

Lesson 5: LGBT+ Rights Trailblazers – Dr Lydia Foy

Key Enquiry Question: Why is Dr Lydia Foy significant in the struggle for LGBT+ rights?

Time: 50 minutes

Learning Objectives:

- To learn about one of the major personalities in the struggle for LGBT+ rights – Dr Lydia Foy
- To develop a simple understanding of the attitudes, beliefs, motivations and actions of individuals and groups involved in the struggle for equal rights for LGBT+ people
- To summarise the story of Dr Lydia Foy in your own words

Resources:

- ‘LGBT+ Trailblazers – Dr Lydia Foy’, pages 32–33
- Copies and pen/pencil

Introduction:

- Ask the class to consider the question ‘Why is Dr Lydia Foy significant in the struggle for LGBT+ rights?’
- Discuss in pairs what prior knowledge they have about this topic and what questions they would like to find out the answers to.
- Share the lesson objectives with the pupils (WALT).

Development:

- Preteach vocabulary from the text as necessary. Depending upon your class, some words you may like to explain in advance include:

Key Vocabulary

pioneer transgender gender identity assign took a toll physical
psychological social transition registrar fruitless correspondence
legal proceedings judgement glimmer of hope violate (a law) appeal
legislation reluctantly gruelling vandalised sensationalist dignity
activism self-declaration icon harmonica

- Distribute the texts ‘LGBT+ Rights Trailblazers: Dr Lydia Foy’ to each pupil or pair.
- As you read through the text, facilitate the pupils in the application of appropriate comprehension skills as suggested.
 - Predicting (using their prior knowledge and what they have read to predict what will happen next). You may also wish to ask the pupils (before distributing the text) to predict ten words that they might come across in the text.
 - Scanning (using the underlined word as a hook to scan for)
 - Inferring (reading between the lines to extract hidden information)

Closure:

- Ask the pupils to identify the most significant historical facts in the account.
- Pupils then summarise the story of Dr Lydia Foy into fifty words. They could work individually, as pairs or in groups for this task. Encourage them to use the new vocabulary they have learned in their pieces.
- Ask the pupils to evaluate a partner’s summary using the ‘Two Stars and a Wish’ methodology (two things that were good and one thing to improve on).

Assessment of Learning:

- Teacher observation of responses to comprehension questions and summary

Assessment for Learning:

- Pupils peer-assess using ‘Two Stars and a Wish’

Differentiation:

- Pupils who require additional language support should be pre-taught the key vocabulary prior to the lesson.
- Pupil who require additional support can record the summary in various forms (e.g. comic strip in five panels).
- Pupils who require extension could be challenged to use at least ten of the key vocabulary words in their summary.

LGBT+ Rights Trailblazers

Dr Lydia Foy

Dr Lydia Foy was a pioneer for transgender rights in Ireland. She was born in Athlone, Co Westmeath in 1947 and had one sister and five brothers. When she was born, it was thought that she was a boy and this is what was written on her birth certificate. However as she got older, she knew that even though she may have looked like a boy, she didn't feel like a boy. However, her family struggled to understand her situation. At the time, there was a lack of understanding around transgender issues in all sectors of society and so Lydia was left to battle on her own.



Image by Sinn Fein, www.flickr.com/photos/sinnfeinireland/1927830094/, CC BY 2.0. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=77699093>

A transgender person is a person whose gender identity does not match the one assigned to them at birth e.g. a baby may have been thought to be 'a boy' when they were born but as they grow up they realise that they are in fact a girl.

COMPREHENSION SKILLS: PREDICTING

Based upon my prior knowledge and what I have read so far, I predict ...

She went to boarding school in Clongowes Wood College from 1960 to 1965. She then completed her Leaving Certificate and went on to study dentistry. In 1971, she graduated with a degree in Dental Surgery and began to practice as a dentist. She later got married and had two children.

However, the many years of trying to be someone she wasn't took their toll and in the 1980s, Lydia began to suffer physical and psychological problems. She decided that enough was enough and she needed to start living her life as the person she knew she was inside. She began to seek help from people who could help her to do this. In 1991, she made a social transition i.e. she began to live her life as a woman. In March 1993, she applied to the Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths to seek a birth certificate that gave her legal recognition in her female gender. However, in 1997, following years of fruitless correspondence, she had not made any progress in this regard. With the help of the Free Legal Advice Centre (FLAC), she began legal proceedings.

The case reached the High Court in October 2000. The judgement was not given until nearly two years later, when in July 2002, Mr Justice Liam McKecknie rejected Lydia's challenge. This was very disappointing but a glimmer of hope appeared from Strasbourg.

COMPREHENSION SKILLS: SCANNING

What year was Lydia born?

Where did she go to school?

What degree did she get?

Just two days after Lydia's claim was rejected, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that the UK had violated Article 8 and 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights because they had refused a transgender woman called Christine Goodwin's request to amend her birth certificate.

Lydia made another claim for a birth certificate in 2005 and when it was rejected, she returned to the High Court referencing the Goodwin decision from the ECHR. In October 2007, the court ruled that Ireland was in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights. The government started an appeal to this ruling but in June 2010 withdrew it. A new government was elected in February 2011 and they promised to bring in Gender Recognition legislation as a priority. Despite this, nothing changed.

**COMPREHENSION
SKILLS: INFERRING**

Lydia has said that she doesn't think she was particularly brave.

Do you agree with her? Why/Why not?

Tired and frustrated by waiting, at the start of 2013, Lydia reluctantly issued new legal proceedings. It was now 20 years since she had first requested a new birth certificate and 5 years since her High Court success. The legal battles were gruelling on Lydia. Her home and car were vandalised and the media wrote about her case in sensationalist, insensitive and cruel ways. She lost many things including her home, her job, her privacy and her dignity. Still, she felt she had no choice but to keep fighting.

Finally in July 2015, after years of activism from Lydia and other transgender rights organisations, the government passed the Gender Recognition Bill. This meant that people could access a gender recognition certificate based on self-declaration of their gender. This certificate can then be used to seek a new birth certificate. Finally in September 2015, Lydia got the birth certificate she had applied for 22 years earlier.

Lydia is an icon for transgender people in Ireland because of the incredible dedication with which she pursued equality and the sacrifices she made to improve things for future generations of transgender people. She has received many awards in recognition of this including the European Citizens Award from the European Parliament, the Trinity Prases Elit Award and GALA Person of the Year.

**COMPREHENSION
SKILLS: SUMMARISING**

Can you summarise the story of Dr Lydia Foy in 50 words? Try to include all the significant points.

However, she is more than just a transgender activist. Lydia loves music, and plays the harmonica. She is also a keen gardener and in 1997, she grew the world's largest foxglove in her garden - a whopping 3.3 metres tall! This record still stands today.