

OUT[®] FOR SAFE SCHOOLS

LGBTQ+ History Lesson

Inquiry Question: What role did female impersonations in various soldier camp performances play in allowing soldiers to explore their identity?

Standard: 10.6.3 & 10.6.4



Inquiry Question:

What role did female impersonations in various soldier camp performances play in allowing soldiers to explore their identity?

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Content Standards

10.6.3 Understand the widespread disillusionment with prewar institutions, authorities, and values that resulted in a void that was later filled by totalitarians.

10.6.4 Discuss the influence of World War I on literature, art, and intellectual life in the West (e.g., Pablo Picasso, the “lost generation” of Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway).

CCSS Standards:**Reading, Grades 10-11**

RH 9-10.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

RH 9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

Overview of Lesson

Students will engage in quote analysis, photo analysis, letter reading, and collaborative group discussions to answer the inquiry question, understanding the role that cross-dressing played in various soldier camps during World War I.

Sources

- Scholarly Article Excerpts
- Letter from Soldier Camps in WWI
- Postcards
- Photos

Procedures

1. The teacher will hand each student a quote from the article "'Best Love': Female impersonation in the Great War," to read as they get to their seats.
2. The teacher will review the standard and objective of the lesson and introduce the inquiry question: *What role did impersonations in various soldier camp performances play in allowing soldiers to explore their identity?*
3. The teacher will ask students to read the quotes they received at the beginning of the class until each quote has been read aloud at least once to the class. In a whole class discussion, the teacher will clarify any unclear phrases and lead a short discussion on the

context of the quotes, making connections to any previous lessons and discussions on World War I.

4. The teacher will have students get into groups of 4 and hand out a folder with photos and soldier letter excerpts to review and share. In groups, students will make observations on photos and annotate soldier letters. They will use each document to develop responses for the following questions: *What role did impersonations in various soldier camp performances play in allowing soldiers to explore their identity? What myths about the military, soldiers, theatre or war are challenged through exploring these soldier camp performances?*
5. Each group has 3-5 minutes to present their findings to the rest of the class and discuss how their findings relate to the inquiry question.
6. The teacher will regroup the class to debrief the students' findings and challenge myths about cross-dressing during World War I.

Assessment

Students will complete an exit ticket, addressing the inquiry question in 2-3 complete sentences. These will be collected on their way out the classroom. Teacher will review these to address the gaps in learning the next day.

Bibliography

Scholarly Article

"'Best Love': Female impersonation in the Great War." Sigel, Lisa Z. 2016. *Sexualities*, Vol. 19.

Primary Sources

Ralph W. Judd collection on cross-dressing in the performing arts, Box 36, ONE Archives at the USC Libraries.

News Report

BBC Radio, World War I: The Cultural Front, An Intimate Front, World War I Female Impersonators; <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p05djkd/p05djknf>



Source A: "'Best Love': Female impersonation in the Great War." Sigel, Lisa Z. 2016. *Sexualities*, Vol. 19.

Quotes from "'Best Love...'" to be cut and handed out as students walk in.

"On Christmas day an exhibition of all the inventions was held, and entrance money, what you liked to give, was charged, which went to the French Red Cross. An officer dressed up as a nurse held the collecting box near the door; yellow straw hair, pink cheeks, very red lips, and a false bust decollete gave the personator a very meretricious appearance. When I appeared 'she' threw 'her' arms around me and kissed me on both cheeks, amid great laughter and cries of 'Vive l'entente'."

"...female impersonation became commonplace in Europe during the Great War. Because front lines and prison camps were places cut off from daily life and normal society, men in both locations stepped up to play female roles, or so the story goes."

"The Great War remains central to Queer Studies because it brought masses of men into close contact with each other outside of the structures of daily life. Men, removed from their families, occupations, and communities, nonetheless brought with them ideas of gender and sexuality freed from the usual contexts that moored them."

"The war brought men who had never seen a play into contact with experienced players and men with sophisticated vocabularies for sexual variation into contact with those with no sophistication in sexuality or culture. Female impersonation became a surprisingly popular way for individuals to communicate in this context."

"The practice [of cross-dressing] became a medium in its own right for men to think through performance about masculinity, femininity, mothers, lovers, sexuality, and pleasure. The radically new context also expanded what female impersonation meant. In a context defined by regimentation, boredom, and restriction at best or brutality, violence, and horrors at worst, cross-dressing rejected boundaries and became a coping strategy that stressed malleability."

"Before the Great War, British society had afforded a surprising latitude for men dressing as women and women dressed as men. The theater, for example, had a tradition of cross-dressing woven into its history...Cross-dressing was played for comedy and burlesque, and continued to be a redolent form of humor in British film and theater."

"Although popular images of the war stress brutality, horror, and death, scholars have recently discussed the ways that periods of intense fighting alternated with stagnation and boredom. Some men never saw the front at all; others rotated back and forth between the front and supply trenches...each space brought its own emotional demands."



