a message is conveyed. How might the impact of a physical leaflet differ from that of a text or email? What are the benefits and challenges of each medium? Have students select a different cause related to their school life (e.g., longer recess time, more celebrations, etc.). Assign a third of the causes to the physical leaflet medium, another third to the text/email medium, and another third to both. Poll the class and collect data on which causes they were most likely to support (limiting the amount of selections to two or three). Which causes were the most supported? Why?

To continue bringing LGBTQ+ history into your classroom, find more resources and lesson ideas at [glsen.org/lgbtqhistory](https://glsen.org/lgbtqhistory).

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Ages 10 & up

## PRAISE

★ *“With meaningful content delivered in an innovative format, The Stonewall Riots deserves to be required reading for people of all ages.”*

— Shelf Awareness, starred review

*“Inviting, engaging, and well-researched.”*

— Booklist

*“Pitman’s fresh storytelling brings emotion and depth to the history of a movement and the establishment that served as an epicenter for social change.”*

— Publishers Weekly

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Gayle E. Pitman, PhD**, is a professor of psychology and women and gender studies at Sacramento City College. Her research, teaching, and writing focus heavily on gender, sexual orientation, intersectionality, and social justice. Her first children’s book won the 2015 ALA Stonewall Award.

This guide was written by Syd Shannon, MA, who has been working in Bay Area and NYC schools for more than ten years and is currently the Kindergarten Director at Children’s After School Arts (CASA).

GLSEN works to create safe and inclusive schools for all. We envision a world in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression. Each year, GLSEN programs and resources reach millions of students and educators in K-12 schools, via action at the national, state, and local level. Over nearly three decades of work, GLSEN has improved conditions for LGBTQ students across the United States and launched an international movement to address LGBTQ issues in education and promote respect for all in schools. Find more information on GLSEN’s policy advocacy, student leadership initiatives, school-based programs, research, and professional development for educators at [glsen.org](http://glsen.org).

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