

The ArQuives Button Collection

A Mini Exhibit Exploring Buttons
about Education, LGBTQ2+
Community-Building, and Protest



Acknowledgements

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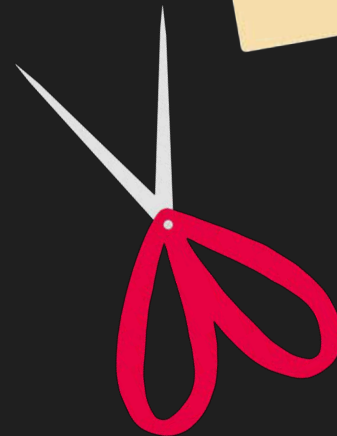
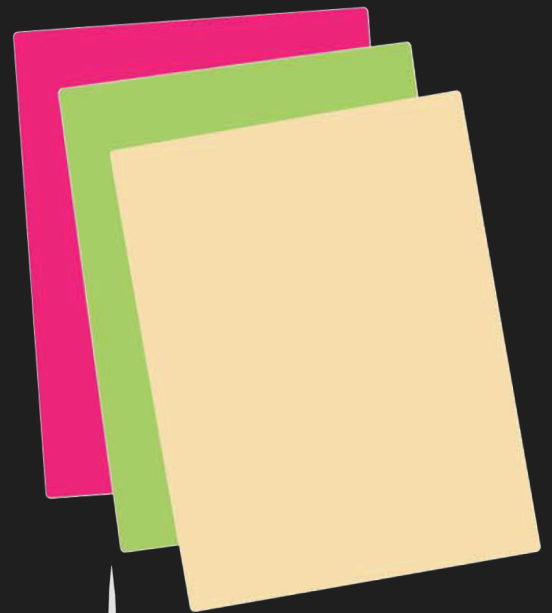
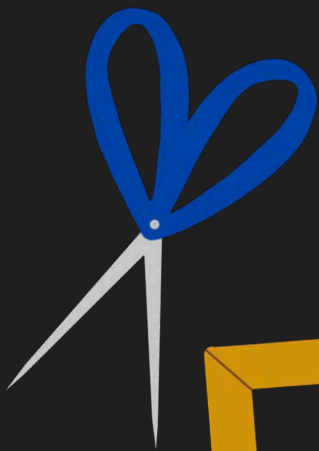
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About The ArQuives: The ArQuives is one of the largest independent LGBTQ2+ archives in the world and the only LGBTQ2+ archive in Canada with a national scope. Its mandate is to acquire, preserve, organize, and give public access to information and materials in any medium, by and about LGBTQ2+ people, primarily produced in or concerning Canada and to maintain a research library, international research files, and an international collection of queer and trans periodicals. You can read more about The ArQuives at www.arquives.ca

A Note About Language: We use the initialism 2SLGBTQIA+ in this document. In other materials, The ArQuives uses the initialism LGBTQ2+. Within this educational resource, we are making an intentional choice to situate 2S (Two-Spirit/two-spirit), Indigiqueer, and other Indigenous LGBTQIA+ people first because we think it's necessary to emphasize the role colonization has played in reproducing cis-heteronormativity. Our initialism within this resource also includes 'A' and 'I' ('asexual' and 'intersex') because we want to highlight these identities for people who are new to learning about queer and trans communities. These (and other) identities are sometimes encompassed in the '+' (plus sign) of the LGBTQ2+ initialism. Ultimately, there is no singular "correct" initialism for queer and trans communities.

To give feedback on this resource please visit www.arquives.ca/about/feedback

Mini- Exhibition Guide



Introduction

In 2022, The ArQuives developed three documents for educators interested in teaching 2SLGBTQIA+ curricula and supporting the implementation of 2SLGBTQIA+ policies in Canadian secondary schools. Building on that work, The ArQuives has developed three downloadable packages with reproductions of items from The ArQuives' collections that can be used in classroom mini-exhibitions.

When the twenty-five initial portraits that would come to form The ArQuives' National Portrait Collection (NPC) were exhibited at The 519 Community Centre in 1998, colour copies were displayed alongside the originals. These copies were to be used for travelling shows, allowing 2SLGBTQIA+ organizations across Canada to organize exhibitions and "[demonstrate] the role that the archives can play in bringing our histories alive in a way that is accessible to all."

In the same way, these downloadable mini-exhibitions provide new possibilities for making 2SLGBTQIA+ histories (and archival records themselves) accessible. In addition to educators, they can be used by gender and sexuality alliances (GSAs) and other student or community groups.

To set up an archival exhibition in your classroom, use this guide with any of the three downloadable mini-exhibition packages.



About the Mini-Exhibitions

The items for the three downloadable mini-exhibitions have been digitized from The ArQuives' collections. There are common themes across all three exhibitions, but each focuses on a particular material type or a particular topic:

The National Portrait Collection (NPC) exhibition includes forty of the 79 portraits in the collection, and are selected for the individuals' contributions to LGBTQ2+ communities in the areas of activism, education, health, and the arts.

The Buttons Exhibition includes thirty buttons, produced by various individuals and organizations for various purposes, but all with a common focus on LGBTQ2+ community support.

The Student/Youth Activism exhibition combines different media types (photographs, posters, documents, and buttons) to demonstrate the work of people aged 29 or younger in LGBTQ2+ activist movements from the seventies to the present.

The National Portrait Collection (NPC) and Student/Youth Activism mini-exhibition packages include 40 items organized around 4 topics and the Buttons mini-exhibition package includes 30 items focused on 3 topics. Each package also includes informational panels (one for each topic and an introduction) and item labels.

