



# Study Guide

# Table of Contents

1. **Welcome & Big Questions**
2. **Background**
  - a. People
  - b. Timeline
  - c. Related Work
3. **Introduction Lesson** - outline of activities for a 50 minute class period to start a unit in an English or Social Studies course
4. **Analytical Projects** - suggestions for literary and historical analysis
5. **Creative Projects** - suggestions for written, visual, and social justice work
6. **Common Core and State Standards**

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# Welcome & Big Questions

Thank you for picking up *There Are Trans People Here!* This guide was written for trans youth, family members, teachers, artists, activists, cultural workers, and you! It is intended as one piece of a map of the constellation of trans history, poetry, and community. All materials are centered around the following themes and questions:

- ◇ What is **liberation**? How do we recognize it? How do we practice it?
- ◇ How does **care work** flourish in the context of community?
- ◇ Who are our **ancestors**? What do our inherited and chosen ancestors teach us?

We have included historical background to inform reading of *There Are Trans People Here* and jumpstart further exploration. For educators, there are also possible learning activities that could anchor a unit of study. Please make it your own and share your adaptations and additions.



Participants in Belgrade Pride 2021 photographed by Bojan Cvetanović

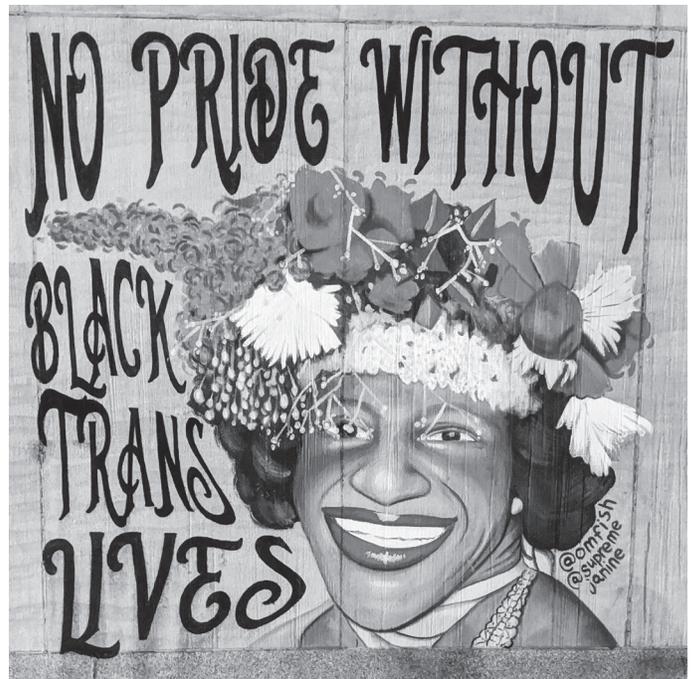
# Background

## People

**Howard Melton**, (1931–2021), grandfather of H. Melt, was born in Lithuania. He was ten years old when World War II began. Howard and his family were sent to a labor camp in Latvia. Howard’s younger sister was sent on to Auschwitz where she was killed. His mother and older sister were both killed in Stutthof. Howard was sent to Dachau concentration camp where he survived countless human atrocities, including a death march at the end of the war. He moved to New York City in 1949, and later to Milwaukee to be near his friend Al Beder, whom he formed a lifelong bond with in the camps. He was married in 1951 to Evelyn Melton. They had four children together, and eventually, many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He dedicated his life to speaking about his experiences as a Holocaust survivor. “On My Way to Liberation,” p. 3.

**Lou Sullivan** (1951–91) was an HIV+ gay trans man who grew up in Milwaukee and moved to San Francisco in the 1970s. He was an activist, writer, and organizer, known for leading support groups for trans men, writing the newsletter *FTM International*, and helping found the GLBT Historical Society. During his time, trans people were often denied medical services by gender clinics if they were not straight. “Trans men weren’t supposed to be gay . . . in the eyes of the medical establishment, he could either be a man or attracted to men, but not both. Lou knew otherwise.” You can learn more about Sullivan from the book *We Both Laughed in Pleasure: The Selected Diaries of Lou Sullivan* edited by Ellis Martin and Zach Ozma. “City of Trans Liberation,” p. 26.

**Marsha P. Johnson** (1945–92) and **Sylvia Rivera** (1951–2002) were friends, part of the Stonewall Riots and co-founders of Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) which provided housing and support for homeless queer and trans youth. Marsha “Pay It No Mind” Johnson was known for her joyous flower crowns, caring personality, and ongoing activism. You can learn more about Johnson in the films *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* by Tourmaline and *Pay It No Mind* by Michael Kasino. Sylvia Rivera was a life-long organizer who worked with many organizations including the Young Lords and Gay Liberation Front. She was an outspoken advo-



A mural celebrating the life of Marsha P. Johnson

cate for trans women of color to be included in the fight for gay liberation. This can be seen in her famous speech “Y’all Better Quiet Down” at the Christopher Street Liberation Day in 1973. Johnson & Rivera left an important legacy by resisting assimilation and focusing on housing access, fighting back against police, supporting queer youth, and centering the needs of trans women of color. “City of Trans Liberation,” p. 26 & Afterword, p. 52.

