

# **A PICTURE BOOK OF BOSTON'S LGBTQ+ HISTORY**

## **Honors Thesis**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Education**

In the McKeown School of Education  
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By

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## Thesis Abstract

### **A Picture Book of Boston's LGBTQ+ History**

“To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin...” (hooks, 1994). Part of respecting and caring for students, and their “souls” as hook says, is respecting and representing all parts of their identity and culture. When looking at the marginalized LGBTQ+ community, we see little representation of their history in elementary schools. Very few LGBTQ+ history resources are available for students, and none that I could find focused on my home state, Massachusetts. This gap silences the history of a whole community.

My presentation will describe my process of creating a picture book designed for late elementary school students (3rd-5th graders) that presents Massachusetts LGBTQ+ history that is accessible to them. The presentation will also describe my research process of learning about Boston's LGBTQ+ history and how I told the stories of LGBTQ+ historical figures in a way that students could understand without minimizing what these advocates did for the Massachusetts LGBTQ+ community. The point of my book was not to idolize these figures but to highlight them alongside other Massachusetts historical figures like Paul Revere, Crispus Attucks, and Tom Brady.

My book and presentation will give the audience a multi-view perspective of Boston's history and will hopefully start conversations around LGBTQ+ representation in K-12 classrooms.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all those who have supported and helped me throughout my thesis process.

First and foremost, I am immensely grateful to my thesis advisor, Cami Condie, for her guidance, expertise, and patience. I could not have finished my book without her accountability check-ins and constructive feedback. Additionally, I am grateful to my honors advisor, Scott Nowka, for giving me the opportunity and freedom to put together a creative thesis that is impactful and meaningful to me, as well as for his support.

Additionally, I would like to acknowledge all the people I have met throughout the process of writing my book who have offered me support and community. When going into my thesis I feared I would run into some backlash because of how hot the topic of discussing the LGBTQ+ community in classrooms is right now, but everyone who I reached out to about my thesis was very supportive and encouraging. I feel so fortunate to have received the support I did, and to have met so many wonderful LGBTQ+ and LGBTQ+ allies who share my goal of destigmatizing topics of the LGBTQ+ community in schools.

Lastly, I would like to thank all the people who have shown interest in my book. I cannot begin to express how validating and meaningful this support has been. It is what encouraged me to continue with my project, even when it got hard, and work to make my book the best it could be!

## Write-Up of Book Process

*Advisor:* Cami Condie (Education Department)

*Project Title:* Boston's LGBTQ+ History: A Picture Book for Grades 3-5

*Project overview:* Teaching LGBTQ+ history has been a huge topic of conversation recently, inside and outside of Education circles. It has come to the forefront recently after bills like Florida's Don't Say Gay Law, Texas's Transphobic Senate Bill 29, and Indiana's proposed House Bill 1134. Even in more progressive states like Massachusetts, where there are no laws against teaching about the LGBTQ+ community, LGBTQ+ history is still often forgotten and left out of our curricula. LGBTQ+ history is everyone's history and to leave it out of history curricula is to leave out a portion of history. Boston specifically, has rich LGBTQ+ history and made many contributions to the ongoing fight for LGBTQ+ equality. Yet this is not being taught in schools. By avoiding talking about this community in the classroom we are communicating to students that this community does not belong.

Through this project, I created a Boston, LGBTQ+ history designed as a classroom resource in the form of a picture book for late elementary-aged children (3rd-5th grades). The intent of this book is to give educators a resource to introduce LGBTQ+ history to students and start conversations around the LGBTQ+ community in their classrooms.

One of the things that is very important to me is that my book accurately reflects and represents the LGBTQ+ community and the diversity within it. Because of this, the

process of how I put together my book was just as important to me as the final product. I wanted to make sure my sources were accurate and told from LGBTQ+ peoples' perspectives. I conducted research through many conversations with people in this community, instead of just rewriting what has already been written.

*Project outcomes:* The outcome of this research project was an LGBTQ+ history book that recounts Boston's unique LGBTQ+ history in a form that is appropriate for elementary school students and can be used as an educational resource.

Additional outcomes of this project include:

- identifying key Boston LGBTQ+ movements and the influential figures in these movements.
- identifying how Boston's LGBTQ+ fight for equality impacted other states and even other countries.
- figuring out how to present this information to late elementary school students in a manner that is age appropriate but does not belittle the struggles of the LGBTQ+ community.
- creation of a picture book that addresses all the above objectives and can be used by teachers as a teaching resource to start conversations about queer history in the classroom.

