

## Forced Choice

### Grade Level:

7-12

### Objectives:

Examine one's attitudes and beliefs about sexual orientation in the context of social justice.

### Teaching Suggestions:

This lesson is based on the following assumptions:

- Sexual Orientation is morally neutral.
- The potential exists for persons of any sexual orientation to create a healthy lifestyle that reflects their orientation.
- In a healthy, nurturing, supportive environment, adolescents will discover their true identity.
- Young people have the right to determine for themselves the nature of their sexual identity without pressure from anyone.
- Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender parents, students, and staff have the right to a safe school environment and to see their life experience reflected in curriculum materials.

Not all students are ready to accept these assumptions. In general, the best response to the student who makes a remark like "I don't believe in homosexuality" is to gently probe further, e.g. "Can you say more about what you mean?" "Does that mean you don't think you could be a friend to someone who is gay or couldn't treat them with respect?" Acknowledge that s/he is probably not alone in the class in feeling that way and solicit other points of view. Often times, insistence increases resistance, so try to accept what people say, acknowledge why they may feel that way, and create an environment in which they can hear other information and viewpoints.

### Opener:

Introduce the topic and have students brainstorm a list of rights for themselves and other as sexual human beings. Ask, "What do you want to decide for yourself when it comes to dating and long-term relationships?" You may have to help them get started with follow-up questions like:

- "Who gets to decide when you get to start dating, who you will date?"
- Who should decide what you can and can't do in a sexual relationship?"

Acknowledge that different cultures will answer these questions differently and ask about the advantages and disadvantages of having family involved in marriage and dating decisions. Also acknowledge that along with these rights come certain responsibilities-to be honest, responsible, and respectful, and to prevent unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

Most Americans want and actually have the right to:

- Say "yes" or "no" to romantic or sexual requests.
- Choose their own partners.

- Marry or not.
- Have children or not.
- Decide with their partner about what they will do sexually. (briefly discuss the idea of consent-that in order for a sexual relationship to be good for both people, they must both understand what they're agreeing to and both freely agree to do it.)

Ask students: Is there any group of people who should be or are denied these rights by law?

### **Student Activities:**

Directions: Students will show their opinion on the following questions by where they stand in the room. Designate spots on a continuum across the front of the classroom. Read all options, then have students go to the spot that best reflects their view. Students should be prepared to defend their position. For each question, have a few representative students from each segment explain their position. Ask for clarification and justification when necessary, then summarize that group's position before going on to a different point in the continuum. Allow a free exchange ideas across varying points on the continuum.

1. **A particular teacher in your school has been recognized as exceptionally gifted by students. Just recently, a rumor has started that the teacher is gay. There are three views about what should be done:**
  - Some parents and students think the teacher should be fired or at least transferred to an administrative position where he or she will have no further contact with students. They fear that contact with this teacher might "turn students gay."
  - Some parents and students think that the teacher should be allowed to continue to teach, but that students who are uncomfortable with his or her orientation should be able to opt out of the class without hassle.
  - Some students and parents think this teacher has always done a good job and that students should be assigned as they always have been. Changing class assignments based on prejudice is not okay and should not be tolerated.

Discussion: If a student doesn't want raise the question, ask: "What if a student were racially prejudiced and wanted to opt out of a teacher's class for that reason? How is one prejudice different from another, if at all? How should teachers be judged?" Point out that most teachers are heterosexual. Ask female students if they feel uncomfortable around male teachers and vice versa. Why or why not?

2. **Your best friend since second grade tells you that he or she is gay and wants your continued friendship and support. Do you:**
  - Stay his/her friend unconditionally?
  - Stay his/her friend as long as they agree not to tell anyone else?
  - End the friendship?

Discuss. Give students permission to move from one point on the line to another to reflect a change in viewpoint as the discussion continues.

3. **Think about what you see in school hallways day to day. Which statement best reflects how you feel about public displays of affection?**
  - Small public displays of affection (like hand holding and little kisses) are okay for all couples-gay or not gay.
  - Small public displays of affection are okay, but only for opposite sex couples.
  - No one should be allowed to hold hands or kiss in school.
  
4. **Agree or disagree: If gay people don't want to be harassed, they should make a real effort to look and act and talk like everyone else and they should NOT talk about their dating life. (This is a forced choice. One side of the room is YES, the other is NO. There is no middle.)**

**Extensions:**

Depending on the class, subject matter, and time available, you may want to consider adding broader issues of gay legal rights, such as:

Agree or Disagree:

- It is unfair for gay or lesbian people to have children.
- If one person leaves a marriage because they are gay, custody of the children automatically should go to the non-gay parent.
- Gay people should not be allowed to marry, but there should be some legal equivalent.
- Marriage should remain a legal right exclusive to opposite sex couples.
- Gay people should be allowed to serve in the military and to be open about their orientation and rules about sexual behavior in the military should apply to everyone equally.

**Closure:**

It is important to speak personally at this point in the class. Refer back to the list the students generated at the beginning of class and emphasize that the decision to deny to others rights that we hold dear should not be done lightly, if at all. Talk to students about what you see and hear in your school and how it makes you feel. Remind students that they have power-their words and actions day to day are the primary influence on the school environment. Express your confidence that they want to treat one another well and your hope that they will consider ways to make the school a safe and welcoming environment. Make note of any support services available to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning students, either in school or in the community.

**Feedback:**

Students are to survey at least 6 other people, at least 3 of whom are adults, using this question: "In a recent court case, it was argued that the legal right to marry carries with it at least 1,000 other rights. In your opinion, should gay people be allowed to legally marry? Why or why not?"

Report your findings in a one-page paper.

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