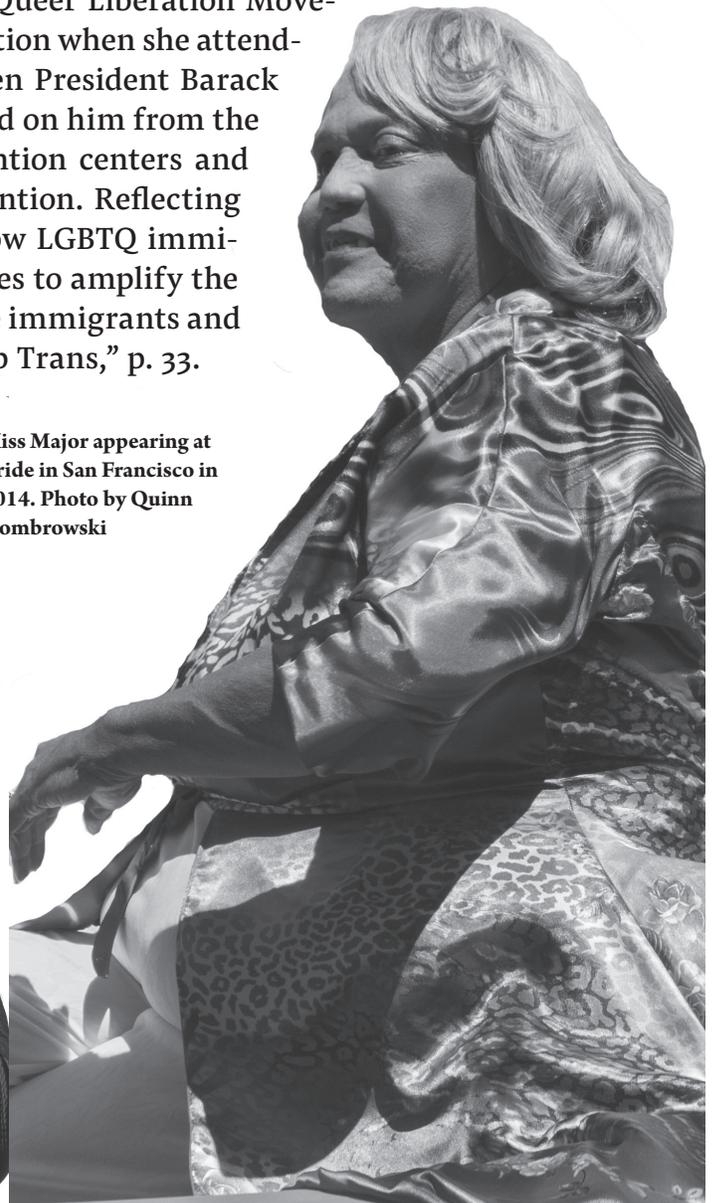
**Miss Major Griffin-Gracy** is a Black transgender elder and activist who was born in Chicago in 1940. She moved to New York City and was an active force in the Stonewall Riots. Major is a survivor of Attica State Prison and a former sex worker. Her decades of activism across the country have been focused on advocating for trans women of color who are sex workers, survivors of police brutality, and who are currently or formerly incarcerated. She worked with the Trans, Gender-Variant and Intersex Justice Project, and her legacy project is the House of GG. You can learn more about Major in the films *The Personal Things* by Tourmaline and *MAJOR!* by Annalise Ophelian. “On Trans Street,” p. 28.

**Jennicet Gutiérrez** is a transgender Latina from México who was born in 1986. She is an organizer with Familia: Trans Queer Liberation Movement. In 2015, Gutiérrez received national attention when she attended a pride event at the White House under then President Barack Obama. While he was giving a speech, she called on him from the crowd to release trans immigrants from detention centers and address the violence trans women face in detention. Reflecting on that day, she wrote, “there is no pride in how LGBTQ immigrants are treated in this country.” She continues to amplify the voices of trans women of color and works to free immigrants and people of color from the carceral system. “Camp Trans,” p. 33.

Jennicet Gutiérrez speaking at 2018 Trans March San Francisco. Photo by Pax Ahimsa Gethen.



Miss Major appearing at Pride in San Francisco in 2014. Photo by Quinn Dombrowski





## Timeline

Tao Li and Magnus Hirschfeld at the fourth conference of the World League for Sexual Reform in Brno, 1932.

**1919 Institute for Sexual Science** was founded by Magnus Hirschfeld in Berlin. The Institute was one of the first to perform gender-affirming surgeries as a part of their broader community care model which included research, sex education, mental and physical healthcare. Hirschfeld, who was gay and Jewish, advocated for trans rights in Germany and also employed trans people at the institute. A massive library containing materials related to gender and sexuality was housed at the Institute. In 1933, the Nazi Party burned the Institute's 20,000 books, medical records, and research as a part of their targeting of people they considered deviant because of their bodies, sexualities, and genders. "The Most Dangerous Jew in Germany," p. 44.

**1933 Dachau concentration camp** was the first of many formed by the Nazi government in Germany. Political opponents, Jehovah's Witnesses, and gay people were some of the first prisoners. In 1938, Nazi persecution of Jews intensified, including internment in Dachau in devastating numbers. People incar-



Nazis destroying the library of the Institute for Sexual Science in 1933.

cerated there were subjected to forced labor, medical experiments, and mass executions. Over 200,000 people were imprisoned at Dachau from 1933 until its liberation in 1945. From just 1940 to 1945 there were 28,000 people killed. "On My Way to Liberation," p. 3.



Silvia Rivera, photographed in 1970 by Kay Tobin.

