

Silence = Death: Confronting the AIDS Epidemic

Lesson Questions

What was the message of the “Silence = Death” poster? How was it part of the larger AIDS activist movement?

Lesson Task: In this lesson students examine the 1987 “Silence = Death” poster and read a primary source document about the poster and AIDS activism during that era. The lesson culminates in students writing a three-paragraph essay that explains the message of the poster and how it was part of the larger AIDS activist movement.

The main goal of this lesson is to support students in investigating the “Silence=Death” image and its role in the larger AIDS activist movement within a particular moment of time in U.S. history.

We anticipate that this image and the history it represents will be unfamiliar to most middle school students. While gay rights activists continue to fight for equity in the United States, the widespread, vitriolic, and publicly accepted homophobia that existed in the mid-1980s will not be the lived experience for most middle schoolers. In addition, while HIV-AIDS continues to be a disease of concern in the United States and the world, the intense public fear and stigmatization associated with HIV-AIDS has, to some extent, dissipated.

In order to deeply understand this image and the larger goals and actions of the AIDS activist movement, it will be particularly important to help students read the lesson documents within their historical context.

An additional goal of this lesson is to help students with the skills of understanding how the craft and structure of a document (in this case the design and symbols of the poster) communicate a specific message.

As students read and analyze the documents, their notes will be organized by:

- The messages in the poster
- The connection between the poster and the AIDS activist movement

NAEP Era: 8. Contemporary America (1945 to Present)

Focal Skill: Reading for point of view and purpose

Number of Documents: 2

Number of Days: 4–6

Common Core Standards

- CC reading standard (primary): RHSS.6-8.2 Identify the central ideas or information of a primary source
- CC reading standard (secondary): RHSS.6-8.6 Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author’s point of view or purpose
- CC writing standard: WHSS.6-8.2 Write informative/explanatory texts

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[Suggested time: ½ session]

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[Suggested time: 1–2 sessions]

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OVERVIEW

[Suggested time: 5 minutes]

Content Objectives

Students will understand the purpose of the “Silence = Death” poster and the larger role it played in the AIDS activist movement during the 1980s.

Discrimination against gays and lesbians has a long history in the U.S. and globally. This prejudice was one reason the government initially failed to address the AIDS crisis.

The “Silence = Death” Poster became the central image of the AIDS activist movement in the 1980s and drew attention to the crisis. The poster argued for gays and lesbians to take a stand for their rights and to force the government to fight against HIV-AIDS.

AIDS activists used the poster to change people’s opinions about HIV-AIDS, raise money and awareness to fight the epidemic, and to force the public to confront the fact that gays and lesbians were being discriminated against and that many were dying from HIV-AIDS.

Historical Thinking Objectives

- Close Reading
- Contextualization
- Sourcing

Skill Objectives

- *(Reading)* Identifying main ideas and details
- *(Reading)* Analyzing craft and structure to determine an author’s purpose
- *(Writing)* Using evidence to support main ideas

Instructional Sequence

Before you begin the lesson you should share a brief agenda with students:

HOOK	Together, we will look at a poster from the 1980s and begin to think about what its message might be.
CONTEXT	We’ll then review some background information about the AIDS epidemic and its connection to discrimination against gays and lesbians at that time.
DOCUMENTS	On your own, you will examine the poster a second time—now with more background information—and read a primary source document about AIDS activists.
CONNECT	We’ll discuss the documents and how they connect to what was happening at this time.
WRITE	You’ll write a three-paragraph explanatory essay in which you will explain the message of the poster and how the poster was used in the AIDS activist movement.

Lesson Background

When HIV-AIDS—a deadly disease that attacks a person’s immune system—arrived in the United States in the early 1980s, it hit the gay and lesbian community the hardest. Unaware of how the disease was transmitted, and without adequate knowledge and resources to tackle its spread, HIV-AIDS quickly became a dangerous public health crisis.

The first efforts to combat and treat the disease in the United States were not effective. Some believed that government agencies like the Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control did not act fast enough to stop the spread of HIV-AIDS because it was viewed as a “gay disease.” Conservative leaders, like the evangelical preacher Jerry Falwell, saw the spread of the disease as justification for what he and others considered to be the immoral lifestyles of gays and lesbians. While many did not hold the same extreme viewpoint, prejudice against gays and lesbians was a factor in the almost systematic inaction of authorities in addressing the AIDS crisis.

Members of the gay and lesbian community (and those who sympathized with their cause) began forming activist organizations dedicated to helping those with HIV-AIDS and stopping its spread. One of the most important organizations was ACT UP—the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power—founded in 1987 from a combination of smaller activist groups in New York City. ACT UP used myriad tactics to call attention to the crisis and to bring about change. Some of their more memorable tactics included “die-in” demonstrations that blocked major roads, and provocative visual images that captured the public’s attention and forced Americans to confront the hardships of those living and dying of HIV-AIDS.

One of the most iconic images to come out of early AIDS activist communities was the “Silence=Death” poster. The stark black image with an inverted pink triangle (an appropriation of a Nazi symbol used to ostracize and demonize gays and lesbians) and the prominent text “Silence = Death” written in white at the bottom was a powerful visual tool. The image was made into billboards, stickers, posters, t-shirts, and a variety of other media. Its message energized and empowered those within and outside of the gay and lesbian community to no longer remain silent about the dangers of the disease, and in doing so, the “Silence=Death” poster became an important symbol of the larger AIDS activist movement.

Student Background Knowledge

Students should understand that:

- There has been a great deal of discrimination against gays and lesbians in many countries and societies throughout history and specifically in the United States during the 20th century.
- HIV-AIDS is a disease that destroys a person’s immune system. Without proper treatment, the disease can be very deadly.
- HIV-AIDS became a public health crisis in the United States in the early 1980s. While many different types of people became infected, HIV-AIDS had a very large impact on the gay and lesbian communities.

THE HOOK

[Suggested time: 10 minutes]

Silence = Death

Purpose

To engage students through the use of a dramatic image.

