



“We Wanted the Booth!” — Deborah Johnson and Zandra Rolón Amato

Introduction

In 1983, when lesbian couple Deborah Johnson and Zandra Rolón Amato were denied seating at Papa Choux, a Los Angeles restaurant, they filed a suit for unlawful discrimination. This lesson explores the story behind the lawsuit and addresses themes of intersectionality, oppression, civil rights, and the LGBTQ+ social justice movement. It is a story of agency and action not included in traditional history books.

This lesson was created as part of the Making Gay History / National Education Association Teaching Fellowship. Each lesson specifically uses a podcast episode and related resources from the *Making Gay History* podcast. These lessons have been created so that teachers across the country have the context and tools to bring archival audio from the *Making Gay History* podcast into middle and high school classrooms.

The *Making Gay History* podcast brings LGBTQ+ history to life through the voices of the people who lived it. We strive to create a world where everyone understands, respects, and honors the experiences and histories of LGBTQ+ people by providing engaging and accessible entry points to their largely hidden history. The podcast is hosted by historian and journalist Eric Marcus, who has been documenting LGBTQ+ history for more than 35 years.

Grade Level

Grades 9-12.

Disciplines / Unit Recommendations

This lesson was created for an Intersectional Ethnic Studies elective course or a U.S. History course. It was taught during a unit on intersectionality and women’s roles in social justice movements throughout U.S. history.

The lesson is also suitable for American Literature courses. It was piloted in an AP English Language and Composition course as preparation for a unit of intersectional readings to increase student understanding of essential ideas of privilege, domination, and oppression. It has also been taught in a college course on women, gender, and sexuality.

Estimated Time

This lesson was created to be taught in three class periods of 50 minutes each.

Preparation

Note: It is recommended that you double-check all links as some may shift since they are not hosted by Making Gay History directly. If you come across any broken links, please let us know at hello@makinggayhistory.org.

- ☐ Listen to ***Making Gay History, Season 3, Ep. 5: Deborah Johnson & Zandra Rolón Amato***. bit.ly/mgh-johnson-rolon

Note: As the teacher, you know your students and teaching situation best. It is always advised to listen to the full podcast episode individually before playing it for or assigning it to your students, just as you would review any text for classroom use. The *Making Gay History* podcast is produced for an adult audience and the episode used in this lesson contains profanity. Read the [episode transcript](#) for any words that might be inappropriate for your students.

- ☐ Review and/or familiarize yourself with the concept of Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw:
 - ☐ Watch the video [“Intersectionality 101”](#) (Learning for Justice/YouTube; 3 min.).
Optional: Prepare to share the video with students.
 - ☐ Review the [“Intersectionality Wheel”](#) (“Intersecting Axes of Privilege, Domination, and Oppression” diagram adapted from Kathryn Pauly Morgan).
- ☐ Review and/or familiarize yourself with the concept of oppression and the “Four I’s of Oppression” (ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized) by watching the video [“Four I’s of Oppression”](#) (Western Justice Center/YouTube; 3 min.).
Note: If you choose to share the video with students, a link to it is included in the lesson slideshow.
- ☐ Review the [lesson slideshow](#). Click the speaker icons on Slides 3 and 8 to make sure you’re able to play the embedded podcast excerpts. As a backup, links to the audio files can be found in the slides’ presenter notes or in the “Lesson Plan” section below.

- ☐ Make copies for students of the following handouts:
 - ☐ Transcripts of [part 1](#) and [part 2](#) of the podcast episode

Note 1: The transcripts reflect the authentic speech of the interviewees. If you prefer that your students not see written profanity, you may choose to redact those words before making copies.

Note 2: As part of the lesson, students are asked to annotate the transcripts. If you'd like to review those annotations, you may want to have your students staple the transcripts to the Part One worksheet and the Part Two worksheet, respectively, for easier collection.
 - ☐ [Part One worksheet](#)
 - ☐ [Part Two worksheet](#)
 - ☐ [Part Three worksheet](#)
 - ☐ [Part Three documents](#)
- ☐ Optional: Make student copies of the [Part Three one-pager template](#).

Note: As outlined in the Lesson Plan below, instead of providing students with printouts of the one-pager template, you can also project the template so students can recreate it on a sheet of flip chart paper or in their journals, or you can have them create their own one-pager without a template.