**1965 Dewey's Diner Sit-ins** took place in Philadelphia at a restaurant that had become a gathering place for the growing LGBTQ community. When the restaurant staff began to deny service to anyone appearing to be LGBTQ, a sit-in took place at the diner; 150 people were denied service, and three teenagers were arrested along with the president of the Janus Society, a gay rights organization. The Janus Society protested the diner and a second sit-in took place. This time, the protestors were not forced out and the restaurant management was forced to provide service to everyone. These events were preceded and followed by similar riots at Cooper Do-Nuts in Los Angeles in 1959, Compton's Cafeteria in San Francisco in 1966, Stonewall Inn in New York in 1969, and others. Police raids on gay bars and gathering places were a common practice at the time. Police often harassed and arrested the community under the guise of "cross-dressing" laws that punished people for wearing clothing that defied traditional gender norms. Today's modern pride parades now occur on the last Sunday in June to mark the anniversary of the Stonewall Riots. "The Riots Must Continue," p. 51 & "Camp Trans," p. 33.

**1978 Attempted Nazi March in Skokie**, Illinois outside of Chicago was held off by a variety of means. The march was particularly concerning as the group of neo-Nazis from Chicago chose Skokie as the location because the suburban village has a significant population of Jewish people and Holocaust survivors. Local Skokie officials passed ordinances that prevented hate speech. However, these were overturned by state and federal lawsuits on the basis of “free speech” rights defended by a Jewish lawyer at the ACLU. In the end, the overwhelming number of planned counter-marchers led the neo-Nazis to hold a rally in Chicago instead. “& Again & Again,” p. 43.

**1994 Camp Trans** was an annual protest and community event held outside of the Michigan Women’s Music Festival, known as Michfest, which excluded transgender women. In 1991 Nancy Jean Burkholder was ejected from Michfest for being a transgender woman. By 1994 the protest to this exclusion was led by transgender activists Riki Wilchins and Leslie Feinberg, author of *Stone Butch Blues*. By 1999 participants of Camp Trans were escorted into Michfest by the Lesbian Avengers for open dialogue. While transgender women were admitted in small numbers, the exclusionary policy was never fully removed and Michfest ended in 2015, largely because of this. “Camp Trans,” p. 33.

**1999 Transgender Day of Remembrance** was first held by Gwendolyn Ann Smith to honor the memory of Rita Hester and other transgender people killed by anti-trans violence. It is now commemorated every year on November 20<sup>th</sup>. The vigils are often hosted by LGBTQ organizations, community centers, or places of worship, where a part of the remembrance includes reading the names of those lost in the past year. The day has also become a moment to increase awareness and take action against anti-trans violence that especially endangers trans women of color. “City of Trans Liberation,” p. 26.

**2017 Muslim Ban Airport Protests** brought thousands of people to airports around the United States including New York, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Boston, and Washington, D.C. Protesters were taking action against President Trump’s executive order that banned entry to the United States for citizens of mostly Muslim countries including Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. Trump issued three revisions to the executive order, the third of which was upheld by the Supreme Court in 2018. However, all three executive orders were revoked by President Biden on his first day in office. “Trans People Against Bans, Walls & Borders,” p. 41.

# Related Work

## Films

*Disclosure* by Sam Feder (2020)

*Free CeCe* by Laverne Cox and Jacques Gares (2016)

*Happy Birthday, Marsha!* by Tourmaline (2017)

*MAJOR!* by Annalise Ophelian (2015)

*Paragraph 175* by Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman (2000)

*Pay It No Mind* by Michael Kasino (2012)

*Screaming Queens* by Susan Stryker and Victor Silverman (2005)

*We've Been Around* series by Rhys Ernst (2016)

## Books

*Branded by the Pink Triangle* by Ken Setterington

*Captive Genders* edited by Nat Smith & Eric A. Stanley

*Care Work* by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

*Pet* by Akwaeke Emezi

*Sex is a Funny Word* by Cory Silverberg

*To Survive on This Shore* by Jess T. Dugan & Vanessa Fabbre

*Trans Care* by Hil Malatino

*Transgender History* by Susan Stryker

*We Both Laughed in Pleasure: The Selected Diaries of Lou Sullivan* edited by Ellis Martin & Zach Ozma

*We Do This 'Til We Free Us* by Mariame Kaba

## Archives & Museums

The Digital Trans Archive  
[www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net](http://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net)

Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago, IL  
[www.gerberhart.org](http://www.gerberhart.org)

GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, CA  
[www.glbthistory.org](http://www.glbthistory.org)

Illinois Holocaust Museum, Skokie, IL  
[www.ilholocaustmuseum.org](http://www.ilholocaustmuseum.org)

Leather Archives & Museum, Chicago, IL  
[leatherarchives.org](http://leatherarchives.org)

Lesbian Herstory Archives, Brooklyn, NY  
[lesbianherstoryarchives.org](http://lesbianherstoryarchives.org)

Leslie/Lohman Museum, New York City, NY  
[www.leslielohman.org](http://www.leslielohman.org)

Museum of Transgender History & Art  
[www.sfmothera.org](http://www.sfmothera.org)

ONE Archives, Los Angeles, CA  
[www.onearchives.org](http://www.onearchives.org)

Queer Zine Archive Project  
[www.archive.qzap.org](http://www.archive.qzap.org)

Stonewall Museum & Archive, Ft. Lauderdale, FL  
[stonewall-museum.org](http://stonewall-museum.org)

