

Liberation Ink

a series of political posters created by and for youth

***Liberation Ink* is a series of seven posters created by youth to make change in schools. We made these posters to display in the hallways and classrooms of schools to build a presence of youth voices for justice, peace, and youth empowerment, and against hatred, harassment, and discrimination of all kinds. These posters are entirely imagined, designed, and originally screen-printed by youth determined to make safer school environments and prove that young people deserve respect. We hope you will be inspired not only to challenge apathy and harassment at your school, but also to make your own voices heard. Make art—make change!**

Liberation Ink was created in Free Zone, an arts empowerment program, in the summer of 2002 in conjunction with Gay-Straight Alliance Network, LYRIC (Lavender Youth Recreation and Information Center, Mission Grafica at the Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts in San Francisco, and Tumi's Copies and Designs.

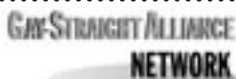


For more information about *Liberation Ink* and the Free Zone program or to order posters, check out www.gsanetwork.org/freezone, call 415-552-4229, or email liberationink@gsanetwork.org.

use *liberation ink* to make change at your school

- Attach information about your GSA to the posters, including contact information and meeting time and location. Similarly, you can attach information about a specific event you want to advertise.
- Encourage teachers to hang the posters in their classrooms. Take the posters to a staff meeting and pass them out or tell teachers how they can get them. Put flyers in teachers' mailboxes to inform them about the posters (include information about AB537 or any campaign you are working on). Have each member of the GSA responsible for getting a certain number of teachers to hang the posters in their classrooms.
- Have GSA members lead discussions in classes. With the curriculum guide, use the posters as a jumping off point to educate your peers. Practice leading discussions in the GSA. Review the Facilitation Tips in the curriculum guide.
- Use the posters as part of an anti-slur campaign to stop verbal harassment at your school. Contact GSA Network to find out more about our anti-slur campaign materials.
- Educate about AB 537. Put up the AB537 Fact Sheet (included in this packet) or the fact sheet about how to file a complaint next to the posters about slurs and creating a safe environment.
- Put the posters up in the courtyard with easels. Build simple easels to display the posters when you're tabling or to put up outside as part of your poster campaign.
- Get the posters printed in your school or community newspaper. Write an article or announcement about your GSA and the work you do on campus.
- Create an agreement for teachers to sign saying that they commit to confront harassment on the school site and will help create an environment that respects all students, staff, and families regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, religion, physical ability, sexual orientation, or gender identity. (see the "Making Your School a 'Hate Free Zone'" resource sheet for more examples.) Give the poster out to those teachers that sign the agreement, making it a symbol that they are an ally. Also, consider printing the agreement and the list of signatures in the school newspaper with the posters.
- Display the whole *Liberation Ink* series in one place. Highlight the powerful messages of youth artists and activists by making a special exhibit of the posters either in a display case or by getting frames donated and hanging the posters in a hallway, the library, or other public spaces. Text for such an exhibit will be available online at www.gsanetwork.org/freezone/liberationink. You could also include an exhibit like this as part of another event.
- Fill a whole wall with posters in a grid.
- Use the posters in conjunction with Day of Silence, LGBT History Month (October), LGBT Pride Month (June), Coming Out Day (October 11), or Diversity Day or Week at your school.
- Be ready to make the most of the posters being torn down. In some schools, the posters may get torn down. You can take advantage of this by putting up a sign under the posters -- see the "Talk Back to the Hate" section of this packet for ideas. Also, if you are aware that other group's posters don't get torn down, you can file a harassment complaint and hold your school accountable to changing a anti-LGBT environment.
- Make your own posters! You can make posters by drawing, printing, making a collage with cutouts from magazines and newspapers, or using the computer.

For more information on *Liberation Ink* check out www.gsanetwork.org/freezone/liberation.