The mini-exhibitions can be adapted to suit students' interests, space available, and budget. You can use all the items in a package, all items on a select topic, or mix and match packages. If mixing and matching, make sure to also include any informational panels or item labels needed.

Learning Objectives

- Practice working with primary sources
- Learn some basic principles of archiving
- Collaboratively organize a classroom mini-exhibition

Materials required

From this guide:

- Readings and discussion questions (recommended)
- Materials for additional suggested activities (optional)

From the downloadable mini-exhibition packages:

- Item images
- Corresponding labels
- Informational panels
- Flyer and exhibition guide templates (optional)

Additional supplies:

- A printer
- Scissors
- Painters tape, adhesive putty, or peel-and-stick adhesive strips
- Glue and coloured paper, card, or foamboard to mount items (optional)
- Lamination sheets (optional)
- Frames (optional)
- Poster boards or tri-fold display boards (optional)
- A copy (print or digital) of 2SLGBTQIA+ Stories: An Adaptable Mini-Unit Plan for English or History Classrooms, available to download from The ArQuives' website (recommended)

Discussion Questions

These questions can be used to initiate a class discussion about The ArQuives' downloadable mini-exhibitions. Modify them based on your needs, or come up with your own. Use the included supplementary readings to support your discussion, as needed.

1. What do you already know about archives? What kinds of records do they hold? Who uses them, and for what purpose? What do archives have in common with libraries and museums? What makes them different?
2. Who decides which records an archive will include in its collections? Or who determines how these records are written about for the people reading them?
3. What problems might result when records creators (i.e., the people who initially made/used these records) are not involved in the archival process? How might community archives address some of these issues?
4. What can be learned through archival records? What challenges or limitations might learning through archival records present? How do you think exhibitions could support this learning?

About The ArQuives

The ArQuives is one of the largest independent LGBTQ2+ archives in the world and the only archive in Canada with a mandate to collect at a national level. Founded out of The Body Politic newspaper collection in 1973, its mandate is to safeguard the LGBTQ2+ history of Canada. The archives formally incorporated in 1980 and following a legal challenge was granted charitable status in 1981. Today, The ArQuives preserves a wide range of material including personal and organizational papers, books, monographs, photographs, moving images, sound recordings, periodicals, artifacts (like buttons, board games, t-shirts, and banners), and other reference material.

Archives are repositories for documentary heritage that work to acquire, preserve, organize, and give public access to information and materials in any medium. Archives are a resource for everyone to use, and a community archives like The ArQuives accepts donations from community members or any record about LGBTQ2+ life in Canada.

The main difference between a library and an archive is that a library contains published works that the public can access and often take home. An archive is non-circulating and can contain published and unpublished works. An archive contains the 'behind-the-scenes' records of an organization or person's work, such as correspondence, notes, receipts, drafts, etc.

An archival collection is referred to as a fonds. A fonds consists of a group of records created, used or collected by a single individual, group, or corporate body through the course of their activities and functions. Archival fonds are oftentimes unique, complex, and tricky to navigate. Through the process of appraisal, arrangement, and description, archivists transform an accumulation of records into a fonds that is accessible to researchers.

Organizing Your Exhibition

You can work on the exhibition collectively, or form groups to focus on specific tasks—for example:

- Curators select items and determine how they will be displayed
- Technicians to print, cut out, and mount/laminate/frame (as applicable) informational panels, item images, and item labels
- Educators to guide tours or give presentations on the exhibition

Select the items you'd like to use—a minimum of 4 items (3 for the Buttons exhibition) is recommended

When deciding on items to use, consider where and how you're planning to display them:

- How much usable wall space do you have? How will people interact with the exhibition?
- How long will the exhibition stay up? Are you going to reuse or lend out the items after the initial exhibition?
- How do you want to install the items? Will you mount them, laminate them, or frame them?
- Who will be the primary audience for your exhibition? Your class? Others at your school? People from your community?
- What topics are you and your class interested in? What story do you want to tell through your exhibition?

Print the package (or individual pages) on regular letter-size (8.5" x 11") paper or cardstock

- The downloadable mini-exhibitions are made to work with any standard home/office printer; if you don't have access to a (colour) printer, expect to pay between \$0.50 and \$1.00 per page at a library or print shop
- You can use the "scale" and "pages per sheet" functions in your PDF reader's print menu to adjust the size down if needed

You can also use the “poster” or “tile” function to print images in large format, though the resolution will be lower and there may be visible pixels—this isn’t recommended for text items

Cut out the item images (as needed), item labels, and informational panels

Mount items onto card or foamboard or, if you have additional funds, laminate or frame them

Plan your exhibition’s layout before hanging any items—you might draw a diagram or place items on the floor in front of the wall to get an idea of how you’ll arrange them

- The distance between items is up to you, but make sure they won’t be too high or too low on the walls

Attach items to the wall using painters tape, adhesive putty, or peel-and-stick adhesive strips

- For a portable exhibition, use poster boards or tri-fold display boards

Get ready for your exhibition opening—use the supplied flyer and exhibition guide templates, or make your own

- You can also prepare a tour, presentation, discussion, or other interactive activity to complement your exhibition

Each downloadable mini-exhibition package includes ideas for lesson plans and activities. For additional resources, refer to 2SLGBTQIA+ Stories: An Adaptable Mini-Unit Plan for English or History Classrooms.

