

Impact Report:

Discover How the Gale-CLGBTH Fellowship Brought LGBTQ+ History to Life in a High School Classroom

A 12th Grade Government Teacher Invites Students to Explore the Evolution of LGBTQ+ Rights with Gale's Archives of Sexuality and Gender



Trevor Ladner

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Gale-CLGBTH Non-Residential Fellowship

MEET THE SCHOLAR

As one of five scholars awarded a fellowship from Gale and the Committee on LGBT History (CLGBTH) in 2022, Trevor Ladner used digital humanities tools to enrich his research on LGBTQ+ teachers who fought for their rights to due process, equal protection, and freedom of speech. As a part of his research, Ladner explored archival materials to design a unit on civil rights in the court system for use in his 12th grade U.S. government course.

All Gale-CLGBTH Non-Residential Fellowship recipients were granted access to Gale's *Archives of Sexuality and Gender* and *Gale Digital Scholar Lab* (the *Lab*) for a six-month period of research. The *Archives of Sexuality and Gender* is the largest historical collection available in support of the knowledge of gender studies and sexuality, spanning from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. The is a cloud-based digital humanities tool that helps researchers tell impactful visual stories with data.

Fellows received training on how to use the text- and data-mining tools available in the *Lab* to explore the *Archives of Sexuality and Gender* and advance their work using digital humanities methods. Read on to see how Ladner used this powerful cloud-based platform to design a high school government course that examined the experiences of LGBTQ+ teachers as they fought for equal rights in the later twentieth century.

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Overview Search History Documents: **Gale (439)**

Add to Content Set Remove

Results Sort by:

Applied Filters: Entire Document : ashlie

Select All

Media Transsexual Wins Job—For Now **Court Cases**

Author: Tim Cwiek
OCR Confidence: 68%

Media transsexual wins job—for now Media transsexual wins job—for now by Tim Cwiek PHILADELPHIA—A fired transsexual art teacher, 27-year-old Jen Ashlie of Media, Delaware County was ordered reinstated— but on...

Publication Publisher Philadelphia Gay N
Publication Date Gale, May 18, 1979
Pages 1

Archive Source Library Archives of Sexual
Content Type Lesbian Herstory A
Document Type Periodical
Essay

Sex Change Wins Job Back **Court Cases**

OCR Confidence: 59%

Sex Change Wins Job Back Sex Change Wins Job Back Philadelphia, Pa. A federal judge recently ordered reinstatement for a teacher fired after a sex change operation. He said that the Chester Upland School District...

Publication Publisher Gay Scene.
Publication Date Gale, June 1974
Pages 1

Archive Source Library Archives of Sexual
Content Type Gay, Lesbian, Bise/
Document Type Transgender Histor
Periodical
Essay

Transsexual Teacher Settles with School Board for Back Pay **Court Cases**

Author: Tim Cwiek
OCR Confidence: 75%

Transsexual teacher settles with school board for back pay
Transsexual teacher settles with school board for back pay Jenell Ashlie by Tim Cwiek PHILADELPHIA— After a 10- month fight for

Publication Publisher Philadelphia Gay N
Publication Date June 29, 1979
Pages 1

Archive Source Library Archives of Sexual
Content Type Lesbian Herstory A
Document Type Newspaper
Article

An example of Ladner searching for materials to build a content set in the *Lab* focusing on LGBTQ+ teachers' employment rights.

EXTENSIVE MATERIAL AVAILABLE THROUGH THE ARCHIVES OF SEXUALITY AND GENDER

Ladner's project examined four key areas under the broader umbrella of employment rights of LGBTQ+ teachers:

1. The legal system's role in interpreting LGBTQ+ rights
2. The role of local media in covering LGBTQ+ experiences
3. The lived experiences of individuals who took legal action against discriminatory practices
4. Historical parallels to contemporary government actions

The most valuable aspect of using the *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*, Ladner says, was the depth of the available materials. "Going into this project, I initially wanted to focus on legal rights of LGBTQ+ people more broadly," he explains. "My focus narrowed due to the extensive number of available materials."

With the wealth of materials available, Ladner refined his research to focus on cases dealing with LGBTQ+ teachers' employment rights, to help his students learn about civil rights and civil liberties.

"I am especially hopeful to see this work expand in the digital space to keep up with current tech trends in education and to reach students in places where there may be limited access to queer archives."

TAILORING RESULTS TO ENSURE RELEVANCE WITH HELP FROM GALE DIGITAL SCHOLAR LAB

As Ladner refined the scope of material for his course, he used Gale's *Archives of Sexuality and Gender* to uncover the most-relevant materials—primarily consisting of articles, essays, legal files, and newsletters from the 1960s to the 1990s.

"I found the build tool to be the most valuable tool in the *Lab* for accessing materials that could be used by my students for primary source analysis or research," Ladner says. "I found the keyword search and filters to be extremely effective for narrowing down my search results to relevant materials. I made great use of the 'search within' function to look for specific legal cases."

To gather documents from his search into a more concentrated set to ensure relevance, Ladner used the clean and build steps. When it came to analyzing these documents, he states, "I used topic modeling to pull out specific documents that were more tailored to my research question."