*Project Benefits:* According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Mcleod, 2023), students need to feel safe and supported in the classroom before they can reach a point of being emotionally and physically ready to learn. By not including LGBTQ+ history in our

teaching of Massachusetts history, we are ignoring the safety and support needed by students who have LGBTQ+ parents, LGBTQ+ loved ones, or who may be a part of the LGBTQ+ community themselves. Without representation, we are continuing to add to the social narrative that LGBTQ+ people are less than their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts and that they do not deserve to have their contributions to history and American culture talked about.

As a teacher, it can be scary to put together a lesson on something you are less informed about yourself, especially when it is a sensitive topic. But that does not mean it is not crucial to do so. I created this book to make this important topic accessible and less scary to teachers. My hope is that this picture book can be used as a starting point to begin conversations about the LGBTQ+ community and LGBTQ+ history.

*Methodology:* I completed this project in three phases.

Phase One- I created an arsenal of resources on Boston's LGBTQ+ history. I put together a range of resources that included everything from Boston LGBTQ+ history books to periodicals and newsletters of the time and first-hand accounts. I learned from current activists in the Boston queer community (Interview, 2021). I learned their stories and how Boston impacted them and their activism. Next, I heard from older people in the LGBTQ+ community to learn about what Boston's LGBTQ+ culture was like in the past. These conversations were supplemented with primary resources from the past. Lastly, I looked to resources from experts who have also studied Boston's queer history. The History Project Boston was crucial in my process. Their book *Improper Bostonians* and

an online interactive map of Boston were the foundation of my timeline and search for figures.

Phase Two- I took what I learned in phase one and began drafting the picture book. First, I compiled a list of influential figures in Boston's LGBTQ+ history that represent different subcommunities within the LGBTQ+ community. Next, I condensed this list to a size that was reasonable for a children's picture book by looking through my original list and determining which figures had a unique impact on the Massachusetts LGBTQ+ community. This sorting was the hardest step of my project because it involved choosing to exclude a lot of really important people and stories from my book. I continually returned to my original goal and tried to make sure the people I did include had a range of impact on the community and represented the diversity within the community. Then, I started to write the text for each person. I tried to make these pages accessible to students. I used vocabulary and perspectives that students with no background knowledge of the LGBTQ+ community could understand. For example, I talked about being able to hold hands with whoever you love and wearing boyish clothes.

Phase Three- After the text was revised, I entered the last phase of creating the book. I started by drawing portraits of each figure in my story. Next, I started thinking about how I could visually represent each person or the outcomes of their actions. I used a combination of real photographs (that I licensed) and drawn elements to collage a page for each person. I paid attention to the colors like incorporating the rainbow flag across the borders of the book. I wanted my pages to be visually engaging and accurately representative.

*The rationale for using these methods for this project:* I think when creating teaching materials for history, the most important thing to focus on is teaching that history accurately from many perspectives. The history of marginalized groups is so often mistold and forgotten. That is why I started with learning the history as my first step. From there, I used what I learned to write the text and to create the visual aspects of my book.

I chose to put together the written text of my story before the visual to keep the writing consistent. By writing the text first, I was able to focus first on presenting the information to match my project goal or representing each group and their community. By the time I started the visual elements I could complement the text with the visuals.

#### *Sources*

Alinsung, Coco; Giessler, James; Lemay, Mimi et al. "Leaders of LGBTQ+ Advocacy on the North Shore." 18 Nov. 2021.

Mcleod, Saul. "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory." *Simply Psychology*, 10 May 2023, [www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html](http://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html).

Book

Have you heard about Plymouth Plantation? What about the Boston Tea Party or Tom Brady winning the Super Bowl for the Patriots? Most proud Bostonians have heard all these stories. Few know the stories of Merrymount Colony or people like Dr. Kenneth Mayer. Join me today as we learn more about Boston's historical LGBTQ+ figures and their impact on our history!



MADE FOR GRADES  
3 AND UP

A graphic titled "Boston's LGBTQ+ History" featuring a rainbow heart, a rainbow flag with a lobster, a city skyline, and several small photos of Boston landmarks. The text "Boston's LGBTQ+ History" is written in a colorful, bubbly font. Below the main title is a silhouette of the Boston skyline in rainbow colors. At the bottom, it says "WRITTEN AND ILLISTARATED BY EMILY MORAN".