Background

In the early 1980s, the LGBTQ+ community in Los Angeles was increasing in visibility. There were a growing number of events, clubs, and bars that provided safe spaces for members of the LGBTQ+ community. LGBTQ+ activism was also on the rise; for example, AIDS Project Los Angeles was founded in 1983 to mobilize grassroots responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Yet, despite these advances, there was ongoing harassment and discrimination.

This lesson focuses on Deborah Johnson and Zandra Rolón Amato, a Black and Latina lesbian couple who in 1983 went out to dinner at Papa Choux, a restaurant known for its romantic dining experience. In the podcast episode that anchors the lesson, students will hear about Johnson and Rolón Amato's personal connections to other civil rights movements, and their direct experience of discrimination when the restaurant refused to seat them in one of its romantic booths (despite their having made a reservation).

In their lawsuit against the restaurant manager, Johnson and Rolón Amato were represented by civil rights attorney Gloria Allred, who later became famous for taking on and winning high-profile and often controversial cases, particularly those involving feminist causes. They

sued Papa Choux for violation of the Unruh Civil Rights Act, a California state law enacted in 1959 that provides protection from discrimination by business establishments in California. Though they won the case and brought visibility to a discriminatory practice, the restaurant ultimately removed the booths rather than follow the court's ruling that it was unlawful to discriminate against same-sex couples.

For more information on Gloria Allred, visit [her website](#).

For more information on the Unruh Civil Rights Act, see [this factsheet](#) from the State of California Civil Rights Department (for Chinese, Korean, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese versions, see the "Discrimination Is Against the Law" brochures at the bottom of [this webpage](#)).

Deborah Johnson and Zandra Rolón Amato's case is included in the article ["5 Fun Facts That You May Not Know About Pride"](#) by Adreayn Torrez (Girls Empowerment Network).

Lesson Plan

Part One

1. Distribute the [Part One worksheet](#) and the [transcript of the first part of the podcast episode](#) featuring Deborah Johnson and Zandra Rolón Amato.
2. **Task #1** (Slide 2): Project the image of Johnson and Rolón Amato and give students time to answer the "See, Think, Wonder" questions on the worksheet:
 - a. What do you see in the image? (List three to four things you see.)
 - b. When do you think this image was taken? Why do you think this image was taken?
 - c. What are two questions you have about this image?
3. After students have answered the "See, Think, Wonder" questions independently, have them think-pair-share their answers and/or allow time for a few students to share their answers with the whole class.
4. *From the author: If students are unfamiliar with the "Intersectionality Wheel" (included on Slide 4 and page 2 of the worksheet), it is important to review it with them before moving on to Task #2.*

Optional: Show the 3-minute video ["Intersectionality 101."](#)

5. **Task #2** (Slide 3): Tell students they are about to hear the first part of a podcast episode featuring Johnson and Rolón Amato, in which they introduce themselves and set the stage for the remainder of the story. Explain that, as they listen, students will be expected to annotate the transcript as follows, focusing on Johnson and Rolón Amato’s intersectionality and their social identities:
 - a. CIRCLE unfamiliar words;
 - b. HIGHLIGHT social identity descriptors (referencing the “Intersectionality Wheel” for examples);
 - c. UNDERLINE what stands out the MOST about their stories.Click the speaker icon to play [the first part of the episode](#) (8 min.).
6. **Task #3** (Slide 4): Have students work independently or with a partner, or lead a whole-class discussion to highlight and label the Intersectionality Wheel on the worksheet based on what students learned about Johnson and Rolón Amato from the first part of the episode. Example: Highlight “LGBTQ” and label it “BOTH” or write both names. Note: If you’d like to demonstrate how the Intersectionality Wheel should be marked up, you can use [this PDF](#) with a document camera.
7. **Task #4** (Slide 5): Project the image of Johnson and Rolón Amato in front of the Papa Choux sign again. Have students write a two- to three-sentence prediction on the worksheet about what might have happened to the couple when they went to have dinner at the Papa Choux restaurant and how it might connect to the image.

Part Two

1. Distribute the [Part Two worksheet](#) and the [transcript of the second part of the podcast episode](#).
2. Introduce or review the concept of the “Four I’s of Oppression.”
 - a. If this is a new concept for your students,
 - i. show them the 3-minute video, [“Four I’s of Oppression”](#) (embedded on Slide 6), which explains and defines the four forms of oppression;
 - ii. or provide them with the definitions on Slide 7:
 - Ideological oppression is the idea that one social identity group is better than another.
 - Institutional oppression is the way that systems and institutions manifest the dominant ideology.