For more information and resources for Gay-Straight Alliances, contact GSA Network:

Statewide Office: 160 14th St., San Francisco, CA 94103, ph: 415.552.4229, f: 415.552.4729

Central Valley Regional Office: 4403 E. Tulare Ave., Fresno, CA 93702, ph: 559.453.9040, f: 559.453.9060

www.gsanetwork.org

Southern CA Regional Office: 605 W. Olympic Blvd., Ste. 610, Los Angeles, CA 90015, ph: 213.534.7162, f: 213.553.1833

talk back to the hate

Putting youth-made social justice posters up in schools is a great way to raise awareness and change the culture of a school. Posters impact the conversations people have and change the environment of the school. However, as you may know, posters that challenge prejudice and oppression are often torn down or vandalized in schools. Over the years, GSAs have developed many strategies for dealing with this. Here are some ideas:

- Be thoughtful about where you hang the posters. Put the posters in places that are visible and where students are likely to see them, but are less likely to get torn down (i.e., classrooms, libraries, display cases, administration offices, etc.)
- Keep track of how many posters you put up and how many get torn down. This is concrete information to share with the administration and the school community in general that can help you illustrate the reality of homophobia and transphobia in your school. You could also use this information in a school announcement or in an article in the school newspaper.
- Use AB 537, the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000. To learn more about this law and how to use it at your school, see www.ab537.org.
 - If you see someone tearing down or defacing the posters, or if something is written on a poster that is directed at a specific person or your GSA, you can file a complaint using your schools harassment reporting procedure. Ask someone in your administration about how to do this.
 - If your posters are being torn down you can tell your administration that your group is being targeted and you would like some space in a display case.
 - To get your school to do something about vandalized posters you can explain that there is a law that obligates schools to protect students from harassment on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. You can argue that vandalism is a form of harassment and that since schools are obligated to protect student's rights, their help in displaying the posters can show their commitment to meeting this obligation to make schools safe for everyone. You can also use this argument to get your administration to approve hanging the posters in your school, if you need to get approval.
- Put a surprise message under the posters. Many GSAs have found it effective and empowering to tape a message behind each poster for the people who might tear it down and for those who see it afterwards. You can use index cards or 1/4 of a sheet of paper. Some GSAs use packing tape to strongly adhere these messages to the wall. Make sure the message underneath the poster is not visible when the poster is hung. Here are some ideas of messages you can use. Of course, you can come up with your own messages that are most appropriate to your community.
 - ***Hate is easy. Love takes courage.*** (From the Los Gatos High School GSA)
 - ***You have just committed a hateful act.***
 - ***Think about the voices you've just silenced.***
 - ***You are helping to create an environment that causes lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth to be twice as likely to commit suicide as straight youth.***
 - ***There used to be a poster here that challenged stereotypes and supported youth empowerment, but someone ripped it down. What are you doing to stop the hate?***
 - ***It's against the law to discriminate or harass people because of their race, color, origin, disability, gender, or sexual orientation, or the perception of one or more of those characteristics.***
 - ***You are the reason this poster was necessary.***

For more information on Liberation Ink check out www.gsanetwork.org/freezone/liberation.



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Liberation Ink Discussion and Journal Questions

Over the summer of 2002, 8 youth worked together with Gay-Straight Alliance Network, Lavender Youth Recreation and Information Center (LYRIC), and Mission Grafica to learn graphic design skills and talk about the issues important to them in their lives. These posters are the culmination of our work and reflect the messages we wish to share with our peers, teachers, and administrators. Included here are questions to help spark thoughtful conversation and reflection. If you are leading a discussion, please take note of the facilitation tips.



by Cass Leung

Share a time when you have confronted a hateful act. What was that like? Share a time when you have wanted to challenge a hateful act, but didn't. Why not? What was that like?

Have you ever acted as an ally to someone or a group of people who are discriminated against? Why did you choose to act as an ally? What did you do? What did that feel like? What was effective and what could have been better?

Have you ever experienced someone being an ally for you or your community? What did they do? What did that feel like? What was effective and what could have been better?



by Jack Thompson and
Vanessa (Andy) Duran

Why do you think slurs, name calling, and bullying are so common? Why do you think people do these things? Who is hurt by slurs, name calling, and bullying?

How do you feel when you are put down?

What kinds of homophobic words and comments do you hear at your school? Sometimes, people use derogatory language even when it's not directed at a specific person. What are the costs of comments like this? Do you hear teachers stopping these comments? Do you hear other students stopping these comments?

Homophobia (fear or hatred of LGBT people) is a form of prejudice similar to sexism or racism. Is your school a safe or accepting place for LGBT students? Students of color? Women? Immigrants? What could you do to make your school more accepting?

Liberation Ink Discussion and Journal Questions



Do you see or experience discrimination at your school based on any of the categories listed in the California non-discrimination policy (see below)?