**LGBTQ+:** Acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer

**Queer:** People use this word as a way to identify with and celebrate people of all gender identities and all the ways people love each other. When used in a mean way, it is a word that hurts.

-Human Rights Campaign



*This is the LGBTQ+ community's current flag. Because the community is always changing, so is its flag. This Flag is important because it represents the different qualities of the community and is a symbol of **pride!***

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Hi! My name is Emily. I am from Boston, Massachusetts. Boston is a cool place to live because we have a lot of people who work hard everyday to make Boston a more inclusive and welcoming place.

Today I want to introduce you to some of the people who worked to make Boston a safe and happy place for people in the LGBTQ+ community!



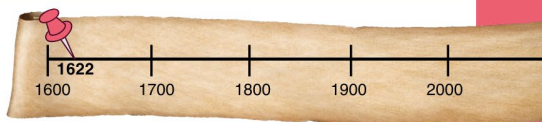
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The first person I want to introduce you to is **Thomas Morton**. Thomas was a Pilgrim who left Plymouth Plantation in 1622 because he did not like their strict rules. He started his own colony called **Merrymount**, where Quincy, MA stands today.



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Many pilgrims left with Thomas, including those who were LGBTQ+ because they could date whoever they loved in Merrymount. Thomas' bravery in doing what he thought was right helped give LGBTQ+ Bostonians a home.

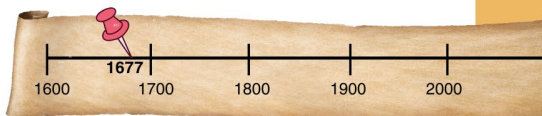


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Unfortunately, in the past few Massachusetts communities were as welcoming to LGBTQ+ people as Merrymount was. Most towns and cities had strict rules about how they expected people to act and behave. For example, girls used to only be allowed to wear dresses and boys were only allowed to wear pants. But some individuals thought these rules were unfair and fought against them.



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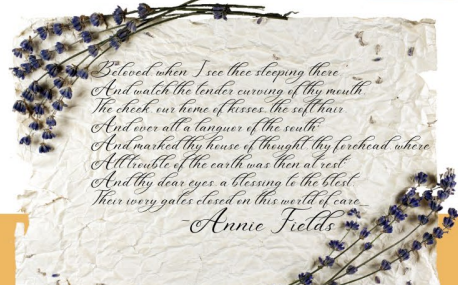
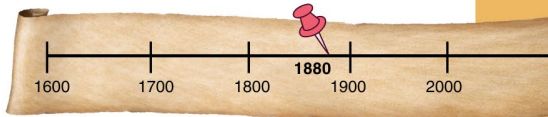
Meet **Dorothie Hoyt**. Dorothie was arrested in Salisbury in 1677 for wearing pants that were viewed as too boyish. Her punishment included being thrown in jail until her father could pay the court 40 shillings worth of money or corn. Even after being arrested, Dorothie continued to wear boyish clothes because she liked them!

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Another pair of women who fought against these rules were **Annie Fields** and **Sarah Jewett**. In the 1880s two women were not allowed to legally marry each other, but Annie and Sarah were so in love that they decided to have a secret marriage ceremony. They spent their days writing each other love poems and traveling together.

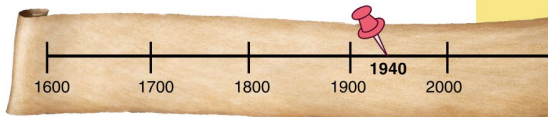


In the late 1800s there were other Massachusetts' women like Annie and Sarah who wanted to live together. Two unmarried women living together in Massachusetts soon gained popularity and became known as a **Boston Marriage**.



Please put your hands together for **Sylvia Sidney**! Sylvia is one of Boston's most famous drag queens. **Drag** is a creative performance used to express one's feelings about gender and gender rules. Drag shows have always been important for the LGBTQ+ community because they are a safe space, where LGBTQ+ people can express themselves without judgement or fear.

When Sylvia first started performing Drag in 1940, he was not well liked. At his first drag show he was booed off the stage. After a pep talk from the pianist, who found him crying backstage, Sylvia went back on stage and performed his routine. He went on to become an inspiration to many other Boston queens.