- Interpersonal oppression is the way that people play out discrimination and violence on each other.
- Internalized oppression is the way that people with marginalized identities internalize narratives of their own inferiority.

b. If your class has previously discussed and analyzed the concept, invite students to share examples they have already studied as a review.

Note: The worksheet has space for students to fill out the definitions to use as a reference while completing Task #1.

3. **Task #1** (Slide 8): Tell students that they will now hear the second part of the podcast episode, in which Johnson and Rolón Amato tell the story of their experience at Papa Choux. Explain that, as they listen, students will be expected to annotate the transcript as follows, focusing on the forms of oppression Johnson and Rolón Amato encountered:
 - a. CIRCLE unfamiliar words;
 - b. HIGHLIGHT oppression experienced;
 - c. UNDERLINE what stands out the MOST about their story.

Click the speaker icon to play [the second part of the episode](#) (9 min.).

4. **Task #2** (Slide 9): Have students work independently or with a partner, or lead a whole-class discussion to complete the "Four I's of Oppression" chart on the worksheet with examples of the forms of oppression that Johnson and Rolón Amato experienced, as told in the episode.

Examples: Institutional oppression = not allowed to sit in the booths at Papa Choux;
interpersonal oppression = staff at Papa Choux were lying about their job roles.

5. **Task #3** (Slides 10-12):
 - a. Have students work independently or with a partner, or lead the class in reading the two primary sources included on the worksheet (*Los Angeles Times* articles from June 10, 1983, and June 24, 1983).
 - b. Have students complete the "Head, Heart, Conscience" questions on the worksheet using the two sources and Johnson and Rolón Amato's interview:
 - i. What new information did you learn from these two primary sources? What additional information would you like to have to help you understand the event better?
 - ii. What moments of the story stand out to you and why? What emotions did this event raise for you?
 - iii. What questions about fairness, equity, or justice does Deborah Johnson and Zandra Rolón Amato's experience raise for you? What choices did they make, and what values might have guided those choices?

6. Depending on time available, have students think-pair-share their answers with a partner and/or have a few students share their answers with the whole class.

Part Three

1. Distribute the [documents handout](#), [worksheet](#), and, if using, the [one-pager template](#) for Part Three of the lesson.
2. Optional: Before beginning Task #1, have students summarize (recall) with a partner and/or with the whole class what they have learned about Johnson and Rolón Amato and their experience at the Papa Choux restaurant.
3. **Task #1** (Slides 13-14):
 - a. Have students work independently, with a partner, or in a small group, or lead the class in reading the five primary sources in the documents handout (three are new; the other two are the same as in Part Two).
 - b. For each of the primary sources, have students complete the following on the worksheet:
 - i. Sourcing: Type of source, author(s), date.
 - ii. Identify a WORD that captured your attention or was powerful.
 - iii. Identify a PHRASE that was meaningful or significant to you.
 - iv. Identify a SENTENCE that connects to the main idea or helps you gain a better understanding of Deborah Johnson and Zandra Rolón Amato's story.
4. **Task #2** (Slide 15): Have students work independently, with a partner, or in a small group to create a one-pager using quotes and/or evidence from the podcast episode and the primary source documents.
 - a. The one-pager can take several forms. Decide whether to assign one form to all students or to let students choose one or more of the following options:
 - i. Students write directly on the provided template, as an additional worksheet.
 - ii. Students recreate the simple format of the template (Slide 16) on a sheet of flip chart paper (if working as a group) or in their journal (if working individually).
 - iii. Students create their own one-pager without a template. As part of creating their design, invite students to consider how its visual imagery, organization, and even colors can be used to more clearly convey the answers to the key questions.

- b. Regardless of format, the one-pager should answer the following questions:
- What qualities did Deborah Johnson and Zandra Rolón Amato display that could be considered beneficial for activism?
 - What small steps did Deborah Johnson and Zandra Rolón Amato take to fight oppression?
 - How were Deborah Johnson and Zandra Rolón Amato seen by others?
 - Who were the allies of Deborah Johnson and Zandra Rolón Amato?

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Christine Sardo has been teaching History-Social Science classes in southern California for the last 17 years. She is part of a school district team tasked with implementing Intersectional Ethnic Studies courses and lessons for TK-12 and has taught a high school Intersectional Ethnic Studies elective course for the last two years. She is also one of the advisors to her school's GSA (Genders & Sexualities Alliance) club.