Mini-Exhibition Content



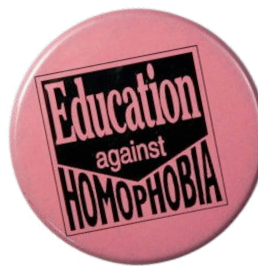
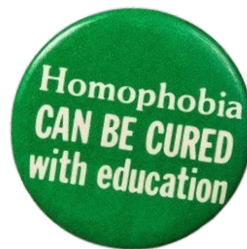
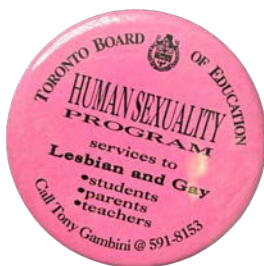
About the Button Collection

The ArQuives button collection includes over 2000 LGBTQ2+ buttons dating from the 1960s to the 2010s. Some of these, like the “Feminists for transgender liberation” button and the “Fight AIDS not Arabs” button, communicated the wearer’s support of (or opposition to) a particular issue. Others, like the “CHAT” button, showed their membership in or support of a particular organization. Some were extremely direct in their messaging, while others could be inconspicuous to anyone outside the community. This mini-exhibition comprises thirty buttons from The ArQuives’ collection on education, LGBTQ2+ community-building, and protest.



Education

This section features buttons on LGBTQ2+ issues in education, including support for LGBTQ2+ curricula, anti-transphobia/-homophobia policies, and specialized programming for queer and trans students. While these buttons primarily address education in the context of the school system, the inclusion of the “Homophobia sucks” button from Planned Parenthood Toronto’s TEACH program and the “Challenge transphobia” button from the Canadian Federation of Students recognizes the importance of peer education and student-led learning. The Student-Youth activism section includes additional buttons on young people’s involvement in LGBTQ2+ student organizations and events.





ELEMENTARY TEACHERS
of
TORONTO
RESPECTING
ALL DIFFERENCES

SUPPORT GAY TEACHERS



NO CHILD
IS BORN
HOMOPHOBIC

Hamilton-Wentworth
Elementary
Teachers' Local

Respecting All Differences

Teachers can be important sources of support for young LGBTQ2+ people who aren't able to (or don't want to) talk about their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression with their family or friends. The Toronto District School Board introduced its system-wide Positive Space program for middle and high schools in 2010, but individual teachers have been using buttons, stickers, and posters to indicate their support for queer and trans students since at least the nineties.

Support Gay Teachers

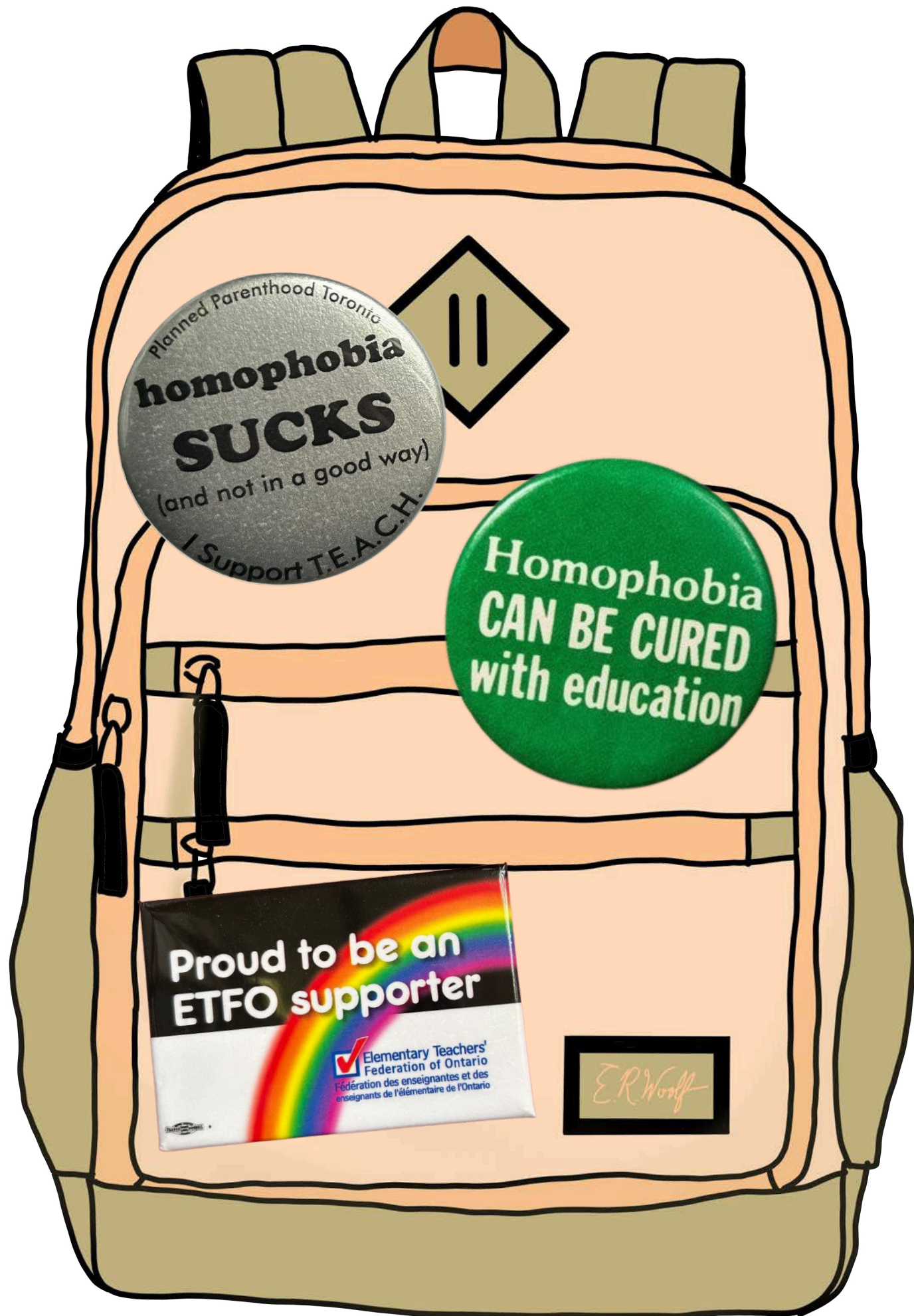
LGBTQ2+ teachers have been disciplined and sometimes fired because of their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. Although federal and provincial/territorial human rights legislation and institutional policies should protect them from discrimination, this is not always the case in practice. This button is from the eighties, but queer and trans educators continue to receive public and institutional opposition exemplified in part by the increase in the number of challenged and banned books with LGBTQ2+ content since 2021.