To introduce the lesson inquiry.

- The poster is visually captivating and provides clear details for students to observe, but raises questions that can't be answered by visual investigation alone. The goal is that, through observation and discussion, a motivation for further research will emerge: What more do we need to know about the historical context and the creator to better understand the message of this poster?



Process

Display the “Silence=Death” poster. (*The Hook image removes text that will appear when students investigate this image again on their own.*)

Tell students that this is a poster from the 1980s.

Have students carefully **observe** the image.

- Some students may have prior knowledge of this image (or parts of it); in this case, invite them to share what they know. If students do not have any prior knowledge of the image, allow them to investigate the image in an open and exploratory manner.
- The focus here is on what students observe and the student-driven questions that may emerge from these observations. Do not provide background historical context at this stage.

Questions you might **ask** to encourage close observation include:

- What do you see? (Words, images)
- What do you notice about this poster’s design? *Key point: “Design” will come up later in a document question, so be sure students understand what is meant by this word.*
 - For example, color, layout, font size, arrangement of images and words, etc.
- What do these words mean?
- What questions do you have about these words?
- Has anyone seen an image of a pink triangle before? Where? What do you know about it? What questions do you have about it? Why might it be on this poster?

After discussing the details of the poster together, **ask** the **Think About It** question: What do you think the message of this poster is?

Ask students to think about the relationship between the poster and the lesson title.

Allow this to be an open discussion rather than try to direct the meaning making. Conflicting or incomplete perspectives are fine at this point in the lesson.

After discussion, **transition** to the lesson questions. **Say** to students:

- We now have a somewhat better understanding of this poster, but do we have a complete understanding of it? We still don't completely understand the message.
- In order to understand historical documents, historians do two key kinds of historical thinking and research. They:
 - **Contextualize**—which is thinking about what else was happening at the time the documents were created, and how documents connect to the larger historical context. And they...
 - **Source**—which is asking questions like, “Who made them? When? What was the creator’s point of view?”
- Today, you will be the historians contextualizing and sourcing this poster in order to understand it more deeply and to understand how it connected to the AIDS activist movement. The first step in contextualizing is to learn a little more about what was happening at the time.
- The big questions we will be investigating are: **What was the message of the “Silence=Death” poster? How was it part of the larger AIDS activist movement?**

TRANSITION TO CONTEXT-SETTING

Transition students to the Context slides by letting them know that they are now going to look in a little more detail at the history of discrimination against gays and lesbians and at what was happening at the time the “Silence = Death” poster was created.

Context slides are intended to serve as a support for a relatively quick “interactive lecture” with students. The goal is to both provide essential background information and engage students’ prior knowledge and thinking.

While you can certainly slow the process down according to your students’ needs, context is not intended to be a “deep dive” into slide images. Documents in the Context slides serve the role of illustrating content, sparking quick observations and reactions, and making abstract ideas more concrete.

CONTEXT

[Suggested time: 25–30 minutes—to be completed in the first session]

Context Overview

The purpose of these slides is to provide the background information that students need in order to fully understand the “Silence = Death” poster and the larger AIDS activist movement.

The five Context slides focus on these ideas:

A Long History of Discrimination—Introduces the use of the pink triangle in Nazi Germany

Discrimination Against Gays and Lesbians in the U.S.—A map that shows where in the U.S. being gay or lesbian was considered a crime in 1980

The Spread of the AIDS Epidemic—Data on the rising rate of HIV-AIDS related deaths in the U.S. from 1981-1991

Homophobia and Government Inaction— Information on the lack of government response in the early years of the AIDS epidemic

Early AIDS Activism—The formation and goals of ACT UP

Slide 1: A LONG HISTORY OF DISCRIMINATION

Purpose

To introduce students to the history of discrimination and oppression faced by gays and lesbians so that they can understand the AIDS activist movement.

To provide historical background information about the pink triangle.

- Later, when students investigate the poster on their own, they will be asked to think about why the poster designers would have inverted the symbol used by the Nazis.

Suggested Process

Read the slide title, introduction and image caption with students.

Ask students to look at the slide image.

Then, **ask** the **Think About It** question: Why did the Nazis sew this kind of badge onto the clothing of gays and lesbians in concentration camps?

Ask students to recall what they might know of other ways that Nazis marked prisoners.

As students discuss the image and question, **provide** the following background information:

The Pink Triangle in Nazi Germany

- The National Socialist (Nazi) Party took power in Germany in 1933. By 1935, Nazis proclaimed that being gay was against the law.
- In 1938, a directive was passed allowing members of the paramilitary SS to arrest gays and imprison them in concentration camps.
- In these forced labor and death camps, the Nazis had developed a very intricate system of identifying prisoners:
 - Each prisoner was assigned a patch to wear on their clothes that described what type of prisoner they were. For instance, Jewish prisoners wore yellow Star of David patches (Jews who were initially not imprisoned were also forced to wear these symbols in public). Red triangles were used to identify political prisoners (communists, anarchists, etc.). Black triangles were used to identify Romas, alcoholics, prostitutes, or anyone deemed “asocial.” There were dozens of possible combinations of symbols.

A Long History of Discrimination



- It is estimated that nearly 100,000 people (mostly men, as German law described homosexuality as being between two men) were imprisoned during the Third Reich for being gay or lesbian, and 50,000 were imprisoned in concentration camps.
- There is no exact number of those gays and lesbians that were killed during the Holocaust, but it is estimated that over 10,000 were killed.

The Pink Triangle in Gay Rights History

- At the height of the gay rights movement in the 1970s the community appropriated the pink triangle (and turned the point upward) as a symbol of gay pride and identity. There is no exact date when this happened, as it occurred organically from within.
- **Note:** During the Documents phase of the lesson students will think about why the gay rights community reappropriated this symbol. If you want, you can raise this question now, or wait to see how students will wrestle with it when they re-examine the poster.

Slide 2: DISCRIMINATION AGAINST GAYS AND LESBIANS IN THE U.S.