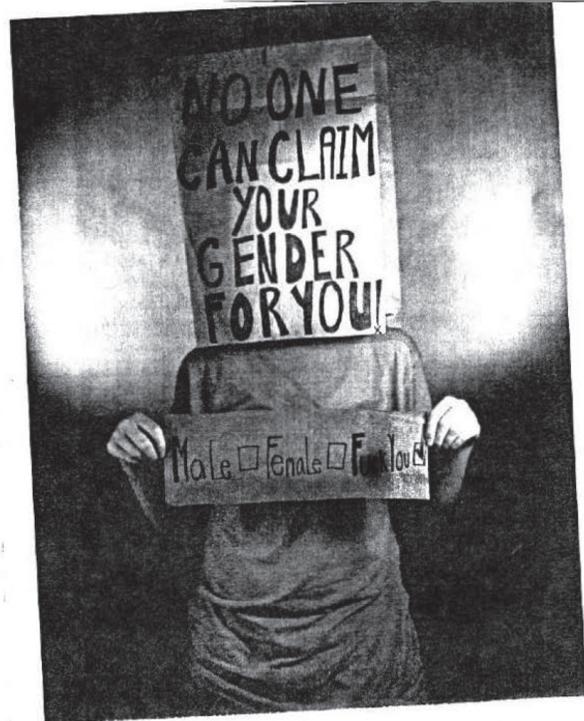
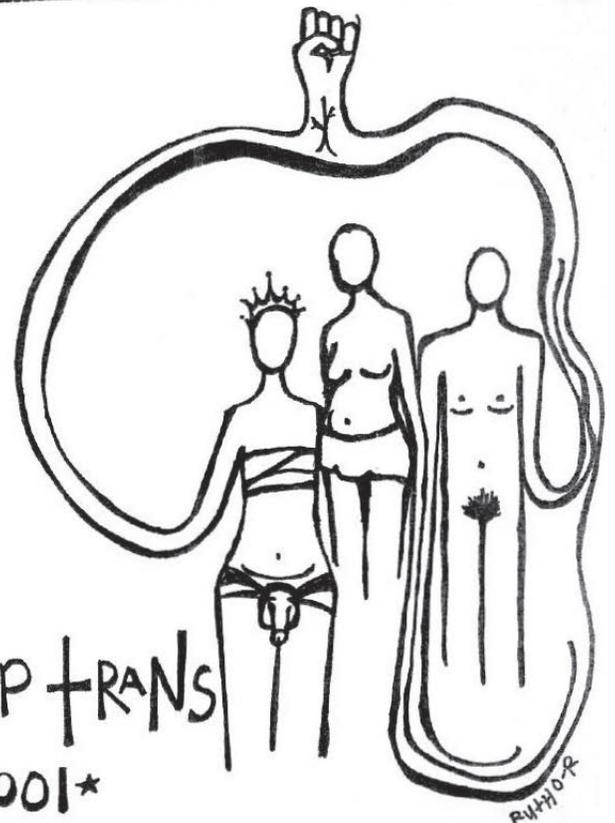


Photo  
by:  
des



Images from Act Up - NY (top) and from Camp Trans 2001 zine (bottom two) available through Queer Zine Archive.

## Community Organizations

Below are a few organizations whose politics, organizing, and programs have helped shape the vision of this book.

Black & Pink  
[blackandpinkpenpals.org](http://blackandpinkpenpals.org)

Brave Space Alliance  
[www.bravespacealliance.org](http://www.bravespacealliance.org)

Chicago Women's Health Center  
[www.chicagowomenshealthcenter.org](http://www.chicagowomenshealthcenter.org)

Dyke March Chicago  
[www.facebook.com/DykeMarchChicago](http://www.facebook.com/DykeMarchChicago)

Familia: Trans Queer  
Liberation Movement  
[familiatqlm.org](http://familiatqlm.org)

Gay Shame  
[gayshame.net](http://gayshame.net)

Lyon-Martin Health Services  
[www.healthright360.org/agency/lyon-martin-health-services](http://www.healthright360.org/agency/lyon-martin-health-services)

Masjid al-Rabia  
[masjidalrabia.org](http://masjidalrabia.org)

Sylvia Rivera Law Project  
[www.srlp.org](http://www.srlp.org)

TransLatin@ Coalition  
[www.translatinacoalition.org](http://www.translatinacoalition.org)

Transformative Justice Law Project  
[www.tjlp.org](http://www.tjlp.org)

Visual AIDS  
[visualaids.org](http://visualaids.org)