No Child is Born Homophobic

For some people, the idea that sexual orientation is biologically determined (i.e., people are “born gay”) is an important part of self-identity or an effective defense of LGBTQ2+ rights. While there are additional environmental, social, and cultural factors that complicate attempts to understand sexual orientation through biology alone, it is an innate part of a person. Homophobia (and transphobia), by contrast, are not innate—they are learned, consciously or unconsciously, by growing up in a society that oppresses LGBTQ2+ people.

Homophobia Sucks

Teens Educating and Confronting Homophobia (TEACH) is a peer education program delivered through Planned Parenthood Toronto. Youth volunteers receive training and support to give presentations on homophobia, transphobia, biphobia, and cisheteronormativity for other young people, parents, caregivers, educators, and community youth workers. Peer-based programming has been an essential part of anti-homophobia education since at least the seventies, with TEACH itself now running continuously for over twenty years.



—— **Homophobia can be Cured with Education** ——

There are a number of forms that homophobic and transphobic oppression can take—sometimes, these ideas are codified into laws that criminalize LGBTQ2+ people (or do not protect LGBTQ2+ people from discrimination); other times, they are the basis for interpersonal violence and harassment. Homophobia and transphobia can also be internalized by LGBTQ2+ people themselves. Recognizing that these are learned ways of thinking is essential to understanding how they can be confronted and resisted.

—— **Proud to be an ETFO Supporter** ——

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) is a federation of public elementary teachers, supply teachers, and support personnel. Since its amalgamation in 1998, the ETFO has focused on addressing oppression in schools. In 1999, it published *We're Erasing Prejudice for Good*, a curriculum resource guide for Kindergarten to Grade 8 that included lessons on racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and ableism, and in 2000, it formed an LGBT Standing Committee to identify needs and make recommendations to support LGBTQ2+ students and educators.



Support the Triangle Program

The Triangle Program is an alternative high school for LGBTQ2+ youth in Toronto. Initially focused on supporting students at risk of dropping out because of homophobia and transphobia in schools, the Triangle Program was started in September 1995 by social worker Tony Gambini and three Toronto Board of Education trustees. In addition to providing a safe and comfortable space for LGBTQ2+ students to learn, the Triangle Program includes queer and trans content in its curriculum across subjects.

Human Sexuality Program

The Human Sexuality Program was a Toronto Board of Education initiative that provided LGBTQ2+ students, staff, and their families access to counselling, information, and other supports. This program was one of a number of initiatives implemented in Toronto schools in the early- to mid-nineties through, in part, the work of Education Against Homophobia—others included support groups, community advisory and consultative committees, and print and audiovisual teaching materials.

Education Against Homophobia

Education Against Homophobia (EAH) was a collective of teachers, students, and parents in support of the inclusion of human sexuality and anti-homophobia curricula and policies at the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). By the early nineties, the work of educators and activists including Tim McCaskell, Helen Lenskyj, and Greg Pavelich had already led the TDSB to implement a number of initiatives to support LGBTQ2+ students and staff. EAH continued this work against increasing opposition from homophobic hate groups such as Citizens United for Responsible Education.

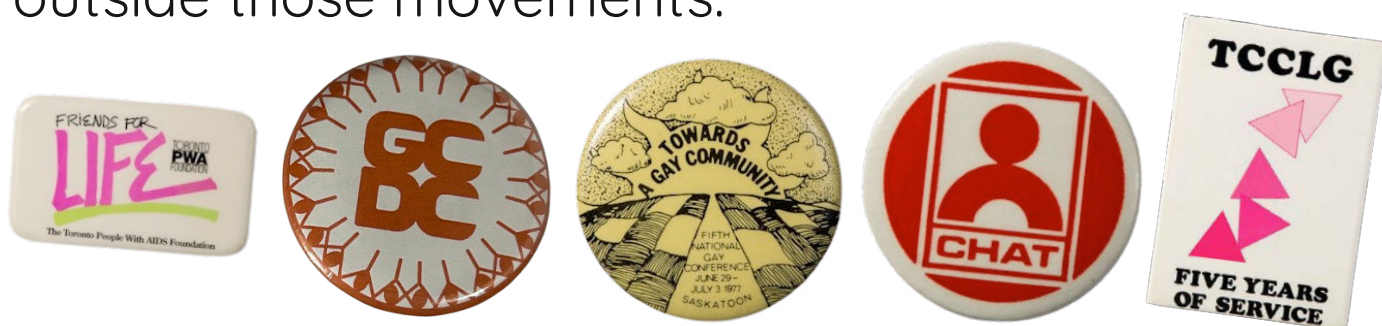
Challenge Transphobia

The Canadian Federation of Students/Fédération canadienne des étudiantes et étudiants represents college and university student unions in dealings with federal and provincial governments. Since its formation, the CFS/FCÉE has campaigned for a number of issues affecting LGBTQ2+ students, including reversing the ban on blood donations from men who have sex with men, addressing homophobia and transphobia on campus and in the community, and advocating for access to comprehensive public healthcare for trans people.