Purpose

- To help students understand how widespread discrimination against gays and lesbians was in the U.S. in the 1980s. This is essential in understanding the early inaction of the government in response to AIDS and the motivation of AIDS activists.
 - **Key Point:** While the civil rights of gays and lesbians have been recognized in many domains, the LGBTQ community continues to fight against discrimination.

Suggested Process

Read through the slide title, introduction and map key with students.

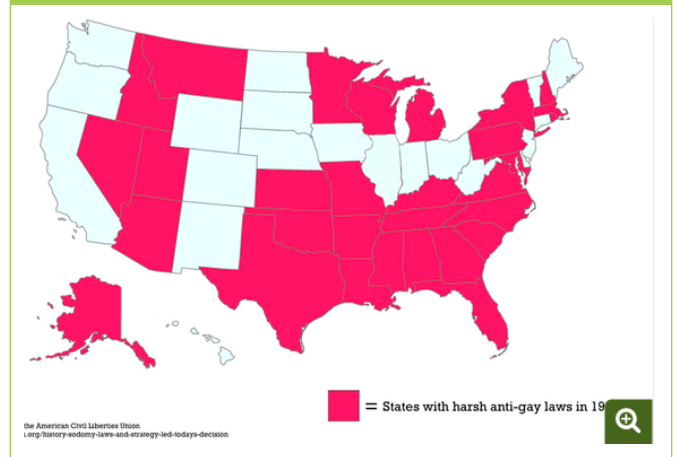
Help students to “read” the map.

Questions you might **ask** include:

- What do the red/pink states represent?
- What do the white states represent?
- **Ask** the **Think About It** question: What do you think are some examples of the ways in which gays and lesbians were discriminated against at this time?

As students discuss the **Think About It** question, **provide** the following background information, as needed:

Map of States with Anti-Gay Laws in 1980



- **Discrimination in government:** As part of the general anxiety associated with 1950s McCarthyism and the Red Scare (the widespread fear that Communists had infiltrated the U.S. government), the U.S. also instituted policies to remove gays and lesbians from government. Later called “The Lavender Scare,” gay and lesbian members of government were forced to resign their positions or face persecution. In 1953, President Eisenhower even issued an Executive Order banning gays and lesbians from working in government.
- **Discrimination in the workforce:** Until 1975, all states in the U.S. allowed discrimination in the workforce based on sexual orientation. The first state to ban this practice was Pennsylvania. Today, there are still 18 states that do not specifically prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation.
- **Discrimination in the medical community:** The medical community also discriminated against gays and lesbians. In 1952, for instance, the American Psychiatric Association listed homosexuality as a mental disorder. Homosexuality remained in the publication as a mental disorder until 1973.
- **Hate crimes:** Public fear and legal discrimination led to widespread harassment of and violence against gays and lesbians.

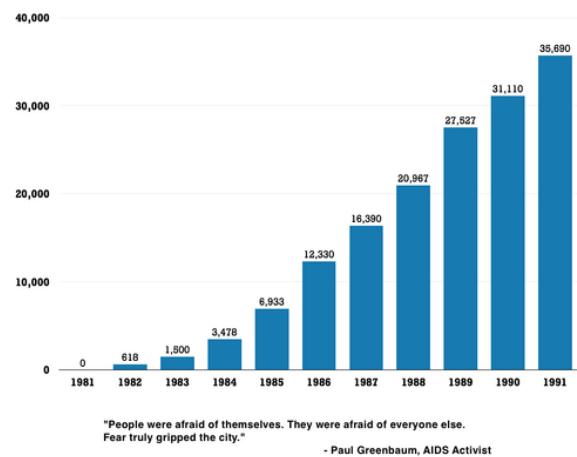
Slide 3: THE SPREAD OF THE AIDS EPIDEMIC

Purpose

To help students understand the urgency of AIDS activists in the 1980s. It also serves to make the connection between the early years of the AIDS epidemic and the gay and lesbian community.

- **Key Point:** HIV-AIDS does not discriminate. It impacts a broadly diverse range of people, but stereotypically, has been seen by many as a disease of the gay community. It will be important to help students understand the devastating impact that HIV-AIDS had on the gay community, while at the same time ensuring that they understand that the disease never was limited to this community.
- **Key Point:** Students may think that this is a disease we no longer need to worry about, so it may be important to note that we have not eradicated HIV-AIDS. Death rates have declined, but HIV-AIDS continues to impact communities in the United States and abroad.

Deaths from AIDS in the U.S., 1981–1991



Suggested Process

Read through the slide title and introduction with students.

Support students in decoding the graph, asking question such as:

- What do the x and y-axes of this graph represent?
- What are these bars? What does it mean that they are getting bigger over time?

- What does this tell us?

Clarify that these deaths represent total U.S. deaths, not just deaths within the gay community, (though the gay community was hit very hard by this disease).

Ask the **Think About It** question: What does this graph tell us about HIV-AIDS?

As students discuss the graph and question, **provide** background information:

- Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a virus that attacks a person's immune system, the part of the body that fights off other diseases and infections. HIV can lead to Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), which can destroy a person's immune system, leaving them vulnerable to any infection. Without the ability to fight off even the smallest of infections, AIDS can be a very dangerous and deadly disease.
- AIDS was first diagnosed in the U.S. in 1980. As it was a new disease that spread very quickly, the medical community was initially unable to properly diagnose and treat it. This led to an extremely high mortality rate for those infected, and by the mid-1980s the disease had become an epidemic.
- In the early years of the epidemic, fear and rumors were rampant. The disease was labeled the "gay cancer" for the large number of gays who contracted the disease, but the gay community was not the only group hit hard by the epidemic.
- The virus is spread by contact with only a few types of bodily fluids, including blood. Therefore, people receiving blood transfusions, or anyone sharing a needle with an infected person, were at risk.
- Methods of transmitting the disease were not clear early on, however, so populations who were at risk were unaware of how the disease was spread. Confusion over methods of transmission, combined with a lack of treatment and high mortality rate, led to a great amount of fear.
- Unfounded rumors that the virus could be transmitted simply by contact with an infected person led to widespread panic. One famous incident was the case of Ryan White, a teenager from Indiana who was expelled from school when officials learned he had AIDS. White contracted the disease during a blood transfusion while being treated for hemophilia. White became a national spokesperson and symbol of the hysteria surrounding the epidemic, before dying in 1990 at the age of 18.
- Today, more than 1.2 million Americans have the disease, and over 650,000 have died.