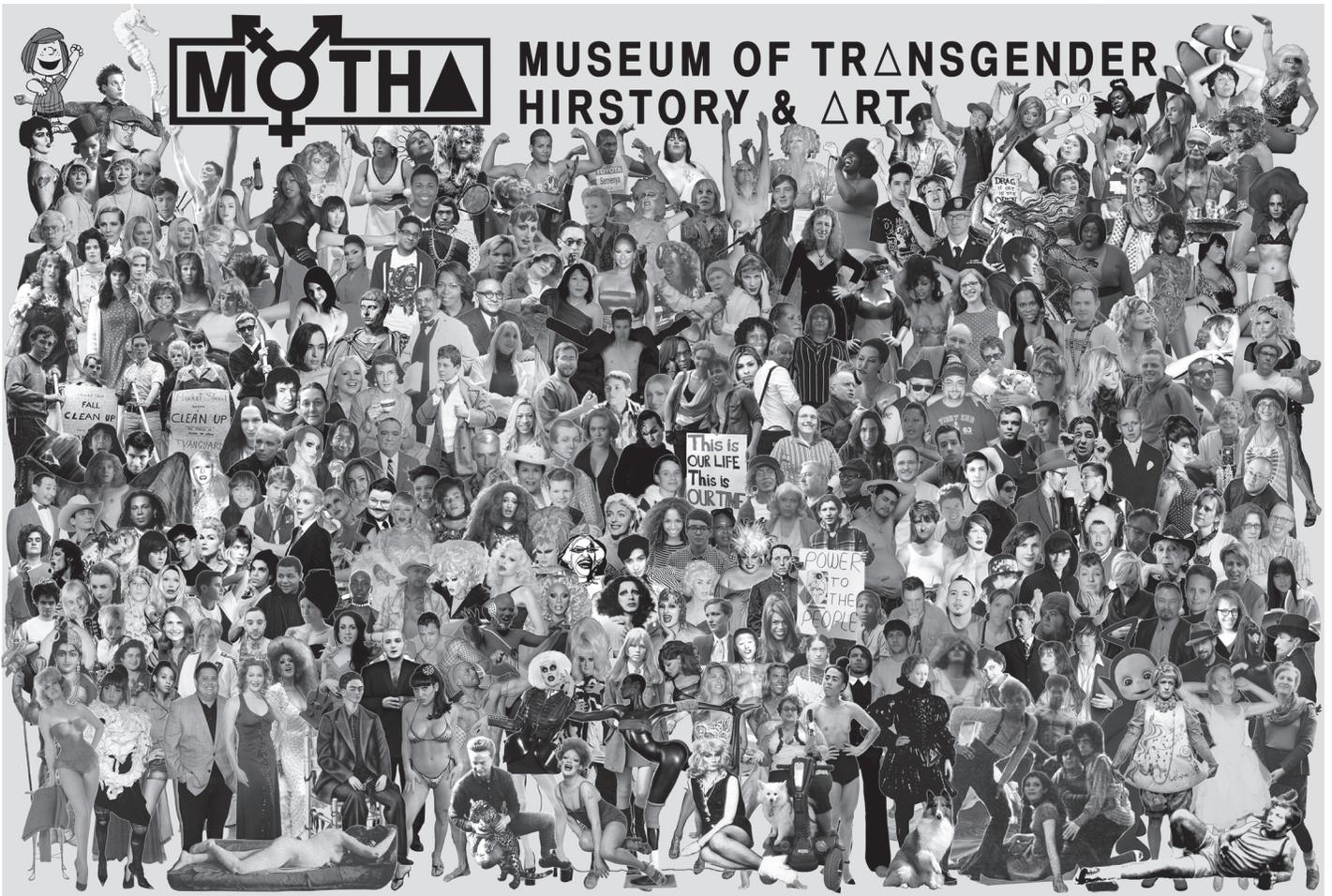
William Way LGBT Community Center  
[www.waygay.org](http://www.waygay.org)



Poster created by MB Stephen for the twentieth anniversary of Chicago's Dyke March

# Introduction Lesson

1. Present students with the collage within the book (on pages 13, 25, 37, and 47). The full collage is available online on the Museum of Transgender History & Art website. Brainstorm and observe the following:



- ◇ Who do you recognize?
- ◇ What objects are included in the collage?
- ◇ What clothing and accessories are people wearing?
- ◇ What types of poses do you notice?
- ◇ What time periods do you think are represented in the collage?
- ◇ Discuss what can be observed AND what is still unknown? Why are these people gathered together in the collage and who is missing? Why is the collage in this book?

2. Read the dedication and first two poems (“There Are Trans People Here” and “On My Way to Liberation”) together to determine the author’s overall purpose and to make three predictions about the collection of poems. Discuss and take collaborative notes on students’ thoughts on the following questions:

◇ How does H. Melt define ancestors and community?

◇ What does liberation mean to you? How do ideas of liberation change and remain the same?

3. Present students with the author’s bio,

“H. Melt is a poet, artist & educator whose work celebrates trans people, history and culture. They are the author of *The Plural*, *The Blurring* and editor of *Subject to Change: Trans Poetry & Conversation*. They were artist in residence at the Newberry Library, researching the Chicago Protest Collection. They’ve taught at 826Chi, the Museum of Contemporary Art, and cofounded Queeriosity at Young Chicago Authors. Lambda Literary awarded them the Judith A. Markowitz Award for Emerging LGBTQ Authors.”

Discuss: How and why do you think H.

Melt celebrates trans people, history, and culture?

Who do you see

celebrated in the culture

(books, movies, music, art)

and history

(classes in school or

with family

at home) around

you? In your own life

and work, who do you want

to celebrate?

4. In the VS Podcast presented

by the Poetry Foundation,

H. Melt states, “so many

of us are writing for

the younger versions

of ourselves.” How might

this book be writing for a

younger version of H. Melt?

Or for young people in general?