How often do you hear homophobic slurs at your school? How often do students, teachers, or administrators intervene? When they do intervene, what do they do?

What role do “out” LGBT people play in helping individual LGBT youth accept themselves and feel empowered?

by Marco Colón

Text: “Assembly Bill 537, *The California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000*, was passed by the California Legislature in September 1999. The law prohibits discrimination in California public schools on the same grounds used to define hate crimes under California law: Penal Code Section 422.6 (a) includes the protection of persons because of their race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, disability, gender, or sexual orientation, or the perception of one or more of those characteristics. However, we know that students and educators who are or who are perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender too often face harassment, discrimination, and even violence on a regular basis.”



If you could see tomorrow, would you change today? What would you do?

What kind of future do you want for your family, community, and society? What needs to change to make that a reality? How can we achieve that change?

Have you ever acted as an ally for someone or a group of people who are discriminated against? Why did you choose to act as an ally? What did you do? What did that feel like? What was effective and what could have been better?

Often, straight people decide it's important to fight against homophobia and be an ally to LGBT people after someone they know has come out to them. Has this ever happened to you? What are other ways that straight people might be inspired to challenge homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism?

by Natasha Brinsko

Liberation Ink Discussion and Journal Questions



by Lauren Bruton

Why do you think there is a higher suicide rate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth?

Have you ever felt isolated or left out? How did that make you feel? What or who helped you out?

What would you do if someone you know told you they felt alone, depressed, or suicidal?

Assumed heterosexuality contributes to LGBT youths' experiences of isolation, rejection, and depression. Where and how do we learn that we are all supposed to be heterosexual? Where and how do we learn that being LGBT is NOT what we are supposed to be? Think about the potential influence of media, family, school, laws, religious institutions, culture, etc.

How can you contribute to creating a safe and welcoming environment for everyone at your school?



by Evelyn Krampf

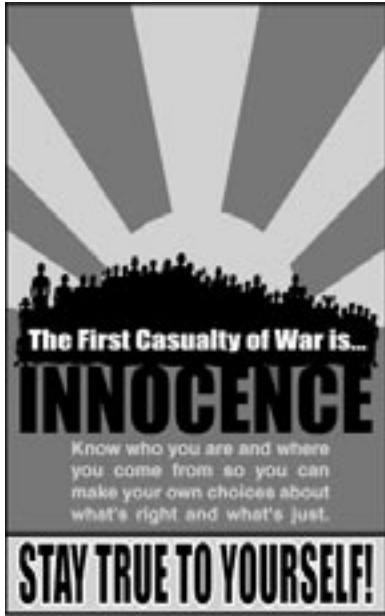
In what ways do you think lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth experience isolation and marginalization in school, in their families, and in society as a whole?

In what ways are LGBT youth "invisible"? To each other? To their friends? To their family? To the community?

Why do you think that LGBT people use the metaphor of "the closet" to describe people not knowing about their sexual orientation or gender identity?

In this poster, "Transphobia" is defined as "strong negative bias or hatred of individuals whose perceived or expressed gender identity does not conform to dominant gender norms." Describe dominant gender norms. In what ways do you see transphobia in your school?

Liberation Ink Discussion and Journal Questions



by Newman Howell

What do you think the artist means by, “The first casualty of war is innocence?”

Do you read about the history of your people in your textbooks and learn about it from your teachers? What group of people is most strongly represented in the history of the United States? How do you think knowing the history of your people and your family helps you stay true to yourself?

What does justice mean to you?

How are youth affected by war?

