

SECONDARY LESSON PLAN

Paper Pride: How Zines Built a Movement

SUGGESTED GRADE LEVELS: 9 - 12

SUBJECT: Social Studies

LENGTH OF TIME: This lesson was designed for a standard class period of 50 minutes. Adaptations and extensions for a block period are included at the bottom of this lesson.

GOAL: Students will explore the history of DIY zines, discovering how marginalized groups bypassed mainstream gatekeepers to share resources, protest, and build community in the US from the 1940s through the 1990s.

OBJECTIVES:

- Examine historical zines from three distinct eras to understand how LGBTQ+ individuals used DIY (do-it-yourself) media for advocacy and survival.
- Identify the social and structural "gatekeepers" that marginalized groups had to bypass before the internet.
- Analyze the evolving "DIY aesthetic" of historical zines and its role in conveying urgency, solidarity, and community care.

EDUCATORS' NOTES:

- + **The Core Concept:** Before the internet, isolated LGBTQ+ youth and adults found community and organized protests by bypassing mainstream censorship and creating "zines": cheap, self-published booklets. This lesson explores how groups bypassed different types of gatekeepers across three eras: the 1940s (using carbon copies), the 1970s (creating space for Black and Latina lesbians), and the 1990s (youth health advocacy via photocopiers).
- + **Cross-Curricular Adaptability:** While this lesson focuses on Social Studies and US history in particular, see the bottom of the lesson for differentiation suggestions and cross-curricular connections.

MATERIALS:

+ Lesson visuals and instructions

- + [Paper Pride PowerPoint](#)
- + Copies of the Archival Inquiry Guide and historical zine excerpts for three stations: Vice Versa (1947), Salsa Soul Sisters newsletters (1970s), and YELL (1994)

+ Welcoming Schools Resources

When discussing gatekeepers and LGBTQ+ history, be prepared to address identity-based bullying and stop discriminatory comments. These resources will help you respond to bullying and provide guidance on preventing it. In addition, Welcoming Schools has resources on navigating pushback.

- + [What to Say to 'That's So Gay' & Other Anti-LGBTQ+ Comments](#)
- + [Bullying Intervention: What to Do When You Witness Bullying](#)
- + [Welcoming Schools Advocacy and Education Policy Resources](#)

THE LESSON

1) THE HOOK: WHO ARE THE GATEKEEPERS? (5 MIN)

Begin the lesson by asking students to think about how information gets published today. If they want to publish an article or a magazine, who/what stands in their way? Introduce the concept of "gatekeepers" (editors, publishers, algorithms). Share this reflection question with students to preview the lesson: If a gatekeeper refuses to share your story because of who you are, how do you get your message out?

+ Slides Resource: [Slides 1-4](#)

2) DIRECT INSTRUCTION: BYPASSING THE GATEKEEPERS (10 MIN)

Share the pre-Internet era printing slide to the class, emphasizing the challenges of making multiple copies of a publication before the Internet.

+ Slides Resource: [Slide 5](#)

Let students know that when mainstream publishers or the government ignored/censored the LGBTQ+ community, activists simply built their own "printing presses." Then, teach students what a ["zine" \(homemade magazine\)](#) is. Emphasize that technological tools, from office typewriters to cheap, public photocopiers, allowed people to create and distribute their own media in secret to build community.

+ Slides Resource: [Slide 6](#)

3) GUIDED PRACTICE: PRIMARY SOURCE ROTATION STATIONS (20 MIN)

Let students know that they will be acting as historians uncovering "underground" primary sources: documents (zines) that were intentionally ignored or hidden by mainstream historical archives. Individually or in small groups, have students rotate through three stations (**Station 1:** The Typewriter/Carbon Copy Rebellion in 1947, **Station 2:** Creating Space Within a Space in the 1970s, and **Station 3:** The Photocopier Youth Movement in the 1990s) using their Archival Inquiry Guide to analyze each artifact:

- + **Technological Subversion:** Examine the physical construction of this artifact (e.g., typewriter, carbon copy, raw photocopies, collage). How does the medium itself prove that the creators had to bypass traditional publishing gatekeepers?
- + **The Counter-Narrative:** What specific truth or call to action is this document sharing that mainstream institutions or governments refused to publish?
- + **Historical Impact:** Situate this document in its exact era. What would be the impact of secretly receiving this underground document as an isolated LGBTQ+ individual during that specific time period?

+ Slides Resources:

+ [Station 1: Slides 7-9](#)

+ [Station 2: Slides 10-12](#)

+ [Station 3: Slides 13-15](#)



3) COLLABORATIVE CLOSURE: THE DIY AESTHETIC (10 MIN)

Bring the class together and display a page from each era on the board to show the evolution of the aesthetic: from the neat, faded typewriter font of 1947 to the raw "Ransom Note" or collage look of 1994. Ask students to share with the class what they found most important in their Archival Inquiry Guide for each era.

Ask the class: *Why might LGBTQ+ activists choose to make zines that look so raw and messy instead of perfect and professional?*

Conclude by highlighting that zines allow people without a lot of money (or permission) to be advocates in their community.

4) INDEPENDENT REFLECTION: INDIVIDUAL EXIT TICKET (5 MIN)

Provide students with quiet time to think about the exit ticket prompt:

- ✚ Think back to our question from the beginning of the lesson: If a gatekeeper refuses to share your story because of who you are, how do you get your message out?
- ✚ If you were going to create a zine today to support a group of students or a cause in our school/community, what would the title be, and what is one thing you would include inside it?