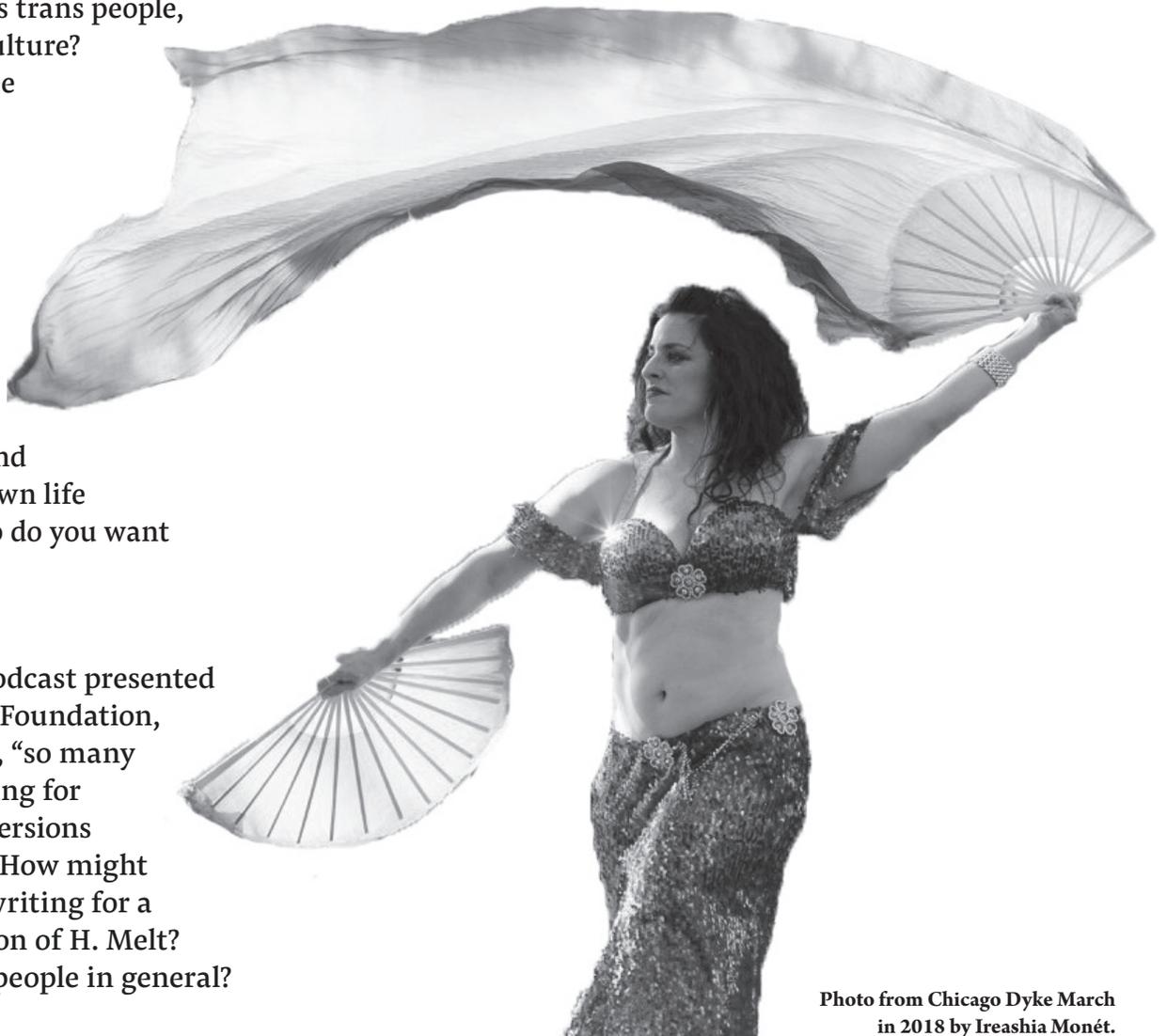


Photo from Chicago Dyke March in 2018 by Ireashia Monét.

# Analytical Projects

1. Imagine you were creating your own collage inspired by the one in the book. Locate a photograph that you would include in your collage of community.

a. Take note of the visual elements:

Setting – Where and when does this image take place?

Objects – What are the relevant possessions, clothing, animals, or text?

Actions – What is happening in the photo or what is being done?

People – Who is depicted – race, gender, class, age? How are they portrayed?

b. Determine the significance of the photograph – Why does it matter to you/us? What has or has not changed since the photograph was taken? What does it reveal about our past, present, or future?

2. Explore the themes of death and the future in *There Are Trans People Here*. In the Afterword, H. Melt writes, “I need to know trans joy exists in order to imagine myself living in the future,” and “transness is inherently futuristic. It requires us to imagine ourselves anew.” What is the relationship between death and the future? Consider the following poems in your analysis:

“There Are Trans People Here,” p. 1

“I Don’t Want a Trans President,” p. 40

“City of Trans Liberation,” p. 26

“Prayer for My Trans Siblings,” p. 49

“On Trans Street,” p. 28

3. How does H. Melt open up the theme of family? What are the connections and contrasts between families of origin and chosen families? How are different types of families in the book tied to sweetness? Consider the following poems in your analysis:

“On My Way to Liberation,” p. 3

“All the Missing Sweetness,” p. 4

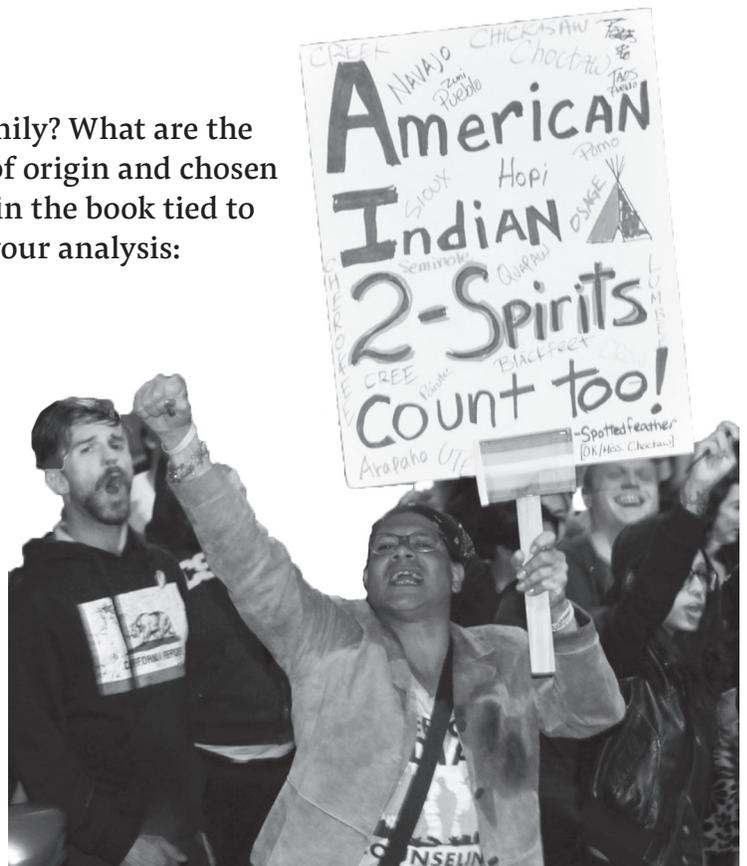
“Trans Care,” p. 6

“Intensive Care,” p. 11

“If You Are Over Cis People,” p. 14

“The Riots Must Continue,” p. 51

4. How is intersectionality present in *There Are Trans People Here*? How do the poems reflect intersectional identities, histories, and present activism?



Marking Transgender Day or Remembrance 2015. Photo by Joshua Barash.

5. In their interview with *Jewish Currents*, H. Melt shared that, “Chicago’s poetry community, especially the youth poetry community, has had a huge influence on me.” How do you see Chicago’s influence in H. Melt’s poetry in *There Are Trans People Here*? How does your geography or sense of home influence you?

6. *There Are Trans People Here* is full of references to people, events, places, and materials. Select a topic from the book that intrigues you for further research. Be sure to craft a clear research question and consult trusted sources to draw your own original conclusions. Here are some examples of research questions:

- ◇ Who are trans ancestors and elders? Consider the legacies of Lou Sullivan, Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, and Miss Major.
- ◇ What are the trans care resources in your community, city, state, or nation? Consider the resources named in the book, especially in the poem “The Most Dangerous Jew in Germany” on p. 44. How are these resources meeting the needs of the trans community? How are trans communities meeting their own needs?
- ◇ In the poem, “I Don’t Want a Trans President” on p. 40, H. Melt brings up the issue of representation. This is a major theme of the film, *Disclosure*, as well. Where do we see transgender representation in our society and where is it lacking? What are the trusted sources of data and information about, by, and affirming of transgender people and their lives?

Marking Transgender Day of Remembrance 2015. Photo by Joshua Barash.



# Creative Projects

1. Create a sketchnote (visual notes or graphic recording that combine handwriting with drawings) on one major theme of or a specific poem from *There Are Trans People Here*. You might focus on one of the following poems:

“On Trans Street,” p. 28

“Trans House,” p. 30

“Take Me to the Trans  
Spa,” p. 31

“Camp Trans,” p. 33

“Trans Museum,” p. 35

“Trans Temple,” p. 48

2. H. Melt writes many poems in response to other poets. Select one of H. Melt’s poems to respond to with your own poem. Here are a few starting points:

In “There Are Trans People Here” on p. 1, H. Melt writes “We are as real & complicated as anyone else.” How are you complicated? Who is “here” in your life that might not be fully seen?

After “Trans Care” on p. 6, who cares for you? How do you care for yourself?

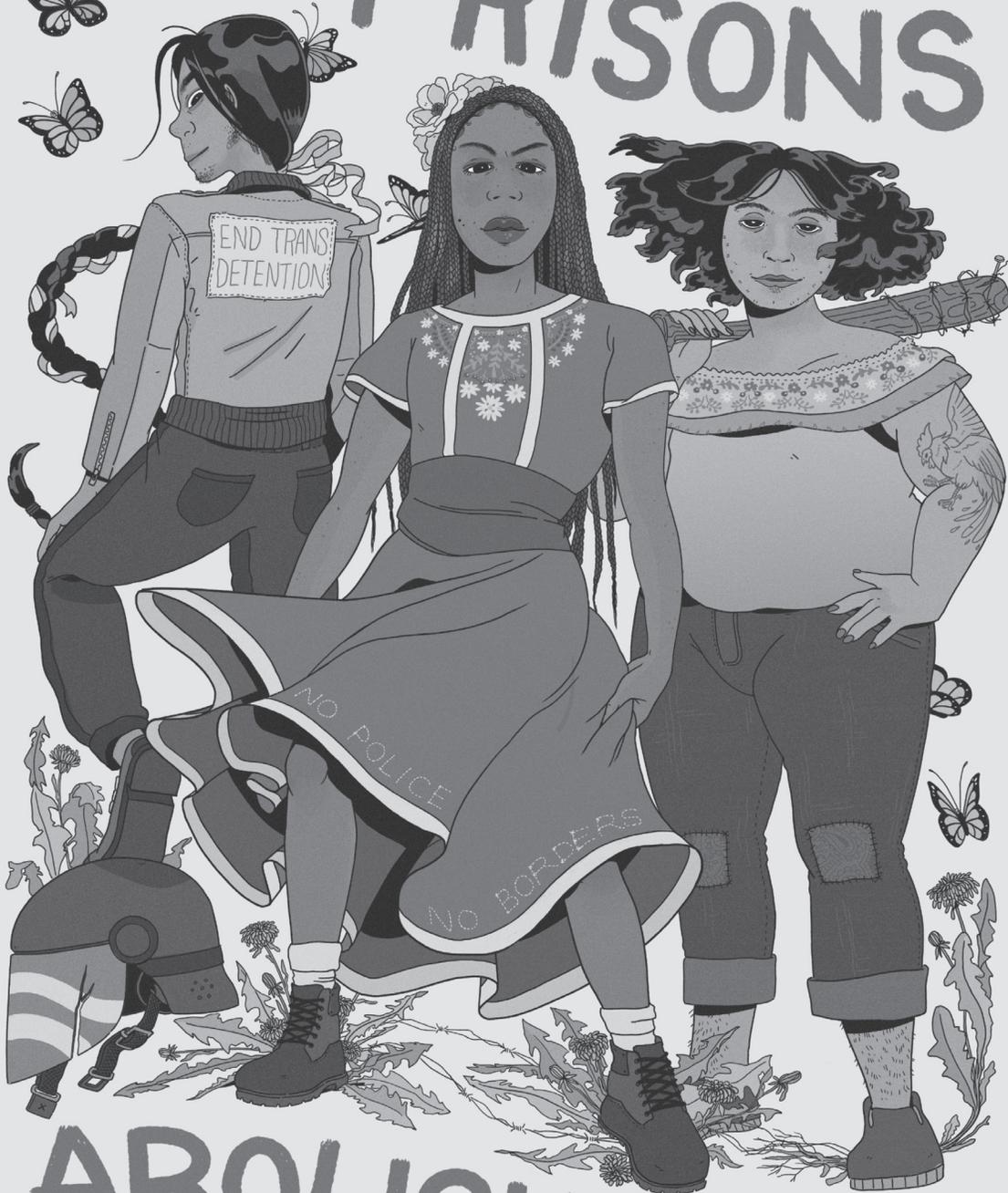
In the Afterword, H. Melt writes, “in poems like ‘On My Way to Liberation’ and ‘The Riots Must Continue,’ I merge my familial and trans ancestries. I am tracing my own lineage, one that embraces trans beauty, brilliance, and resistance.” Who are your familial and found ancestors? How are they woven together into your lineage?