Slide 4: HOMOPHOBIA AND GOVERNMENT INACTION

Purpose

To help students understand the connection between widespread homophobia and the initial lack of response to the AIDS epidemic.

To introduce some government agencies that students need to be familiar with when they investigate the poster on their own.

Suggested Process

Read through the slide title and text.

Homophobia and Government Inaction



"AIDS is not just God's punishment for homosexuals. It is God's punishment for the society that tolerates homosexuals."

- Jerry Falwell, a Christian pastor and political figure

Have students **read** the poster and Falwell quote.

Provide additional background information describing how homophobia and government inaction were interconnected:

- The social conservatism of the Reagan administration combined with the growth in the Christian right was a dangerous combination for the gay and lesbian community. When the AIDS epidemic struck, social conservatives were quick to dismiss the epidemic as a problem only affecting people they considered to be immoral.
- President Ronald Reagan did not even mention AIDS publically until 1986—six years after the crisis began.
- Jerry Falwell was a prominent Christian pastor and political figure. He and many other influential politicians of the era equated gays and lesbians with being sinful, and the AIDS epidemic as being punishment for their lifestyle. While this was certainly not the case for all social conservatives, Falwell's opinions were an openly homophobic perspective and represented a popular belief about the disease's origins.
- Partially due to the stigma associated with the disease, government was not quick to act on the epidemic.
 - Many felt that the Centers for Disease Control did not adequately address the epidemic, nor do enough to contain its spread or educate Americans about transmission and/or proper treatment.
 - People also felt that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) was not moving quickly enough to approve drugs for treatment. When, in 1987, the FDA finally approved AZT, a drug to treat the disease, it met with little success. AZT was a very expensive, very poisonous, and ultimately rather ineffective drug treatment for the disease.
 - This level of systemic inaction left many in the gay and lesbian community feeling abandoned by the government.

Ask students the **Think About It** question: Why does this poster say “The government has blood on its hands”?

Allow students to **discuss** the question. **Ask** follow-up questions such as:

- In what ways did homophobia influence the government's response to the AIDS crisis?

Slide 5: EARLY AIDS ACTIVISM

Purpose

To provide students with background information about the AIDS activist movement.

Suggested Process

Read through the slide title, introduction and text with students.

Early AIDS Activism



An ACT UP protest in California, 1989

"ACT UP is a diverse, nonpartisan group united in anger and committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis. We meet with government and health officials; we research and distribute the latest medical information; we protest and demonstrate. WE ARE NOT SILENT."

- Jon Greenberg, an activist and co-founder of ACT UP. Greenberg died of AIDS in 1993.

Support students with some of the difficult language (for example, the meaning of “nonpartisan”).

Ask students: What was ACT UP? What were some of their goals?

Ask students the **Think About It** question: What do you see in this picture?

Focus on key details, including:

- “County Hospital AIDS vigil”
 - **Ask:** What does that mean?
- “Dannemeyer stop your campaign of hate and fear against lesbian and gay people” [Dannemeyer was a conservative Congressman from California who was very critical of gays and lesbians.]
- “Action=Life”
- Signs and t-shirts with “ACT UP” on them
- Triangles on t-shirts and signs (and perhaps a sticker on one man’s shirt)
- Pointing, yelling, marching

Ask students: What messages do you see? How do these connect to ACT UP’s goals?

As students discuss the slide, **provide** the following background information on gay activism:

- There were gay rights activist organizations decades before the AIDS crisis. The first public group was founded in 1950 to “eliminate discrimination, derision, prejudice, and bigotry.”
- In the 1960s, gay and lesbian rights organizations grew in popularity in major U.S. cities, notably in New York City and San Francisco.
- ACT UP (The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) was one of the most important activist organizations formed to combat the AIDS epidemic. Formed at the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center in New York after conversations about the need for political action, ACT UP quickly swelled to hundreds of members.
- ACT UP’s first protest was held in March 1987 when members marched on Wall Street demanding better treatment and research to combat AIDS. They would continue to use the Stock Exchange, and other high profile venues like sporting events, to promote their cause. The purpose of these protests was to gain the most amount of attention possible.
- ACT UP’s methods of protest were controversial even within the gay and lesbian activist community. Many felt that their protests were too radical and angry. For instance, many activists involved in the Names Project, founders of the AIDS Quilt, saw the political nature of ACT UP as counterproductive to their shared goals of gay and lesbian equality and an end to the AIDS crisis. Nevertheless, ACT UP (which is still an active organization) was an extremely powerful and influential force in the 1980s and early 1990s.

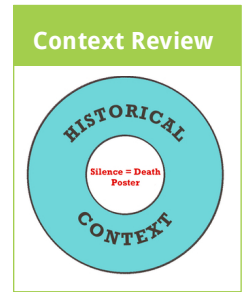
Slide 6: CONTEXT REVIEW: THE AIDS CRISIS

Purpose

To summarize the essential information from the Context slides that students will need for contextualizing the “Silence = Death” poster.

Process

- **Look** at the image on this slide.
- **Tell** students that they will use some of the information they’ve just learned or reviewed to answer the lesson questions. They will now spend a few moments to *review and take some notes*.
- Guide students in remembering the most important information to answer the three **Take Notes on Context** questions:
 - What kind of discrimination did gays and lesbians face in the U.S. in the 1980s?
 - How did HIV-AIDS impact the gay community?
 - How did homophobia impact the way the government responded in the early years of the AIDS epidemic?
- If necessary, click back to past slides to jog students’ memories. Allow students to **discuss** their answers at table groups or with a partner. Each student, however, should **record** his/her own notes.