Fun Fact: Up until the 1960s Boston held an annual Beaux Drag Ball known for the extravagant costumes of its performers. Hundreds of people from across the country would travel to Boston each year to see these Balls!

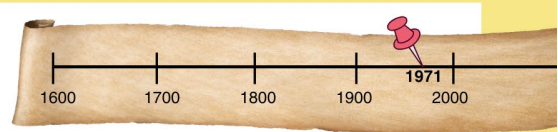
Fun Fact: Drag became popular in Boston in the 1940s after clubs like Jacques Cabaret and Playland opened. Jacques Cabaret was Boston's longest running LGBTQ+ establishment.

Drag shows and other **LGBTQ+ safe spaces** allowed the community to grow. Soon the LGBTQ+ community and its allies, people who supported them, had a bigger voice and began coordinating efforts to increase equality.

In 1971 Boston's LGBTQ+ community decided to march to demand that Boston provide them with equal access to jobs, housing, and health care, as well as for the right to hold hands or kiss in public without being arrested.



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At this march, Boston's LGBTQ+ community invited **Reverend Goddess Megora Kennedy**, a well-known Black, LGBTQ+ activist, to read off a list of demands. She was asked, in part, because she participated in **Stonewall**, the New York LGBTQ+ protest that inspired this **Boston march**.

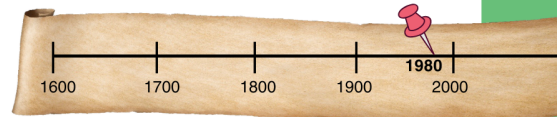


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The 1980s were a very hard time for the LGBTQ+ community. A sickness called **AIDS** started to spread. At the time people knew very little about AIDS, so sadly a lot of people died from it. Although anyone could get AIDS, it spread rapidly among gay men. Luckily, today we know a lot more about how to keep people safe from AIDS and this is thanks to the Doctors and professionals who worked hard to study and spread awareness about AIDS.



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Meet **Dr. Kenneth Mayer**, he was one of these doctors. He worked for **Fenway Health**, a healthcare center in Boston for LGBTQ+ people. He started Fenway's first AIDS research and community education programs. It was these programs that set Fenway Health apart from other health centers and allowed it to be seen as a leader in AIDS research and education.

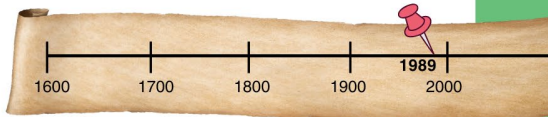


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The LGBTQ+ community faced even worse discrimination during the AIDS epidemic than they did before. So the community started fighting for legal protections.



Meet **Arline Isaacson**. In 1989 Arline helped advocate for the **Massachusetts' Gay Rights Bill** that would prevent people from being discriminated against because of who they loved. This allowed women who loved other women and men who loved other men to be open about their love without fear of being fired from their job or denied housing. This bill went on to inspire other LGBTQ+ bills like **Freedom for all Massachusetts** in 2018, which prevented discrimination against anyone in the LGBTQ+ community.

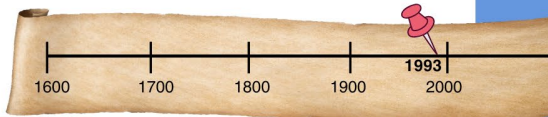


Fun Fact: The Freedom law received support from the Patriots, Red Sox, Bruins, New England Revolution, and Celtics. Every New England professional sports team publicly endorsed this law.

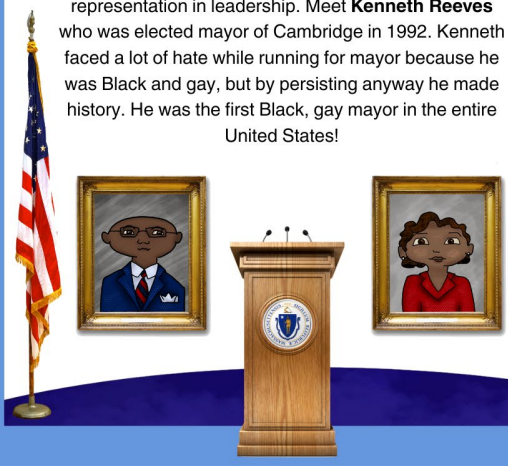


Even though the LGBTQ+ community now had legal protections against discrimination, they still did not have all the same rights as non-LGBTQ+ people. For example, a Massachusetts law only allowed a child to have one legal mom and one legal dad. This narrow definition of family made it extra hard for LGBTQ+ couples to have legal rights as parents. But thanks to two Boston surgeons, this law changed.