3. Who in your life has a story that connects to the poems in *There Are Trans People Here*? Listen to, watch or read an interview from an oral history project. Examples include: the Act Up Oral History Project (and the corresponding film *United in Anger*), the Dragon Fruit Project, the podcast *Gender Reveal*, Outwords, and the Tretter Transgender Oral History Project. Record an oral history with someone in your life like a friend, a relative, or a community member. Share it with text, drawings, audio or video.

4. Create an artifact of abolition, liberation, or community care. As H. Melt writes in the Afterword, “We are reimagining our communities one garden, march, protest, lesson plan, name change, and poster at a time.” What would your poster or flag be? Consider the following resources:

- ◇ Monica Helms’ transgender pride flag
- ◇ Trans Day of Resilience Art Project
- ◇ Aram Han Sifuentes’ the Protest Banner Lending Library
- ◇ Justseeds’ Celebrate People’s History poster series
- ◇ Matthew Riemer & Leighton Brown’s @lgbt\_history Instagram archive
- ◇ ONE Archives Foundation digital collection of posters

# DISMANTLE PRISONS



# ABOLISH I.C.E.

Dandelions and Butterflies, by art twink, created in collaboration with Familia: Trans Queer Liberation Movement in 2018



ART TWINK

5. In the Afterword, H. Melt writes,

“In ‘City of Trans Liberation,’ I dreamt of public art dedicated to trans elders. Other people must’ve imagined this too. A few years after writing that poem, She Built NYC announced plans to install permanent statues of Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson in New York. When I learned about this, it was a reminder that dreaming and action are both required to transform the world.”

What other people and events in history do you think should be commemorated and how? What event, exhibit, museum, monument, public space, organization, or public resource do you think should be created to honor them? Create your vision.



Laura Jane Grace performing with Against Me! in Paris in 2017. Photo by Stéphane Burlot

6. H. Melt refers to music throughout their poetry including music from Juliana Huxtable, Laura Jane Grace, Billy Tipton, and G.L.O.S.S. Create a playlist for *There Are Trans People Here*. How might it include historical and contemporary selections? Present your playlist in print, digital, or live format.

# Common Core Standards

The Common Core standards focus on English Language Arts, and include an approach to building literacy through History/Social Studies. Whenever appropriate, both middle school and high school standards have been included.

## Reading

- ◇ CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2  
Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- ◇ CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4  
Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

## Writing

- ◇ CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.1  
Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- ◇ CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.7  
Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

## Speaking and Listening

- ◇ CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1  
Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

## History/Social Studies

- ◇ CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6  
Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

# State Standards

As standards at the state level will vary, we have included two examples. The first is from Illinois, whose standards are skills-based. The second is from California, whose standards are content-based.

## Illinois

### *Inquiry*

SS.IS.4.6–8.MdC: Determine the credibility of sources based upon origin, authority and context.

SS.IS.4.9–12: Gather and evaluate information from multiple sources while considering origin, credibility, point of view, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources.

SS.IS.8.6–8.MdC: Assess individual and collective capacities to take action to address problems and identify potential outcomes.

SS.IS.8.9–12: Use interdisciplinary lenses to analyze the causes and effects of and identify solutions to local, regional, or global concerns

### *History*

SS.H.1.6–8.MdC: Analyze connections among events and developments in historical contexts.

SS.H.2.6–8.MdC: Analyze multiple factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras

SS.H.1.9–12: Evaluate how historical developments were shaped by time and place as well as broader historical contexts.

SS.H.2.9–12: Analyze change and continuity within and across historical eras.

## California State Standards for Social Studies

8.1 Students understand the major events preceding the founding of the nation and relate their significance to the development of American constitutional democracy.

11.10 Students analyze the development of federal civil rights and voting rights.

11.11 Students analyze the major social problems and domestic policy issues in contemporary American society.

12.2 Students evaluate and take and defend positions on the scope and limits of rights and obligations as democratic citizens, the relationships among them, and how they are secured.

12.8 Students evaluate and take and defend positions on the influence of the media on American political life.









