

Opus 9: “No freedom 'til we're equal”

Social Justice Issue: Homophobia

Opening (10 minutes)

- Welcome
- Opening words
- Light the chalice
- Meditation
- Check-in

Prelude (10 minutes)

Homophobia encompasses a range of negative attitudes and feelings toward homosexuality of people who are identified or perceived as being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT). Often based on irrational fear, homophobia can be expressed as antipathy, contempt, prejudice, aversion or hatred. It is sometimes related to religious beliefs.

Some musicians have written and recorded songs that display empathy for, and solidarity with, those in the LGBTQ community. Songs have also been composed and used in support of achieving the passage of marriage equality laws.

Marriage equality refers to the legal recognition of marriage between two persons of the same biological sex and/or gender identity. Marriage law is enacted at the state level, with this topic part of changing legislation nationwide.

Track 1 (5 minutes)

Pass out lyric sheets and play, or watch, *Smalltown Boy*. (Watching the video is recommended.)

- Written by Jimmy Somerville, Larry Steinbachek, Steve Bronski.
- Recorded by Bronski Beat

- Lyrics at <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/delain/smalltownboy.html>
- Video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xuz94ZIPfJk>

Bridge 1 (10 minutes)

Discuss *Smalltown Boy*, playing *Smalltown Boy* again, if necessary.

This song is a semi-autobiographical story of the lead singer of the band Bronski Beat, and the oppression he felt as a homosexual in Scotland in the early 1980s. The music video was considered groundbreaking at the time, addressing key issues in LGBTQ culture in the 1980s.

Consider this: British pop has a long history of visionary musicians who just happened to be gay, but it was something that was kept hidden, partly because it was felt that it would be distasteful to a huge chunk of the mainstream record buying public, and partly because it was also illegal until 1967.

The song and video were newsworthy because it brought homosexuality into the open.

(1) *Smalltown Boy* begins with a depiction of family rejection because the singer is homosexual. Have you ever known someone who faced rejection from their family because they were gay?

*You leave in the morning
With everything you own
In a little black case
Alone on a platform
The wind and the rain
On a sad and lonely face*

*Mother will never understand
Why you had to leave
But the answers you seek
Will never be found at home
The love that you need*

Will never be found at home

(2) It also talks about societal rejection and bullying and the resulting loneliness. Whatever your sexual orientation, imagine that it makes you an outsider in society. What is that like?

*Pushed around and kicked around
Always a lonely boy
You were the one
That they'd talk about around town
As they put you down*

*And as hard as they would try
They'd hurt to make you cry
But you never cried to them
Just to your soul*

(3) *Smalltown Boy* defied the odds and became a hit for Bronski Beat as one of the first openly gay songs and bands. The music video brought to life the song's realistic depiction of rejection and homophobia. Did the video help you to understand the song? Why do you think it was able to cross over and become a hit with the general public? Do you think it had any impact on changing feelings toward homosexuality?

(4) The song has a strong emotional pull, conveying loneliness, alienation and frustration.

*Run away, turn away
Cry, boy, cry*

What feelings did it provoke in you? Did you empathize with the singer?

Track 2 (5 minutes)

Pass out lyric sheets and play *Same Love*.

- Written by Macklemore and Mary Lambert
- Recorded by Macklemore & Ryan Lewis
- Lyrics at <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/macklemore/samelove.html>
- Video at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIVBg7_08n0

Bridge 2 (10 minutes)

Discuss *Same Love*, playing *Same Love* again, if necessary.

(1) Discuss the stereotypes present in these lyrics:

*When I was in the third grade I thought that I was gay,
'Cause I could draw, my uncle was, and I kept my room straight.*

(2) Discuss whether or not the class thinks sexual orientation is a decision.

*The right wing conservatives think it's a decision
And you can be cured with some treatment and religion*

(3) Discuss the discrepancy between certain religions preaching intolerance of gays versus God loving all his children. How do some religions justify this dichotomy? (Emphasize that not all forms of Christianity are intolerant of homosexuality.)

*And "God loves all his children" is somehow forgotten
But we paraphrase a book written thirty-five-hundred years ago*

(4) Discuss these comments from Macklemore on why he wrote the song *Same Love*. "Same Love was a song that I wanted to write for a long time but I didn't know exactly how to address the issue," he explains. "I knew I wanted to write a song about gay rights and homophobia within the hip-hop community and the world." Have you noticed homophobia within hip-hop music?

(5) Macklemore, whose uncle is gay, said that an inspiration for the song was the frequent use of 'gay' as a derogatory word in the hip-hop industry, and the world. Have you heard people use the word "gay" as an insult? How have you handled it? Does a song like *Same Love* make people second guess their language and pay attention to the slang that they use? Does it make them more aware?

(6) A teacher in Michigan was suspended without pay for allowing her 8th grade students to play this song in her classroom because the song used the word "faggot" and had pro-gay content. What do you think about this?

(7) *Same Love* has been unofficially adopted as the anthem for supporters of marriage equality. The video won the 2013 MTV Video Music Award for

Best Video With A Social Message. Accepting the award, Macklemore said: "I've been writing songs since I was 15 years old, and out of every single song I have ever written, to me this is the most important record out of all of them. To watch the song in the last year spread across the world is a testament to what is happening right now in America on the forefront of equality. Gay rights are human rights, there is no separation." What do you think? Are gay right human rights?

Track 3 (5 minutes)

Pass out lyric sheets and play (or watch) *It Does Get Better*.

- Written by Georgey Payne
- Charity Single written for The L Project
- Lyrics at <http://thel-project.com/lyrics.php>
- Video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OkeLe0LCLtk>

Bridge 3 (10 minutes)

Discuss *It Does Get Better*, playing *It Does Get Better* again, if necessary.

The L Project is an ongoing anti-LGBTQ bullying campaign designed to help raise awareness by setting up projects with various artists and sponsors. The L Project's aim is to raise awareness about the effects of LGBTQ bullying, to give hope to those being bullied, and to raise money to help combat bullying.

(1) This song differs from other bullying songs because it focuses on providing hope to those being bullied.

*When days don't seem right just shine,
'Cause this life is yours and mine.
On a day like today when you're walking away,
Hold your head up so high, 'cause I tell you from here...
That you've come so far, and always be who you are.
When your head hits the floor, and you're bleeding some more,
Let me tell you I swear...
That it does get better*

(2) It speaks to things getting better and obstacles being overcome, like the passing of laws that legalize same sex marriage. How big of a victory is this?

*For all the lovers who have smiled
As they walked down the aisle in this life,
Saying beautiful words, they were finally heard.
And all the women and the men who've marched time and again
For this fight, they were finally right,
Now we're all breathing life.*

(3) What do you think about musicians who band together to create songs for charity? How successful do you think music is at provoking change?

Medley (optional – 5-10 minutes)

Listen to, and discuss, songs brought in by students on today's topic.

Improvisation (optional – 10 minutes)

Learn more about the UUA and Marriage Equality at <http://www.uua.org/lgbtq/witness/marriage/>.

Closing (1 minute)

- Invite class to search for songs pertaining to next week's social justice issue.
- Closing words