Organizations & Events

This section focuses on buttons from LGBTQ2+ organizations and events, including the Gay Community Dance Committee (GCDC), which organized dances that raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for LGBTQ2+ groups, and Librairie l'androgyné, a volunteer-operated gay bookstore and community space in Montréal. Compared to buttons included in other sections (though with some exceptions), a lot of those included here are not immediately perceptible as LGBTQ2+. Buttons with acronyms/initialisms or symbols, for example, could be worn to signal a person's involvement in LGBTQ2+ movements without necessarily outing them to anyone outside those movements.





HomoFile

The ArQuives was founded (as the Canadian Gay Liberation Movement Archives) in 1973 out of The Body Politic collection. Initially comprising “a small shelf of books and two drawers of a filing cabinet,” the archive was developed through volunteers, including James Fraser, Harold Averill, and Alan Miller. This button references the homophile movement of the sixties, a formative period for many of the activists who would later be involved in the gay liberation movement, including many members of The Body Politic Collective.

Friends for Life

The Toronto People with AIDS Foundation (PWA Toronto) was formed in 1987 to address the unmet need for services for people already living with HIV/AIDS. While there were, by that time, a number of AIDS Service Organizations in operation in Toronto, most of these were focused on prevention. PWA Toronto set out to increase access to practical information and community services to support the health and wellbeing of HIV-positive people.

TCCLG

The Toronto Counselling Centre for Lesbians and Gays (TCCLG) was co-founded by youth workers and activists David Kelley and John McCullagh in 1981. While LGBTQ2+ organizations had been providing counselling as part of their service offerings since at least the seventies, the TCCLG was one of the first to have counselling as its main focus. It was also one of the first to employ professional social workers, allowing it to access government and institutional funding that other organizations could not.

GCDC

Between 1981 and 1992, the Gay Community Dance Committee (GCDC) organized more than fifty themed dances to raise money for LGBTQ2+ community groups. Almost 100 groups participated, including the AIDS Committee of Toronto, Gays and Lesbians of the First Nations, the Lesbian Phone Line, ZAMI, and Lesbian and Gay Youth Toronto (LGYT). In addition to being an effective way of fundraising—LGYT alone raised over \$15 000 through the GCDC—these dances were a way of building queer community.



Towards a Gay Community

The Fifth National Gay Conference was held in Saskatoon from 29 June to 3 July 1977. Programming included social events, educational talks and workshops, and a demonstration in which more than 300 conference attendees from across Canada marched from Kiwanis Park to Saskatoon City Hall, calling for legislative protections for gay people. Although the gay liberation movement had been active in Saskatchewan since the formation of Saskatoon Gay Action in 1971, the first public protest in the province had occurred only two years earlier, in 1975.

CHAT

The Community Homophile Association of Toronto (CHAT) was formed in 1971 out of the University of Toronto Homophile Association (UTHA). In addition to advocating for the social, political, and legal rights of gay people, CHAT operated a community centre at 58 Cecil Street, where it regularly held dances, co-eehouses, and other events (including Toronto's first Gay Pride Week in 1972). As the homophile movement developed into the gay liberation movement, CHAT's membership started to decline, and in 1977, it disbanded.



OUT on the Shelf
Queer Library and Resource Centre
147 Wynnton Street, 2nd Floor, 597-822-1789



librairie l'androgynne
3642 boul. st-laurent
tél: 866-2131



Out on the Shelf

The Out on the Shelf Queer Library and Resource Centre is a volunteer-run queer community centre in Guelph, Ontario, opened in 2005. Their collections now include more than 3000 books by LGBTQ2+ authors and/or with LGBTQ2+ content for adults and children and a number of pamphlets, events calendars, and resource guides. Out on the Shelf also offers social and support groups, activity-based programs, and public lectures by academics and researchers.

SOY Toronto

Supporting Our Youth (SOY) was started in 1998 by Bev Lepischak, a Central Toronto Youth Services community worker. As part of the Toronto Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youth, Bev consulted with LGBTQ2+ youth to understand their needs and develop programming to address them. Now part of Sherbourne Health Centre, SOY continues to support queer and trans youth through intergenerational and peer mentorship and drop-in programs like Black Queer Youth (BQY) and Trans Fusion Crew.

librairie l'androgynie

Librairie l'androgynie was a queer feminist bookstore opened in Montréal by members of Gay McGill in 1973 and initially operated entirely by volunteers. One of the first LGBTQ2+ bookstores in Canada, Librairie l'androgynie provided a place for the gay community separate from the bar scene. In addition to selling books that couldn't be found at other stores, Librairie l'androgynie sold tickets for LGBTQ2+ events and allowed organizations to use its space for meetings.