TRANSITION TO DOCUMENTS

After reviewing the Context slides say to students:

You will now read two primary source documents on your own. This is the next step in the lesson, and the contextual information we just discussed will help you to better understand the documents.

This is also a good time to remind students of the lesson questions: **What was the message of the “Silence = Death” poster? How was it part of the larger AIDS activist movement?**

DOCUMENTS

[Suggested time: 2 sessions]

Documents: Overview

Students read and analyze two primary source documents in this lesson.

“Silence = Death” Poster, poster, 1987

Big Idea: Gays and lesbians should stand up for their rights and should take action to force the government to fight against HIV-AIDS. (It became the central image of the AIDS activist movement.)

A Journalist Describes ACT UP and the “Silence = Death” Poster, magazine article, 1989

Central Information: Describes the ways ACT UP used the poster to draw attention to and galvanize support for the fight against HIV-AIDS.

Note to Teachers: Preview the categories for student notes

In the CONNECT section, student notes will be organized by:

- The message in the poster
- How the AIDS activist movement used the poster

The central reading skills are to identify the central ideas or information in a primary source and to identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose.

Note: Students can work on these documents independently while you circulate and support their work. (See PD Doc on supporting students during document work.)

Document 1: “Silence = Death” Poster

Purpose

To decode the central messages of the poster, using background information from the Context slides.

This document is the central focus of the lesson. Students now return to it for a second time, with added text at the bottom.

Key Reading Challenge

We find that when students have not had much practice, decoding the meaning of complex visual images can be challenging.

Students may also have some difficulty with the dense text at the bottom of the poster, but they needn't understand all aspects of it (for example, why the Vatican is mentioned) in order to get a gist of the meaning.

Poster, 1987



Suggested Process

- As students read independently, move around the room to diagnose difficulties and offer coaching. When you note several students struggling with particular details or questions bring them to the attention of the class as appropriate. Discuss the document after students have read and answered the questions.
- Use your Teacher Dashboard to scan and assess student responses to specific Document questions (such as the Big Idea question) once a majority of students have finished reading the document. This will prepare you for the class discussion.

Document 1: Class Discussion

It is critical for students to briefly discuss each document after they have read it.



Purpose

Check for and deepen students'

- comprehension of the document
- grasp of the “Big Idea”—i.e., the main message of the “Silence = Death” Poster

Process

Engage students in discussing one or two key questions they have answered in the tool.

- *Zoom In* provides Source It, Read Closely, Gather Evidence, and Big Idea questions alongside this document. Depending on your class's needs, you may choose to focus on certain question types over others.
- We strongly recommend using structures such as turn-and-talk and table group discussions as you engage students in these questions.
- Most important, be sure to follow up on student comments by *pressing for reasons and evidence*, and *for accountable talk*. Use the prompts for the extension questions below.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

Select student responses to the “Big Idea” question, and use them to guide discussion.

- Ahead of time, use the Lesson Dashboard to quickly scan your students' responses to the “Big Idea” question:
 - What is the main message in this poster?
 - What details from the poster best support your answer?
- Identify student responses that reflect understanding of the Big Idea, and good use of supporting evidence, and those that reflect confusion or misunderstanding.
- Select and project a range of student responses to the summary questions. You can choose model responses as well as responses that need development as a way to spark student discussion. (See the PD document and video on “Discussion Phase 1: Formative Assessment of Student Comprehension of Individual Documents” for more support on using students' responses to analyze their reading strengths and needs.)

Discuss the Source It Questions

As you talk through the Source It questions, **focus** on the following points:

- The Silence=Death Project, the poster's **creator**, was made up of a small group of AIDS activists. The activists quickly joined up with ACT UP and the image became central to ACT UP's activities.
- The poster had two **audiences**:
 - It was designed to empower gays and lesbians to stand up and fight and
 - It was also designed to draw the attention of the general public
- Students may argue whether the **purpose** of the poster was to “inform” or “persuade.” The poster was intended to galvanize action, so there is a stronger argument for “persuade,” but as long as students are having a thoughtful discussion grounded in the text it is not necessary to get to a “right” answer.

Discuss the Read Closely Questions

Ask: The pink triangle (with the point down) was a symbol used by Nazis in Germany to identify gays and lesbians in the concentration camps. Why might the designers of the poster have used this symbol with the point upward?

- This question requires students to do some inferencing and to connect back to what they learned in the Context slides. You may want to ask students to **revisit** Context slide 1.
- Gay rights activists took an image that was intended to be one of shame and turned it upside down as a way to reappropriate the image and claim it as a symbol of pride. There is a long tradition of oppressed groups reappropriating the language and symbols of their oppressors, and it may help to **connect** students to other examples they are familiar with.

Ask: Why did the creators of this poster ask people to think about Reagan, the Centers for Disease Control, the Federal Drug Administration, and the Vatican?

- Again, this question requires some inferencing as well as a return to the historical context. You may want to **prompt** students to return to Context slide 4 about government inaction.
- The creators want to draw attention to the devastating impact of government inaction. Readers can infer that the creators see this inaction as deliberate and related to homophobic attitudes.
 - Mention of the Vatican refers to the explicit intolerance expressed by religious leaders, which helped to fuel the rampant homophobia that existed at this time.
- Students may not understand all the nuances of meaning here, but should have some understanding that these government agencies were not taking action to stop the spread of HIV-AIDS.

Ask: What does “Gays and lesbians are not expendable” mean?

- *Tip:* Use the glossary if you need help with the word expendable.
- Here, the creators are referring to the loss of life in the gay community to HIV-AIDS. This statement is intended to galvanize gays and lesbians to stand up and take action.

Discuss the Gather Evidence Questions

Ask students to share the details they tagged for the **Gather Evidence** question: How did the designers of this poster use words, symbols, and design to communicate a message?