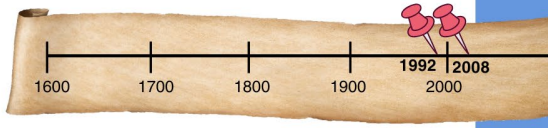
Meet **Dr. Susan Love** and her long-term partner **Dr. Helen Cooksey**. Together they raised a daughter named **Tammy**. In 1993 they fought for the right to both be Tammy's legal mothers and won! This lawsuit opened the door for other same-sex couples to be recognized for their rights as parents in Massachusetts.



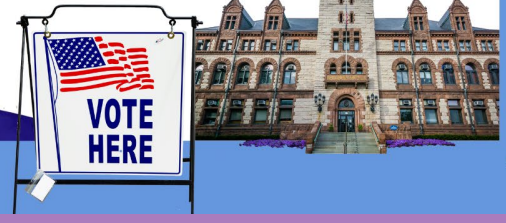
Slowly, the LGBTQ+ community started to gain representation in leadership. Meet **Kenneth Reeves** who was elected mayor of Cambridge in 1992. Kenneth faced a lot of hate while running for mayor because he was Black and gay, but by persisting anyway he made history. He was the first Black, gay mayor in the entire United States!



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The great thing about people standing up for themselves and their community is that it inspires and opens the door for others to do the same. In 2008 **Denise Simmons** ran and was elected mayor of Cambridge. She too made history as Massachusetts' first Black female mayor and the United State's first Black, lesbian mayor!

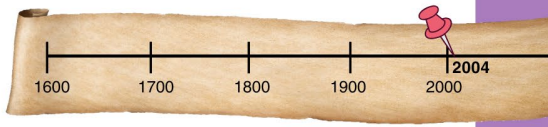


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On May 17, 2004, Massachusetts made history again by becoming the first state to allow same-sex marriage. **Marcia Kadish** and **Tanya McCloskey** got married in Cambridge City Hall and were the first same-sex couple to legally marry in the United States!



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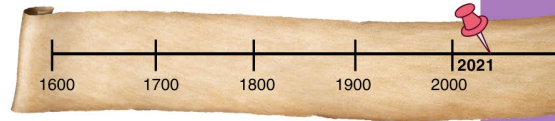
Although Marcia and Tanya already felt in their hearts like they were married, it was important to them to be legally married so that they could receive the privileges that other married partners received, like health care, financial, and legal benefits.



*Fun Fact: Marcia and Tanya did not plan to make history as the first same-sex marriage. They only arrived to the court house early so they could spend the whole day celebrating with other couples who could finally get married!*

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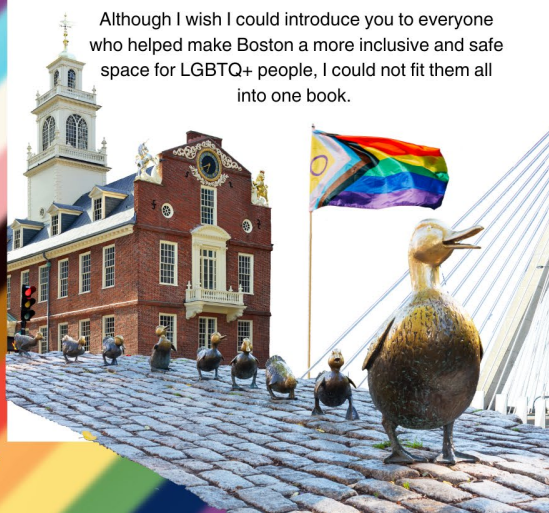
Lastly, let me introduce you to **Ashton Mota**. Ashton is a young activist from Lowell! Since he was 14, Ashton has been advocating for LGBTQ+ youth. Specifically people's right to define their gender however feels best for them. He also advocates for them to be able to use the restrooms and play on the sports teams that match that gender identity.