facilitation tips

DOs

- **Role model the behavior you wish others to use.**
- **Emphasize that questions are welcomed and encouraged.**
- **Set ground rules/agreements for the discussion.** When discussing difficult topics, agreeing on a set of ground rules can help make people feel comfortable about being open with their experiences and feelings. Some ground rules you can set are 1) respect everyone in the room, 2) agree to disagree, 3) keep everyone's comments confidential, 4) be honest, 5) step forward (if you aren't participating as much) or step back (if you are dominating the discussion), 6) don't interrupt, 7) allow people the right to pass, 8) no assumptions or generalizations, and 9) any other rules the group suggests and agrees upon.
- **Encourage students to use I statements, and steer clear of generalization and stereotypes.** If youth refer to stereotypes or make generalizations, point it out – use this as a time to ask the group about stereotypes and myths vs. factual information.
- **When students use derogatory language, talk about where it comes from.** If a student uses derogatory or stereotypical language, before reprimanding them, ask the student if there might be a better way to phrase their statement or question. This can be a good opportunity for the whole class to discuss ways that derogatory language about LGBT people is hurtful and offensive. Furthermore, it provides the chance to illustrate that anti-gay slurs and harassment are pervasive in our schools and society.
- **Be honest about what you do and don't know.** If a student asks a question to which you do not know the answer, tell them that you do not know. If possible, commit to researching the answer through contacting the Gay-Straight Alliance Network or a local LGBTQ resource center or give the student the resources to do the research on their own.
- **Encourage students to answer each other's questions.** Ask the group if any one wants to speak on that point.
- **Pause to check for understanding.**
- **Keep an eye on group dynamics, and address any issues respectfully** (i.e., are some people dominating the discussion and others not speaking?)
- **Encourage active participation in the group.** Make sure everyone is talking; your voice shouldn't be the only one. Don't just look for raised hands; look at people's faces and body language.
- **Be prepared to respond to inappropriate questions and comments.** Students may ask questions to embarrass the teacher/facilitator and shock classmates. Use correct terminology in responding and re-word the question in appropriate language. Refer to classroom ground rules or state when a question is inappropriate.

DON'Ts

- **Don't automatically assume understanding.** It's often difficult for youth to talk about LGBT issues because for many this will be a new or uneasy subject. Don't be afraid to call on people. Don't be confrontational, but ask students if they have any thoughts on the topic.
- **Don't be afraid of discussions on LGBT people and issues.** They are the only way to change a culture of homophobia.
- **Don't assume you are the only source of information in the room.** Give the group space to share their knowledge, ideas, and personal experience.
- **Don't rush through it or talk too fast.** Allow for silent gaps so info sinks in and quieter people have a chance to speak.
- **Don't ignore disrespectful behavior.** Use disrespectful comments as a "teachable moment" and to model respectful ways to confront slurs, stereotypes, and misinformation.
- **Don't allow for a small group of people to do all the talking.**
- **Don't dominate the discussion.** The facilitator should simply be moving the discussion along.



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if you're harassed or discriminated against...

AB 537, the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000 added actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity to the California school non-discrimination policy which already protected students from harassment and discrimination on the basis of sex, ethnic group identification, race, ancestry, national origin, religion, color, or mental or physical disability. If you are being harassed or discriminated against you can file a complaint. Here are the steps you should take:

Make sure that you're safe. Violence and threats of violence are illegal: if you have experienced a serious attack, report it to the police. Once you are safe, here are some steps to take to stop the harassment or discrimination from continuing at school.

Make a complaint at your school.

- **Document the incident.** Write down a thorough description of the incident. If someone witnessed the harassment, ask them to join you in person when you make the complaint or have the witness add a short note to your written description verifying that they witnessed the incident and that it happened as you described it.
- **Take it to the principal or authorized complaint officer.** Under AB 537, your school is legally responsible for protecting you from harassment and discrimination. However, you must notify the person responsible for taking complaints or your school can still claim that they never knew about it.
- **Present your written report.** This will help your complaint officer take the complaint seriously. Make a copy for yourself and keep it in a folder.
- **Ask for a solution.** Ask your complaint officer what action he or she plans to take and when.
- **Follow up.** Check in to see what action has been taken. If harassment continues, talk to the principal.
- **Document your interaction with your principal.**

If your schools' response is inadequate you can file a complaint with your school district within six months of the incident. Ask to talk to the designated complaint officer. Make sure that they are the right person to receive complaints and get their mailing address for sending written complaints. You can also appeal your district's decision if you are unsatisfied. You have 15 days to appeal to the California Department of Education. This process can be long and hard. Remember that most complaints are adequately dealt with at the local level. And don't forget—you don't have to do any of this alone!