Focus on key parts of the poster, including:

- *Pink triangle:* a symbol of gay pride intended to reject oppression
- *“Silence=Death” slogan:* Not speaking out about HIV-AIDS will lead to more people dying
- *Colors and design:* Bold, easy to read, draws attention to the poster; communicates the message “this is important”
- *Text at the bottom of the poster:* The gay community needs to demand a response from the government and take action

As students are discussing the details they tagged **ask** them:

- Why did you choose this detail? What message does it communicate?

- Does anyone else agree? Disagree?
- What does this mean? Can anyone think of another way to explain this detail?
- Are there other details we should focus on here? How did the designers draw attention to different parts of this poster?

Prompt students to put any text they quote *in their own words*.

Discuss the Big Idea Questions

Students move at this stage from noticing the specific details in the text to articulating the Big Idea. There are many ways students could articulate the Big Idea. For example:

The main message of the poster is:

- Gays and lesbians should stand up for their rights and take action to force the government to fight against HIV-AIDS.
- HIV-AIDS is killing people and the public needs to pay attention.
- The government is not responding to the AIDS epidemic and this is causing people to die.

Anticipate these difficulties that students will have getting to the Big Idea:

- They may focus too much on smaller details (*The main message of the poster is that silence will lead to death*)
- Or, they may articulate ideas quite generally, without staying connected enough to the document details (*The main message of the poster is gay rights*)

Ask these questions to help students *identify and articulate the Big Idea*:

- Let's think back to the details we identified. What were the Big Ideas?
- How do these details connect to each other?
- Can you make that idea more specific?
- Is there more than one message in this poster?
- Who were the designers trying to communicate to?

The idea here is not to push students towards the “right” answer, as there are many possible ways to articulate the Big Idea, but to push them to **engage in a rich discussion with one another** in which they have to articulate their ideas and ground their thinking in the document.

Students will only have written about one message, so it is important to help them see the range of messages the creators made.

Have students revise their notes. Allow students time to revise their notes after and/or during the discussion. Students may need to be prompted to revise how they have articulated the Big Idea.

Document 2: A JOURNALIST DESCRIBES ACT UP AND THE “SILENCE = DEATH” POSTER

Purpose

To uncover some of the ways the “Silence = Death” image was used to further the goals of the AIDS activist movement.

Magazine Article, 1989



Key Reading Challenges

This document is fairly straightforward. One concept that may be challenging for students is the idea of the poster image as a visual motif for the AIDS activist movement. It may be helpful to connect students to ideas around visual branding.

Suggested Process

- As students read independently, move around the room to diagnose difficulties and offer coaching. When you note several students struggling with particular passages or questions bring them to the attention of the class as appropriate.
- Use your Teacher Dashboard to scan and assess student responses to specific Document questions (such as the Big Idea question) once a majority of students have finished reading the document. This will prepare you for the class discussion.

Document 2: Class Discussion

It is critical for students to briefly discuss each document after they have read it.



Purpose

Check for and deepen students’

- comprehension of the document
- grasp of the “Big Idea”—i.e., ways in which the “Silence = Death” image supported the goals of the AIDS activist movement.

Process

Engage students in discussing one or two key questions they have answered in the tool.

- *Zoom In* provides Source It, Read Closely, Gather Evidence, and Big Idea questions and prompts alongside this document. Depending on your class’s needs, you may choose to focus on certain question types over others.
- We strongly recommend using structures such as turn-and-talk and table group discussions as you engage students in these questions.
- Most important, be sure to follow up on student comments by *pressing for reasons and evidence*, and *for accountable talk*. Use the prompts for the extension questions below.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

Select student responses to the “Big Idea” question, and use them to guide discussion.

- Ahead of time, use the Lesson Dashboard to quickly scan your students’ responses to the “Big Idea” question:
 - How did the “Silence = Death” image support the goals of the AIDS activist movement?
 - What is strong evidence from the document to support your answer?

Discuss the Source It Questions

As you talk through the Source It questions, **focus** on the following points:

- SPIN magazine was a magazine about rock music and culture that had a large audience in the mid-1980s. Have students think about who the main audience for SPIN was likely to have been.
- This article was written about two years after the formation of ACT UP.
- The article is a piece of journalism, so it may be helpful to review with students what journalism is.

Discuss the Read Closely Questions

Ask: According to the article, what were the goals of the ACT UP movement?

- Students will likely zero in on the two numbered goals in the article:
 - Change public opinion
 - Press for the development and distribution of medication
- Follow-up questions you might **ask** include:
 - What was public opinion?
 - Why did ACT UP feel like it needed changing?
 - What kind of change did they want to see?

Ask: What does it mean that the “Silence = Death” image became “the dominant visual symbol” of the movement?

- This question requires that students have a conceptual understanding of “visual symbol” and how that might connect to a social movement.
- To support students, **ask** about visual symbols of other social movements they have studied and/or the use of visual symbols in branding.

Discuss the Gather Evidence Questions

Ask students to **share** the quotes they highlighted in response to the **Gather Evidence** question: How did ACT UP use the “Silence = Death” image?

Focus on key quotes, including:

- ACT UP’s well known “Silence=Death” graphic adorns T-shirts, posters, and the small round stickers that have been appearing on surfaces all across the country.
- ACT UP members carry rolls of the stickers everywhere: in Atlanta during the Democratic Convention, stickers peppered news boxes, telephone poles, windows, doors, cars, buses—everywhere they would stick.

- The idea is to change public opinion beginning on the street. ‘When you put these posters and stickers all over town, people are forced to confront what they think they know and what the newspapers tell them[.]’
- The group also sells the shirts, stickers, and buttons to raise money.

Follow-up questions you could **ask** include:

- Why did you choose this quote? What does this tell us about how ACT UP used this image?
- What does this mean? Can anyone think of another way to explain this detail?
- Are there other details we should focus on here? How else was this image used?
- How can a poster change an opinion?

Encourage students to articulate these quotes *in their own words*.