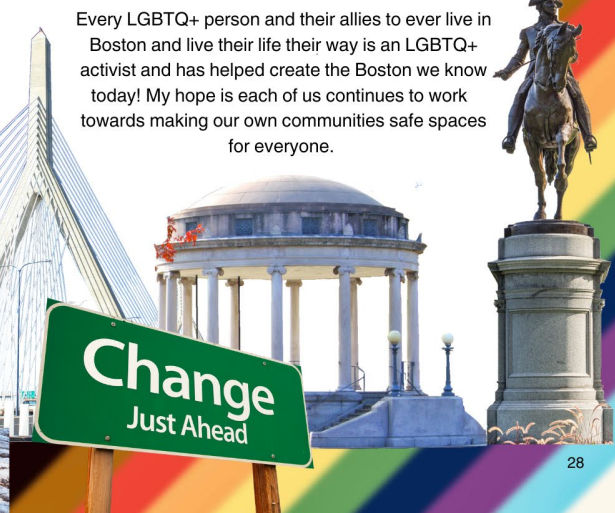
In 2021, when Ashton was 16, he was invited to speak at the White House's Pride celebration, at which he advocated for the **Equality Act**. A law that would protect this right for people in all states!



Although I wish I could introduce you to everyone who helped make Boston a more inclusive and safe space for LGBTQ+ people, I could not fit them all into one book.



Every LGBTQ+ person and their allies to ever live in Boston and live their life their way is an LGBTQ+ activist and has helped create the Boston we know today! My hope is each of us continues to work towards making our own communities safe spaces for everyone.



## From the Author

Thank you so much for reading my book! I believe that LGBTQ+ history is everyone's history and I am happy to be able to share with you a side of Boston's history which is often ignored. I am so grateful for all the wonderful people who believed in me and helped me put this book together!

As a disclaimer I want to mention that Boston's LGBTQ+ history is very diverse and not well recorded. The people included in this book were people who stood out to me and the people whose stories I wanted to tell. This does not mean that they are the only or even the most influential people in Boston's LGBTQ+ history, or that everyone within the LGBTQ+ community has the same opinions on them. I encourage everyone to keep learning about all communities whose histories are often forgotten or misrepresented.

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## More Resources for Educators and Parents

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The History Project

[welcomingschools.org](http://welcomingschools.org)

[bagly.org](http://bagly.org)

[flag.org/resources](http://flag.org/resources)

[glsen.org/elementary-resources](http://glsen.org/elementary-resources)

[thetrevorproject.org/resources](http://thetrevorproject.org/resources)

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## Annotated Bibliography:

1. Alinsung, Coco; Giessler, James; Lemay, Mimi et al. "Leaders of LGBTQ+ Advocacy on the North Shore." 18 Nov. 2021.

The "Leaders of LGBTQ+ Advocacy on the North Shore" was an informal interview I conducted at an advocacy dinner put on by Salem State Universities Center for Civic Engagement. This interview gave me insight into the needs and advocacies of the LGBTQ+ community and led me in choosing what to highlight in the book.

2. Banales, Meliza. "ACT UP." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 30 Oct. 2013, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ACT-UP>.

The "ACT UP" Britannica article talks in depth about the Act Up international organization. It talks about how the organization was created in 1987 to bring attention to the AIDs epidemic. The purpose of the organization is to find a cure for AIDs while bringing information, help, and awareness of the disease to those in need. The article then talks about the AIDs epidemic, and its toll on the queer community as well as the general public, and includes the different protests that took place due to the homophobia that arose because of the epidemic.

3. "Boston Equality Trail: History of Equality in Boston." *Visit Boston*, Boston, <https://www.bostonusa.com/things-to-do/sightseeing-and-trails/boston-equality-trail/>.

"The Boston Equality Trail" on *Boston USA* talks about the Gay Pride March in Boston in June 1971. The article quotes flyers that were used to promote the event, gives a list of all the important sites on the march and their connection to Boston's Queer History, and the list of demands that were read out. The article includes lots of photographs and is a great reference for the march.

4. "The Campaign to Win LGBTQ Nondiscrimination Nationwide." *Freedom for All Americans*, Freedom for All Americans 2023, <https://freedomforallamericans.org/new-england-professional-sports-teams-call-for-full-transgender-protections-in-massachusetts/>.

The “The Campaign to Win LGBTQ Nondiscrimination Nationwide” site written and published by Freedom for All Americans talks about how in 2018 the bill had support from every New England professional sports team.