Making a complaint can sometimes involve certain risks. When you weigh the risks, don't forget the risks of not reporting, which include escalation of harassment, continuation of an unsafe or hostile school environment, and interference with your right to learn and be educated. Here are some risks you should consider before you file a complaint:

- **Retaliation from the perpetrator--** Remember, violence and threats of violence are illegal.
- **Inappropriate punishment**
- **Confidentiality--** The law requires that the person who receives your complaint must keep it confidential as appropriate; however, many schools automatically notify your parents of bias incidents, threats, or harassment that you report. Ask your principal if he or she will respect students' wishes not to notify parents. If you are afraid that your parents will find out about your complaint, you can go straight to your district, explain your fear, and ask them to maintain confidentiality. You can also send an anonymous letter of complaint to your district superintendent's office so that your school will know that harassment is occurring.

Throughout this process, **you also have the option of activism.** Activism can help you put pressure on your school, empower you and your allies, give exposure to the issue you are facing, and win the support of your fellow students. Organize your allies to pressure your school to make changes that will stop and prevent harassment and discrimination on your campus.

For assistance with any of this, contact Gay-Straight Alliance Network and see www.ab537.org.



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AB 537 Fact Sheet

California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act

What is AB 537?

AB 537, the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000, changed California's Education Code by adding actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity to the existing nondiscrimination policy. The state defines "gender" as "a person's actual sex or perceived sex and includes a person's perceived identity, appearance or behavior, whether or not that identity, appearance, or behavior is different from that traditionally associated with a person's sex at birth." The nondiscrimination policy also prohibits harassment and discrimination on the basis of sex, ethnic group identification, race, ancestry, national origin, religion, color, or mental or physical disability.

What does AB 537 cover?

AB 537 protects students and school employees against discrimination and harassment at all California public schools and any school receiving state funding except religious schools. Harassment is defined as "conduct based on protected status that is severe or pervasive, which unreasonably disrupts an individual's educational or work environment or that creates a hostile educational or work environment." The protections cover any program or activity in a school, including extracurricular activities and student clubs. This gives GSAs and other LGBTQ-related student clubs state protection in addition to federal protection through the Equal Access Act.

How do you file a complaint?

First, file a complaint with your school. The process for filing a complaint at your school can vary. Look for information on how to make a complaint in your student handbook or ask a teacher or an administrator. It is often the same process as filing a sexual harassment complaint. If your school's harassment report form does not specifically include sexual orientation and the expanded definition of "gender," consider working to change this as a goal of your activism.

Document everything. Write down the key details of the harassment such as who, what, when, where, and witnesses. Include details from meetings you have with administrators. Keep a copy of all reports you file and confirmation that they were received.

What is your school district obligated to do?

If your school does not adequately address your complaint, you can take your complaint to your district superintendent's office (ask for the designated complaint officer or compliance coordinator). Your school district must follow the state's "Uniform Complaint Procedures," which say that your school district must do the following:

- Have a staff member who is responsible for receiving and investigating complaints who is knowledgeable about the law.
- Every year, notify parents, employees, students, and anyone interested of the district complaint procedures, including the right to appeal the school district's decision to the California Department of Education.
- Protect you from retaliation after you make a complaint.
- Keep your complaint confidential as appropriate.
- Accept complaints from any youth, adult, public agency, or organization.
- Investigate your complaint, come up with a solution, and send you a written report no more than 60 days after they receive your complaint.

What is the state Department of Education obligated to do?

As the authority over public schools, the California Department of Education (CDE) is responsible for making sure that schools follow AB 537. If your school district fails to adequately resolve your complaint, the CDE is obligated to do the following:

- If your school district does not act within 60 days of receiving your complaint or if you appeal the school district's decision, the CDE is obligated to complete an investigation within 60 days, and make a decision about whether the school district has lived up to its responsibilities and whether it needs to do anything else.
- Require schools to take steps to improve problems raised through investigation of complaints.
- Request a report of the schools' actions and keep a file of every written complaint received.

Other options for holding your school accountable:

- **Litigation.** You can sue your school district. With the help of an attorney, students can ask a judge to order the school to stop discrimination before it happens or continues. This is called injunctive relief. It's cool because a judge issues an "injunction" (order) to your school district – and your school district has to do it immediately! You can do this while going through the complaint process.
- **Community Organizing.** Organize other students, teachers, staff, parents, and community allies to form a community response to the problem of homophobia in your school. Think of AB 537 as a tool and use it as leverage to work to change the school climate.

To learn more about how you can implement and enforce AB 537, check out our student organizing manual at www.ab537.org or call our office.



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