Discuss the Big Idea Questions

Students move at this stage from noticing the specific details in the text to articulating the Big Idea. There are many ways students could articulate the Big Idea. For example:

- The “Silence = Death” poster supported ACT UP’s goals because the image was spread all over the place and it helped to change people’s opinion about HIV-AIDS.
- The “Silence = Death” poster supported ACT UP’s goals because ACT UP used the image to raise money and to get a lot of attention for fighting against the AIDS epidemic.
- The “Silence = Death” poster supported ACT UP’s goals because its message made people think about the fact that gays and lesbians were being discriminated against and that many people were dying from HIV-AIDS.

Anticipate these difficulties that students will have getting to the Big Idea:

- They may focus too much on smaller details (*The “Silence = Death” poster supported ACT UP’s goals because it told people that being silent about AIDS equals death*)
- Or, they may articulate ideas quite generally, without staying connected enough to the document details (*The “Silence = Death” poster supported ACT UP’s goals because it got a lot of attention*)

Ask these questions to help students *identify and articulate the Big Idea*:

- Let’s think back to the quotes we identified. What were the Big Ideas?
- How do these details connect to each other?
- Can you make that idea more specific?
- What were some of ACT UP’s goals? How did the poster help support these goals?

The idea here is not to push students towards the “right” answer, as there are many possible ways to articulate the Big Idea, but to push them to **engage in a rich discussion** with one another in which they have to articulate their ideas and ground their thinking in the document. Students will only have written about one Big Idea, so it is important to help them see the range of Big Ideas in the article.

Have students revise their notes. Allow students time to revise their notes after and/or during the discussion. In particular, students may need to be prompted to revise how they have articulated the Big Idea.

CONNECT

[Suggested time: ½ session]

Purpose

Before students write in response to a historical question, they need opportunities to talk. They need to clarify their understanding of the documents and how they connect with the larger context and the question they are answering. Your job as a *Zoom In* teacher is to create these discourse opportunities.

Cross-Document Discussion

In this discussion the main goal is to help students synthesize their learning across documents and connect back to the Context and the larger historical questions under investigation. This supports the historical thinking skills of corroboration and contextualization.

Three major moves should happen here:

- Re-engage students in the historical inquiry
- Support students in comparing Big Ideas and details across documents
- Support students in articulating their own thinking, while listening and responding to their peers

A) Re-engage students in the historical inquiry

Begin by reminding students of the lesson questions and the larger historical context. Do an initial informal assessment of what “big picture” students have walked away with. **Say** to students:

- Before we look at the message in this poster and how it was used, let’s think back to the Context. What was happening in the U.S. in the mid-1980s?

Turn-and-talk or table group question:

- What was happening at this time that made ACT UP decide it needed to take action?

Prompt groups to look at the Context slides and their notes. Let groups discuss and then share their responses.

B) Support students in comparing big ideas and details across documents

Display the Connect Tab.

Tell students:

- Given what was happening, let’s think more deeply about this poster and the way it was used.

Connect will display a t-chart labeled “Message of the Poster” and “ACT UP’s Use of the Poster” that displays student notes on the Big Idea questions, and their supporting evidence. You can choose one student’s work to project to guide the discussion, or you can project notes you’ve “starred” while using the Teacher Dashboard to review students’ Big Idea notes.

An example of student work in the t-chart format is shown on the next page.

CONNECT	
Message of the Poster	ACT UP's Use of the Poster
<p>"Silence = Death" Poster</p> <p>Big Idea:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People need to speak up or more people will die of HIV-AIDS. <p>Evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The biggest, boldest words on the poster say "SILENCE=DEATH." 	<p>A Journalist Describes ACT UP and the "Silence = Death" Poster</p> <p>Big Idea:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The poster supported ACT UP's goals by raising public awareness of the crisis and changing public opinion about AIDS. <p>Evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gay activists put stickers and posters of the image all over the streets so that a lot of people would see it and think about the crisis.

The Connect tab will also display the key discussion questions:

- How did the message and the design of the "Silence = Death" poster support the goals of ACT UP?
- How did ACT UP use this image and why did they use it in these ways?

Engage students in the Connect questions.

We recommend that you give students time to discuss these questions with each other in small groups or turn-and-talks before engaging with them as a whole group. Follow-up questions you could **ask** include:

- What support from the documents do you have for your thinking? Let's go look; what did it say here? What did this mean?
- How did this message connect to what was going on at the time? What were ACT UP's goals? Why?
- Why do you think this image became so important to the movement?

This part of the discussion is intended to support students in both synthesizing the documents and reflecting on their larger historical significance.

Give students time to **edit** their responses in *Zoom In* based on class discussion.

C) Support students in articulating their own thinking

Finally, be sure to allow students time to speak with each other about their own thinking. This can happen at any stage of the discussion through turn-and-talks or small group discussion. Questions to support this kind of thinking include:

- What's important here and why?
- What are your thoughts and reactions?
- Do you think this poster is effective in communicating its message? Why?

WRITING

[Suggested time: 1–2 sessions]

In this three-paragraph essay, students must describe what the different parts of the “Silence = Death” poster mean and how AIDS activists used this image in their movement to fight the AIDS epidemic.

Teacher’s Roles During Writing

As students are writing, support them in these key ways according to their needs:

- Circulate and observe students’ progress through the template or outline. Take some notes to help you think about mini-lessons in writing you may want to teach to the whole class.
- Conference individually with students on their writing. Support their development through asking probing questions:
 - You seem stuck; where might you find that information?
 - If you don’t remember what that quote means, where can you go?
 - Tell me why you introduced that evidence that way? What more do you think the reader might want to know?
 - Can you tell out-loud what the Big Idea is here? OK, how could you put that into writing?
- If you see patterns, pull together small groups of students for mini-lessons, or to review instructions.
- Support students in being peer editors.
- Help students move on to polished writing.