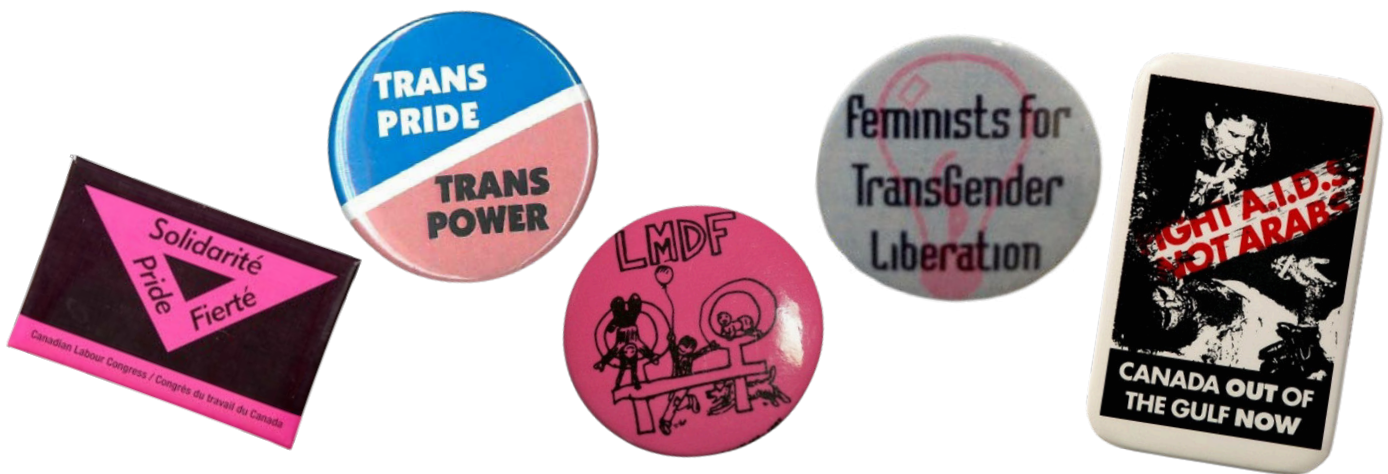
Lesbian Youth Peer Support

Lesbian Youth Peer Support (LYPS) was a support group for lesbian and bisexual youth started by Kristyn Wong-Tam in 1990. Kristyn had previously been a member of Lesbian and Gay Youth Toronto, and LYPS was based on the same principles of youth empowerment. By the mid-to-late nineties, membership in peer support groups had started to decline as state-led programs (and dial-up Internet) became increasingly accessible, but the ability to have spaces of their own continues to be essential to LGBTQ2+ youth community-building.



Solidarity

This section includes buttons showing solidarity with LGBTQ2+ people and with other social and political movements. The “Solidarité/pride/fiérte” button, for example, directly connects workers’ struggles and LGBTQ2+ people. It also includes buttons with messages of resistance against homophobia and transphobia, racism, misogyny, classism, and other forms of oppression, like the “Pissed on transsexuals united” button and the “Lesbians and gays against apartheid” button.





FIGHT A.I.D.S.
NOT ARABS

CANADA OUT OF
THE GULF NOW

BISEXUAL
PRIDE!

Solidarité
Pride
Fierte

Canadian Labour Congress / Congrès du travail du Canada

Feminists for
TransGender
Liberation

Bisexual Pride!

Produced by Mirha-Soleil Ross' and Xanthra Phillippa Mckay's small publishing company genderpress, this button confronts the issue of bi-invisibility. Although bisexuality was becoming increasingly understood by the nineties, the false idea that bisexuals were really closeted gay men or lesbians or straight people "experimenting" with queer sexuality was (and continues to be) common, including from some gay people. Additionally, a bi person might be perceived as gay or straight depending on the gender of their current partner, making it almost impossible to have their bisexuality recognized.

Fight A.I.D.S. Not Arabs

Through the late eighties and early nineties, groups like AIDS Action Now! organized hundreds of demonstrations against the federal government's inaction on the AIDS epidemic. In August 1990, as the government continued to insufficiently fund HIV/AIDS research and treatment, Canada announced that it would offer its support to the United States-led military coalition in its occupation of Iraq. That year, Canada spent approximately \$11.4 billion USD on defence, over a billion dollars more than their military expenditure for 1989 and more than any previous year since 1950.

Solidarité - Pride - Fierté

The gay liberation movement of the 1970s was closely interconnected with other left political movements, including the labour movement. Many gay activists learned how to organize through their involvement with trade unions. Gay liberation and labour activists also worked for the inclusion of clauses prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation (and, later, gender identity/expression) in union contracts.

Feminists for TransGender Liberation

Mirha-Soleil Ross and Xanthra Phillippa MacKay formed genderpress in 1993, publishing a zine (gendertrash from hell) and producing buttons that could be purchased by mail-order. This button is included in the order form of Issues 3 and 4 (Winter 1995 and Spring 1995). gendertrash published poetry, personal essays, interviews, photos, collages, and other works by (primarily) trans women. Contributors addressed topics including race, class, sex work, substance use, and incarceration, often from a Marxist feminist perspective.



TDOR Until the Violence Ends

Trans Day of Remembrance (TDOR) was founded on 20 November 1998 to memorialize Chanelle Pickett, Rita Hester, and Monique Thomas, three Black trans women who had been murdered in the Boston area (Chanelle in 1995 and Rita and Monique in 1998). It has been observed annually since its founding, with candlelight vigils, talks, performances, and other events to honour people who died as a result of transphobic violence.

LMDF

The Lesbian Mothers' Defense Fund (LMDF) was formed in Toronto in 1978 by members of Wages Due Lesbians (itself a part of Wages for Housework, an international network of organizations that campaigned for the recognition of women's unpaid domestic and affective labour). The LMDF provided financial assistance, legal information, and social support to lesbian mothers involved in child custody cases.

Trans Pride / Trans Power

In the seventies, some trans people found community through involvement in the homophile and gay liberation movements—the Association for Canadian Transsexuals, for example, was initially formed as a side organization of the Community Homophile Association of Toronto. Although trans people were present in these movements, their liberation was considered secondary to the liberation of cisgender gay men and lesbians, if it was considered at all. Celebrating trans pride and trans power can be a way of confronting the past (and ongoing) marginalization of trans people in LGBTQ2+ activism.

Gay Self Defense - fight back!