5. “City Council Members.” *City Seal of Cambridge*,  
<https://www.cambridgema.gov/Departments/citycouncil/members>.

The “City Council Members” published by the city of Cambridge MA provides information on the past Cambridge city council members Kenneth Reaves and Denise Simmons.

6. Daly, Christopher B. “Gay-Rights Bill Passes Massachusetts Legislature.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 7 Nov. 1989,  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1989/11/07/gay-rights-bill-passes-massachusetts-legislature/e8bd68cc-da92-4fa2-af56-f9991fda2438/>.

The “Gay-Rights Bill Passes Massachusetts Legislature” article by the Washington Post talks about Massachusetts's passing of the Gay Rights Bill in 1989. It also talks about the contributions of Arline Isaacson in getting this bill advocated for and passed.

7. Frank, Barney. *Improper Bostonians: Lesbian and Gay History from the Puritans to Playland*. Beacon Press, 1998.

The *Improper Bostonians* is a book that accounts Boston’s Queer History using a range of sources from newspapers to eyewitness accounts to photographs. The book looks at Queer History in Boston starting in the prohibition era up to today. The book names many of Boston’s influential LGBTQ+ figures and their contributions to the equality movement.

8. Koelz, Heidi. “Ashton Mota '23 Speaks at the White House.” *Concord Academy*, Concord Academy, 5 Jan. 2022, <https://concordacademy.org/ashton-mota-white-house/>.

The “Ashton Mota ‘23 Speaks at the White House” article talks about Ashton Mota’s 2021 speech on the Equality Act that he gave at the White House’s pride celebration. It provides information about Ashton and his goals as while as quotes from the speech he gave.

9. Krone, Mark Thomas, et al. "Boston & Stonewall 50: The History Project." *Boston & Stonewall 50*, The History Project, June 2019, <https://historyproject.org/stonewall50>.

"Boston and Stonewall 50" from *The History Project* have an incredible interactive map that shows all the queer historical sites in Boston. It shows sites ranging from City Halls where important LGBTQ legislation was passed, to important Queer Bars, to LGBTQ+ aligned Churches that provided the community with support and alliances, to health centers that were active during the AIDs epidemic. Each location includes a summary with eyewitness accounts or quotes from periodicals of the time. This site provides names of many influential Boston LGBTQ+ advocates and a glimpse into Gay history and laws in Boston. It has events and dates ranging from the 1900s to today.

10. Margolick, David. "Boston Individualists." *Boston Queer History*, Apr. 2017, <https://markthomaskrone.wordpress.com/category/boston-individualists-2/>.

"Archive for the 'Boston's Individualists' Category" from Boston Queer History has a collection of biographies on queer figures from Boston. They are predominately from queer white men but still provide a great jumping-off point of figures to look into. Most are artists and writers from the area and include folks like Marie Equi, F. Holland Day, and John Burns.

11. Masters, Jeffrey. "Magora Kennedy: Meet the 83-Year-Old Reverend and Stonewall Veteran." *Advocate.com*, Advocate.com, 18 May 2022, <https://www.advocate.com/lesbian/2021/12/13/magora-kennedy-meet-reverend-stonewall>.

The "Magora Kennedy: Meet the 83-Year-Old Reverend and Stonewall Veteran" retells an interview with Reverend Goddess Magora Kennedy in which she talks about her life experiences including her participation in Stonewall and Boston's first-ever pride march.

12. "Research." *Fenway Health: Health Care Is A Right, Not A Privilege.*, Fenway Health Boston, 9 July 2021, <https://fenwayhealth.org/the-fenway-institute/research/>.

The "Research" article on Fenway Health's page talks about Fenway Health's past including its involvement in the AIDs epidemic.

13. "Tracing Queer History in Boston." *Boston Preservation Alliance*, 25 June 2019, <https://www.bostonpreservation.org/news-item/tracing-queer-history-boston>.

“Tracing Queer History in Boston” from *The Boston Preservation Alliance*, looks at Boston's Queer history, focusing on Places of worship, bars and clubs, and resources and support centers. They give a quick history of each in regard to queerness and note important examples of each. The section that stands out to me is the resources and support centers, it includes important organizations like BAGLY, the Bisexual Resource Center, Trans Club of New England, Fenway Health, and Boston City Hall.