

# Diversity & Inclusion *in History*

## Case Study

2020

1948

1066

1215

History and Politics teacher Bex Bothwell-O'Hearn (she/her), shares her views on LGBT+ inclusion in history and what she's doing to celebrate more diversity across her school.



Bex Bothwell-O'Hearn (she/her),  
History and Politics  
Teacher

## Championing LGBT+ history and greater diversity in the curriculum.

As a teacher, I love history, I love my subject and I really believe in giving young people a knowledge-rich curriculum - one that teaches proper, evidence-based history.

As a member of the LGBT+ community too, I also really care about building more diversity and inclusion into what we teach in history. I think there's been parts of history that we've not necessarily forgotten about, we're just too uncomfortable to address. There's so much rich history with LGBT+ history, black history and disability history that as a historian and history teacher, I have to ask why wouldn't you want to delve in?

In our school, we are also seeing a rise in students coming out as LGBT+. I take this as a good thing and that students now feel more comfortable talking about this and being themselves. However, with this rise comes a notable lack of understanding from those that perhaps don't identify in that way.

I feel it's our duty as educators to teach our students about the world, build greater acceptance and give them all opportunities to be themselves and flourish in school and in life. Key to that is teaching them about things they

feel engaged in and things that are relevant to their lives, so we have taken steps to champion more diversity across our school, and particularly in the history we teach.

We are still on a journey, but here are some of the key things we've learned and experienced along the way so far.

## **A whole-school approach matters**

The work we've been doing to build more diversity into the history we teach hasn't been happening in isolation - it's part of what we are doing as a school too.

For instance, we've set up a Northgate Diversity and Community Group, which anyone can join - from staff to students in Years' 7-13. We come together regularly and talk about things we've heard in the news, any questions we have and how, as a school, we can improve and make all our students feel celebrated, secure, safe and represented.

Capturing student voice on these issues really is crucial, as is supporting teachers to talk about subjects that they might not be trained in. When it comes to LGBT+ inclusion in particular, off the back of our diversity community group, our students created an amazing language toolkit, which addresses things like, what Trans means, what pronouns are and the definition of bi-phobia. This has been shared with teachers and students across the school, as well as with other schools and even in a local LGBT museum exhibit.

This ultimately helps to make your school, and its classrooms, a safe space, where teachers and students alike feel empowered to engage with LGBT+ issues with confidence and greater understanding.

## **Classroom visuals can have a powerful impact**

In terms of diversity and the history classroom itself, one of the first things teachers can do is to think about the visuals they're using. For example, the power of classroom displays should not be underestimated.

We created and put up some new posters in my classroom, exploring inspirational, diverse activists from history, including people like Alan Turing, Lady Phyll from UK Black Pride and LGBT+ campaigner Ted Brown - and the impact has been amazing.

Students love reading them. They hang around after class to find out more, and two students in a week just came out there and then, while looking at them. Having visual content like this around your classroom can

help students to not only engage more in your lesson, but feel safe and represented - it's like a nod that says 'I see you - you're safe here'.

## **Think outside the box when it comes to LGBT+ topics and people in history**

There is so much that can be done in history when it comes to exploring LGBT+ people and topics that span beyond awareness days, events or well-known individuals.

For example, we've been doing a memorial and plaque project unit on symbolism, which has looked at the Pride flag, how it has changed over the years, what it means, why some people liked it and others didn't.

Meanwhile, everyone loves the Suffragettes, but what about exploring their feminism and relationships with students too? Many Suffragettes were in lesbian relationships and not criminalised for being so - it was a big part of the movement. While lots of teachers talk about Princess Sophia Duleep Singh as a person of colour and a Suffragette, her sister Catherine has been a fantastic person to explore with students - she was a Suffragette in an open relationship with a woman and led a really remarkable life too.

Students have loved this content too - in the student voice feedback we carried out after lessons, comments included 'it was nice to learn about someone who was gay', 'It was great to learn about real people', 'It was good to learn about something new, that I didn't ever know about'. This makes it worth it for me.

## **Draw on networks available to you**

One of the biggest challenges for teachers, outside of confidence and knowledge, is finding LGBT+ resources and accessing archives. Because it was considered a crime for so long, you've got to look in the most unlikely places, like jails and asylums, which can be challenging and time-consuming.

That's where drawing on networks and the support available to you is a game-changer. #LGBTed on Twitter is amazing for helping to share resources and ideas in this area, there's also a host of books that are being published on LGBT+ education and history.

We also really recommend getting involved with your local Universities and academics too. We worked with Professor Rainer Schulze from the University of Essex to deliver a virtual presentation to students and staff on the Pink Triangle and the history of LGBT in Berlin, Nazi and Weimar Germany. Students and staff alike found it so interesting that it is now being added to a scheme of work in our curriculum.

## Starting somewhere is better than not starting at all

As teachers, we've probably all heard the phrase "don't do it as a bolt on" when it comes to diversity and inclusion in the curriculum, and I definitely agree with this. However, while more diverse people, themes and topics should absolutely be fully integrated into the curriculum, this can take time and a whole education community commitment that extends beyond schools to exam boards, publishers and government to really achieve this. So, while we all keep aspiring to get to this point, it's important for schools to start somewhere and do something than nothing at all.

**Bex Bothwell-O'Hearn (she/her), is a History and Politics Teacher at a secondary school in Suffolk.**

Take a look at [Pearson's Diversity and Inclusion in History webpages](#) for more great content.