Increased reports of queerbashing and other violent incidents against LGBTQ2+ people in the seventies and eighties led organizations like the Gay Liberation Union to offer self-defense classes for gay men and lesbians. Collective fears around anti-gay violence were intensified after 5 February 1981 when, as part of Operation Soap, police raided four gay bathhouses in Toronto, arresting 273 people in both the raids themselves and in the protests that took place in the weeks and months after, numerous people were subjected to violence by the police.

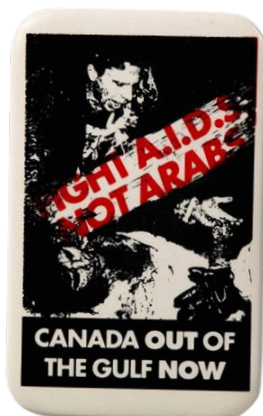
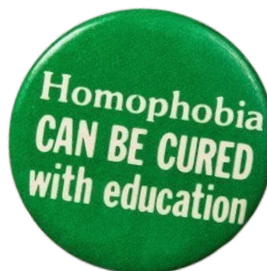
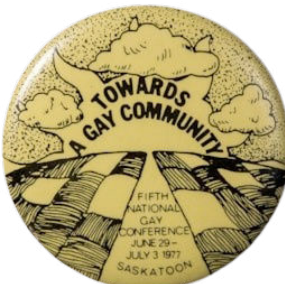
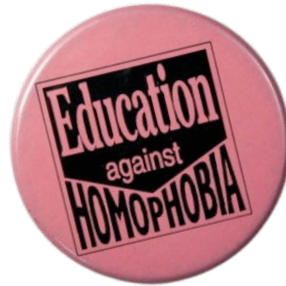
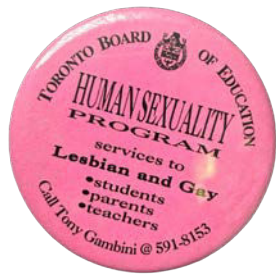


AIDS Action Now!

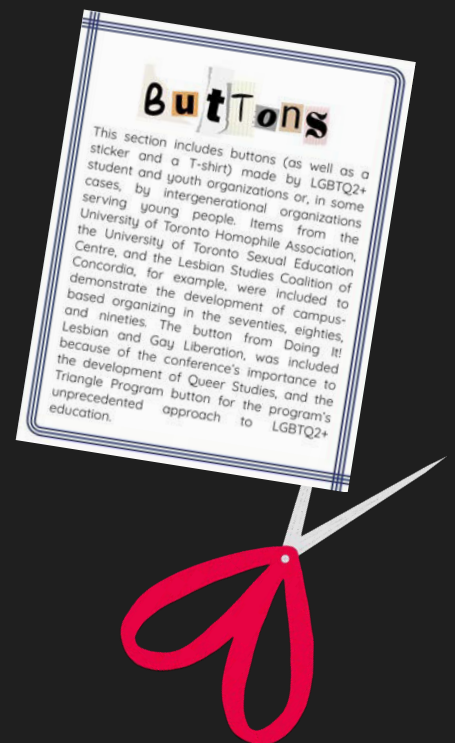
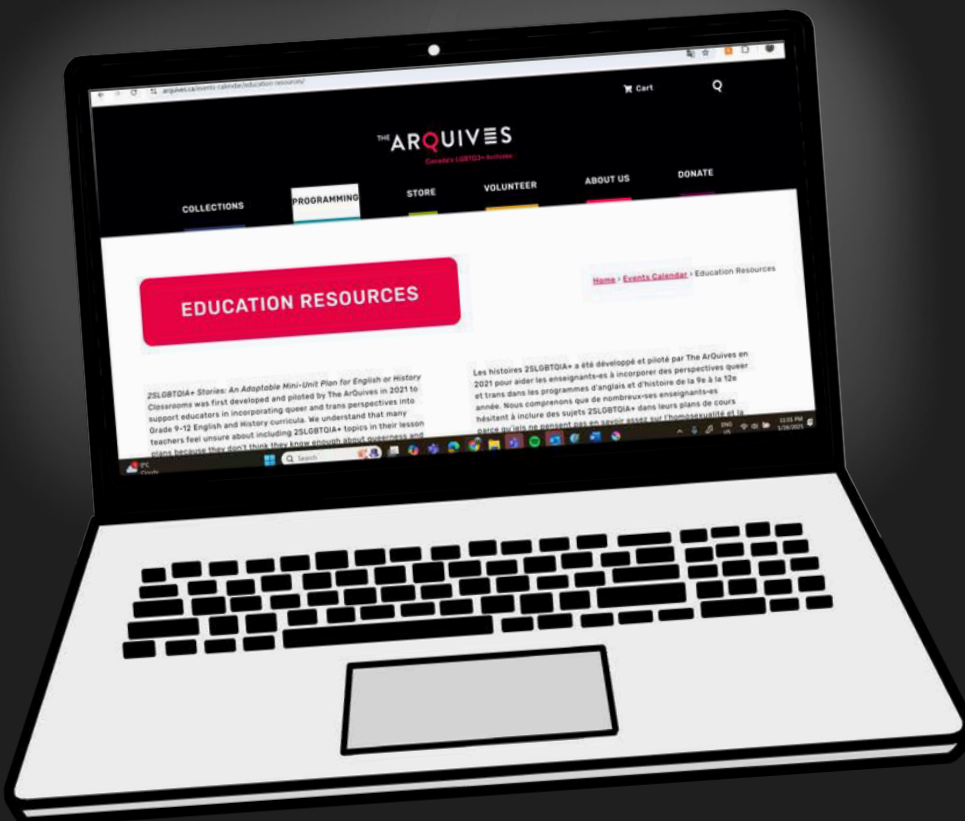
In 1987, a group of gay activists, people living with HIV/AIDS, and healthcare workers were brought together by Michael Lynch to address the Canadian government's inaction around HIV/AIDS. On 8 February 1988, the group held its first public meeting (with over 300 attendees) and AIDS Action Now! (AAN!) was formed. As the context of HIV/AIDS research, treatment, and access to care developed through the eighties and nineties and into the 2000s, AAN! continued to organize protests, hold press conferences, and prepare policy briefs.