Have students share one idea from their exit ticket with a partner, and/or have students share thoughts from their exit ticket in a full class discussion.

HOW TO ADAPT FOR A BLOCK PERIOD (90 MIN)

- ✚ **Host a "Zine-Making" Workshop:** Turn the analysis activity into a hands-on creation lab. Teach students the classic ["8-page zine"](#) fold using a single sheet of printer paper. Have students create their own zines dedicated to their pride about their own identities or an issue they care about, utilizing tools (scissors, glue sticks, old magazines, sharpies) to mimic the historical DIY aesthetic they analyzed in the station rotation.
- ✚ **"Blackout the Gatekeepers" Poetry Lab:** Provide students with photocopies of "official" or biased historical texts (for example, an old newspaper article criticizing the gay rights movement, or a dry, restrictive 1950s government policy). Have students use thick black markers to cross out the majority of the text, leaving only specific, carefully chosen words visible to create a brand new, empowering poem. This physically demonstrates the concept of taking power back from gatekeepers and creating art out of censorship.

HOW TO ADAPT THE LESSON FOR OTHER SUBJECTS & DIVERSE LEARNERS:

- + **Jigsaw Differentiation for Diverse Learners:** To support diverse learners, slower readers, or students who require additional processing time, replace the station rotations with a Jigsaw activity. This allows students to focus deeply on a single primary source while utilizing peer-to-peer support.

Start by dividing the class into mixed-ability groups of three. Assign each student in the “home group” one of the three historical artifacts (Vice Versa, Salsa Soul Sisters, or YELL). Give them a few minutes to read their assigned text independently. Then have students leave their “home group” to gather with the other students in the room who were assigned the exact same artifact. In these “expert groups,” students will collaboratively work through the Archival Inquiry Guide. This allows students to pool their knowledge, check their understanding with peers, and ensure everyone has strong, accurate answers for the three analytical prompts.

Finally, students return to their “home groups.” Each “expert” is given 3 to 4 minutes to present their artifact, explain the technological subversion used, and share the historical impact with their groupmates. By the end of the share-out, all students will have learned about all three historical eras.

- + **English Language Arts (ELA):** Students explore the literature of healing, exploring how marginalized groups use poetry to process systemic fear and reclaim their voices.
 - + **Activity:** Using Audre Lorde’s [“A Litany for Survival”](#) as a mentor text, educators can guide students in analyzing the emotional progression from fear to the empowering realization that “it is better to speak.” To apply these concepts, students will use Lorde’s work as a creative spark for their own page in a class/group zine. They can choose to write either a “Litany” (a repetitive chant or prayer) that validates the experiences of a group at their school that feels marginalized or misunderstood, or a punchy “Better to Speak” micro-manifesto (4-5 sentences) declaring why their specific identities and community truths deserve to be heard proudly and unapologetically.
- + **Art & Graphic Design:** Just as the creators of youth zines used bold text to make a statement, students can use graphic design and typography to foster community.
 - + **Activity:** Students will collaboratively construct a “Classroom Community” zine, with each student designing one master page. They must intentionally use the “Analog Aesthetic” (high-contrast textures, varied typography, and collage elements) to visually answer the prompt “What makes you uniquely you, and how do you show care for your friends and community?” without relying on digital tools.

+ **Science:** Adapt the lesson for students to learn about public health, virology, and “citizen science.”

+ **Activity:** During the AIDS crisis, organizations like ACT UP and YELL had to bypass government gatekeepers because schools and health departments were refusing to teach accurate, life-saving medical information to the public. Students will analyze how the creators of 1990s youth zines took complex scientific and medical information (like viral transmission and safe sex practices) and translated it into raw, accessible formats for teenagers. To practice “science communication,” students will select a modern public health or environmental science topic (e.g., vaccine science, local water quality, mental health statistics) and design a highly visual, easy-to-understand zine page that educates their peers using facts, diagrams, and the DIY aesthetic.

+ **Math/Data Literacy:** Students can explore the mathematics of network building and decentralized distribution by geometric sequences and exponential growth to model how a few pieces of paper could build a massive, invisible network of community care.

+ **Activity:** In 1947, *Vice Versa* was created to find and create community. The author used a typewriter and carbon paper, which yielded 10 copies. She explicitly instructed her readers to pass their copy along to another girl, who should pass it along to another girl and so on. Students can use math concepts like graphing, exponential growth, and logarithms to explore distribution models, how long it would take to reach a specific target population, and/or discuss the limitation of theoretical models (e.g. how real-world variables can disrupt sequences).

+ **Current Events/Ethics:** Students connect the historical necessity of underground zines to modern current events by examining how today’s activists combat algorithmic bias, shadowbanning, and local book bans. Students will analyze modern gatekeepers and distribute their own digital zines to bypass corporate suppression.

+ **Activity:** Students will research a current event related to information suppression, such as the shadowbanning of marginalized creators on social media or recent school board book bans, and discuss how modern algorithms act as the new gatekeepers. To combat this, students will design a single-page “Digital Era Zine” highlighting a current news story, a banned book, or a local activist movement they feel is being hidden by mainstream feeds. To mimic the grassroots, underground distribution of historical zines, students will save their creations as image files and distribute them directly to their peers via AirDrop or text message, bypassing the internet entirely to build their own decentralized information network.