Preparing Students to Write

Tell students that the next stage of the lesson will be their writing. Remind them they will be writing a three-paragraph explanatory essay. The key elements of historical essay writing you will help them with are:

- Describing the historical context
- Citing details from the documents to support their explanation of the poster’s message and how it was used by AIDS activists

Project the Essay Outline View. Use this to review the writing prompt and preview the essay structure with students. Review explicitly each part of the essay and the role it serves in developing an answer to the historical question. Making these elements of the essay explicit for students will help them to develop the skills to construct essays more independently down the road.

Essay Outline View

Prompt: Write a three-paragraph essay that answers the questions: What was the message of the “Silence = Death” poster? How was it part of the larger AIDS activist movement?

Use historical context to describe how the AIDS epidemic impacted the gay community. Cite details from the poster and magazine article to support your discussion of the goals of the “Silence = Death” poster and how activists used this image in their fight.

Paragraph-by-paragraph guidance: In your essay you must have the following sections:

- **An introduction in which you describe the early years of the AIDS epidemic and homophobia**
 - Provide a topic sentence that tells the reader the main subject you will be writing about.
 - Provide historical information about the treatment of gays and lesbians in the 1980s and the AIDS epidemic (its impact on the gay community and the initial government response).
 - Introduce your thesis.
- **A first body paragraph in which you describe the message of the “Silence = Death” poster**
 - Provide a topic sentence that introduces the message of the poster.
 - Provide 2–3 supporting details from the poster.
 - > Introduce each detail from the poster.
 - > Explain the message each detail communicates.
- **A second body paragraph in which you describe how the poster was part of the larger AIDS activist movement**
 - Provide a topic sentence that introduces how the poster was used to support ACT UP’s goals.
 - Provide 2 details from the SPIN magazine article.
 - > Introduce the quote and supporting detail.
 - > Explain what the evidence tells us about how activists were using this image.
 - Provide a concluding sentence: Why is this important? What impact did this image have?

Setting the Level of Writing Support

Using the Teacher Dashboard, you can set the level of students’ writing support. (*Note:* Do this before they begin drafting their essays, or essay writing will be lost.) *Zoom In* offers two levels of writing support. High Support (the default) gives all students sentence-level tips, optional sentence-starters, and guidance in selecting and using evidence. As students show progress as historical writers – especially in using evidence from documents to support their ideas – teachers can set writing support for individual students to Low Support. The system will provide these students with paragraph-level tips only, meaning students will shape and support their essays substantially on their own.

Preparing Students to Write with Low Supports

If most of your students are writing with Low Supports (meaning with outline only, rather than the detailed Writing Template), you may wish to give them more up-front preparation to write their historical essays. The following outline may help.

Overview

- Let students know that the next stage of the lesson will be their writing.
- Remind them that they will be explaining the message of the “Silence = Death” poster and how it was part of the larger AIDS activist movement.
- Their final product will be a three-paragraph explanatory essay.

Introduction

- Remember, what is the purpose of your essay? Right, you are going to explain what the message of this poster was and how it became an important part of the AIDS activist movement.
- What do the various pieces of this essay need to be? [Review the overarching structure of the paragraphs.]
- What's going to go into this introduction?
- How will you start this essay?
- What background information will you need to provide? You will need to describe the impact of AIDS on the gay community as well as the government's response during the first years of the AIDS epidemic. You will need to use information from the Context slides as you write your introduction.
- What is the thesis statement in an essay like this? Your reader will need to know what ACT UP's goals were. Their goals connect to the treatment of gays and lesbians in the 1980s.

Body Paragraphs 1 and 2

- OK, now that we have a sense of what needs to go into the introduction, let's think about the two body paragraphs.
- It makes most sense to organize your paragraphs by the sub-topic, in this case, (1) the message of the poster and (2) how the poster image was used in the activist movement.
- In each paragraph you will need to use details from the documents to support your thinking. Remember to introduce your source and to explain how your evidence connects back to the Big Idea you are writing about.
- Finally, you will end the essay with a concluding idea about why the image was important and what impact it had.

Allow students time to ask questions for clarification before they move on to independent writing.

Sample Student Essay

In the 1980s the AIDS epidemic was killing many people in the gay community and the U.S. government did very little to stop the disease. At this time there was a lot of homophobia and discrimination against people who were gay. When AIDS first started it killed many people who were gay. Some people believed that AIDS was a punishment for being gay. Because of discrimination, the government at first did not spend money on research to find a cure for the disease. AIDS activists from the gay community began to protest to gain public support for a fight against AIDS. AIDS activists created the "Silence = Death" poster in order to draw attention to their cause and to encourage people who were gay to stand up and fight.

The creators of the "Silence = Death" poster used symbols, words and design to spread a message that people should stand up and fight against AIDS. One important part of the poster was the pink triangle. The message of this triangle was that people who were gay would fight discrimination. An upside down triangle was used as a sign of discrimination by Nazis. The designer of this poster turned the point up to show that they refused to be discriminated against. Another important part of the poster was the big white words "Silence=Death" against a black background. The message of these words was that if people did not speak out about AIDS and demand action then more people would die. Finally, another important part of the poster was the words at the bottom. The message of these words is that the government has to pay attention to the problem and that people who are gay need to defend their rights.

The “Silence = Death” poster was an important part of the larger AIDS activist movement. According to an article in SPIN magazine, “ACT UP’s well known ‘Silence = Death’ graphic adorns T-shirts, posters, and the small round stickers that have been appearing on surfaces all across the country.” ACT UP used the image on the poster to get attention by putting it everywhere so that many people would see it. The article also said, “The idea is to change public opinion beginning on the street. ‘When you put these posters and stickers all over town, people are forced to confront what they think they know and what the newspapers tell them.’” This means that the image made people pay attention to something that they had been ignoring. In the end, through using images like the “Silence = Death” poster, the activists were successful in getting people to care about fighting the AIDS epidemic.

Assessing Student Writing with the Essay Rubric

For information on assessing student writing, see these documents:

- “*Zoom In* Essay Rubric” (PDF)
- “Tracking Students’ Progress and Assessing Student Work” (PDF)