Lesbians and Gays Against Apartheid

The Simon Nkoli Anti-Apartheid Committee (SNAAC) was formed in Toronto in 1986, with around twelve initial members. It was named for Simon Tseko Nkoli (1957-1998), an anti-apartheid, gay rights, and HIV/AIDS activist who was arrested for his involvement in the apartheid opposition movement. Through the duration of his trial, SNACC organized demonstrations, sent out press releases, and pressured the (primarily white) Gay Association of South Africa, of which Nkoli was a member, on their inaction. Nkoli was eventually acquitted and was released from prison in 1988.



Mini-Exhibition Activities



Curriculum Connections

Many of the individuals, organizations, and ideas referenced in the Buttons mini-exhibition are included in the timelines in Lesson 1 (“Learn About Significant 2SLGBTQIA+ Events [Canada]”).

To connect this mini-exhibition to the curriculum content more directly, consider incorporating content from Lesson 3, Activity 3 (“Learn about Slurred Speech Acts and Reclaimed Speech Acts”).

While this lesson/activity focuses on resistance through the reclamation of words (e.g., “queer”) and symbols (e.g., the pink triangle), its use of buttons (and T-shirts) to exemplify this resistance can provide the basis for a discussion about how the buttons included in this mini-exhibition communicate themes of community, power, and protest.

Discussion Questions

These questions can be used to initiate a class discussion about the Buttons mini-exhibition. Modify them based on your needs, or come up with your own. Use the included supplementary readings to support your discussion, as needed.

1. How have buttons been used as a form of wearable activism in LGBTQ2+ communities? In other political and social organizing? What do you think makes them effective? Can you think of other items that are used to communicate identity or solidarity?
2. Why are buttons and other everyday objects useful as historical documents? What might these items allow us to understand that government records, newspaper articles, or personal letters might not?
3. How have the language and symbols used in LGBTQ2+ button designs developed since the mid-twentieth century? Are there any words/phrases or symbols that continue to be used regularly? Why do you think that is?
4. Did you identify with any of the buttons in the mini-exhibition? Did any of them introduce you to a new idea or new way of thinking? What do you think it might have been like to wear one of these buttons at the time it was produced? To see someone else wearing one?

Class Connections

As a class, read “Buttons as Activism” on The ArQuives’ digital exhibitions page for gendertrash: Transsexual Zine, 1993–1995:



Buttons have been used historically and into the present as a low-cost form of wearable activism. While buttons are typically produced on a mass scale and are not particularly rare, what makes buttons valuable is their personal and political effective qualities. Mirha-Soleil Ross and Xanthra Philippa MacKay’s publishing company genderpress produced hundreds of buttons related to trans issues and activism. The collection of buttons demonstrates genderpress’ commitment to multi-issue activism, as the buttons articulate opposition to intersecting forms of oppression and celebrate differences in queer and trans identity. For example, one button reads “I’m electric, TS epileptic,” indicating the intersections between transsexual and disability rights activism. Another button reads “TSS AGAINST RACISM,” indicating a practice of intersectional solidarity against racism. A variety of gender identities are celebrated, for example, “Trans Dyke,” “TransFag,” and “Poly gendered.” Other buttons relate to Mirha-Soleil’s animal rights and vegan activism, including “Transsexuals for Animal Liberation.”

For an additional option, read “The ArQuives Collection: Buttons” in *Out North: An Archive of Queer Activism and Kinship in Canada* by Craig Jennex by Nisha Eswaran (p. 208):



Buttons have been used as consciousness-raising objects since the mid-twentieth century, allowing individuals to signal a political stance or association. William Craddock—curator of The Pin Button Project, and exhibit that shows off The ArQuives’ vast collection of over 1500 buttons—explains the continued popularity of these wearable objects, noting that “they are relatively inexpensive, easily created, and a widely distributable medium, making them an ideal form of expression for activist movements and community groups.” Since the mid-twentieth century, gay and lesbian activists in Canada have been creating wearable pin buttons to promote LGBTQ[2]+ rights, causes, and awareness and to demonstrate solidarity; accordingly, the buttons held at The ArQuives chronicle a tangible, overtly public form of queer desire and kinship.

Additional Activities

Button-making activity:

Use the printable templates to make reproductions of archival buttons—you can rent button makers from companies like People Power Press, and some public libraries (e.g., Greater Sudbury Public Library, Hamilton Public Library, Middlesex County Library) have button makers for drop-in use (normally for the price of supplies).

If you don't have access to a button maker, you can:

- Use the printable templates with clear plastic snap-together pinback buttons (or keychains)
- Make decoupage buttons using the templates and wood circles, bar pins, and Mod Podge (or a mixture of white glue and water)—you can also add glitter or sequins or use other wood shapes
- Make stickers by printing the templates on 1-inch diameter round labels
- Make bookmarks by printing the templates on cardstock and/or laminating them and attaching an oversized paperclip to the back
- Make small charms for keychains, necklaces, earrings, etc. by printing or tracing the templates onto shrink plastic sheets (e.g., Shrinky Dinks)