After using the *Archives of Sexuality and Gender* to identify relevant legal cases, Ladner summarized the facts of the case, the legal issues involved, and the decision of the court. The scholar explains, "This gives students a broad overview to examine what are the common legal challenges to cases of discrimination, identify where courts expanded or limited minority rights, and understand the decades-long process of securing these rights."

"I was able to use the information from the archives to [help] create a timeline of over 20 court cases from 1969 to 1998 in which LGBTQ+ teachers have challenged employment discrimination."



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Transsexual teacher settles with school board for back pay



Jenell Ashlie

by Tim Cwiek
PHILADELPHIA— After a 10-month fight for reinstatement to

By a unanimous vote, the Chester-Upland School Board agreed June 14 to the cash settlement and adopted a resolution to strike from Ashlie's personnel file any reference to her dismissal last August. Last May, U.S. District Judge Donald Van Artsdalen ruled the board violated Ashlie's right to due process when it dismissed her without a hearing, and he ordered the board to pay Ashlie back wages and temporarily reinstate her pending a pre-termination hearing. Suspecting a repeat decision, Ashlie decided to forego the hearing and accept a settlement. So instead of a dismissal hearing, the school board voted unanimously to adopt a resolution detailing the agreement worked out between Ashlie, her attorneys and the board.

Leo Hackett, school board solicitor, said in a statement that "the settlement is mutually satisfactory and does not constitute an admission by the school board of any in-

fringement of Ashlie's rights."

But her attorney, Jack Brian, was quoted in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* June 15 as saying, "If we find another plaintiff, we will go back to court" and settle the issue.

According to Brian, Ashlie had received satisfactory ratings from her principal and department supervisors. She had the backing of her fellow teachers in the Chester-Upland Education Association, as well as her students, but parents of the middle school students objected to her presence after the sex change.

In the *Bulletin* interview, Ashlie conceded that she had had many difficult moments during the last 10 months. "Nothing can compensate for what they (the school board) printed about me. You know people don't have the right to do that. That's what I was upset about. I was a good teacher."

Ashlie said she had only \$50 to her name after her transsexual operation was done August 4, 1977 in

LGBTQ Teachers and the Law, 1969-1998

A Unit Plan for CA 12th Grade U.S. Government Courses
Created by Trevor Ladner, Gale-CLGBTH Non-Residential Fellow

"It seems to me that Gay students have a right to their own role models just as straight students have a right to theirs." - Jim Gaylord, *Seattle Gay News*, March 1977¹

In May of 1979, art teacher and transgender woman Jenell Ashlie expressed her passion as an educator, and her students' reciprocal admiration, to a local gay paper. "All the kids really like me; I never had any problem. I really want to go back and teach." She was fired without a hearing when her school learned that she had gender-affirming surgery the year prior.² The U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania ruled that her due process rights—the 14th Amendment protection to not have one's life, liberty, or property deprived without fair government procedures—were violated by the Chester-Upland School Board by not providing Ashlie a hearing before firing her. Judge Donald Van Artsdalen, however, did not rule broadly on the protection transgender teachers from employment discrimination. Ashlie was forced into a settlement, unable to secure her job. "I felt the transsexual issue should be ruled on," she told *Philadelphia Bulletin* in June 1979.³ It wouldn't be until four decades later that the Supreme Court would rule that firing someone for being gay or transgender violates federal law.⁴

Morrison. Acarfora. Grossman. Gish. Gaylord. Dain. Berner. Rowland. Escarcega. Weaver. These are the plaintiffs who fought for their rights to due process, equal protection, freedom of association, and right to privacy under the law as LGBTQ teachers in the later 20th century.

"Transsexual Teacher Settles with School Board for Back Pay," *Philadelphia Gay News*, June 29, 1979, Lesbian Herstory Archives, *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*.

12th grade unit plan created by Ladner: LGBTQ+ Teachers and the Law, 1969-1998.

CLASSROOM APPLICABILITY: CONTEXTUALIZING HISTORY WITH A HUMAN APPROACH

In some instances, a certain level of information was already available online regarding the legal cases that Ladner studied. The *Archives of Sexuality and Gender*, however, was critical to bringing new life, humanity, and context to those cases—in addition to helping fill factual gaps. The articles that Ladner uncovered within the archives also helped improve the student experience.

"I find historical news articles to be more accessible to K-12 students who may be digging into essential questions or enduring understandings around historical events, rather than getting lost in the legal processes of a case text," Ladner comments.

"Through these news articles in which plaintiffs who challenged discrimination were interviewed, students can 'hear' from the plaintiffs themselves on how these individuals' dignity was affected by unjust termination, the critical role of openly LGBTQ+ identified teachers, and the importance of advocating for one's legal rights even in a social context of pervasive prejudice."

"I gravitated toward the media coverage by LGBTQ+ publications on the legal cases involving LGBTQ+ teachers, which illuminated the stories of the individuals involved in those cases."

DISCOVERING MULTIPLE SOURCES FOR RESEARCH NEEDS

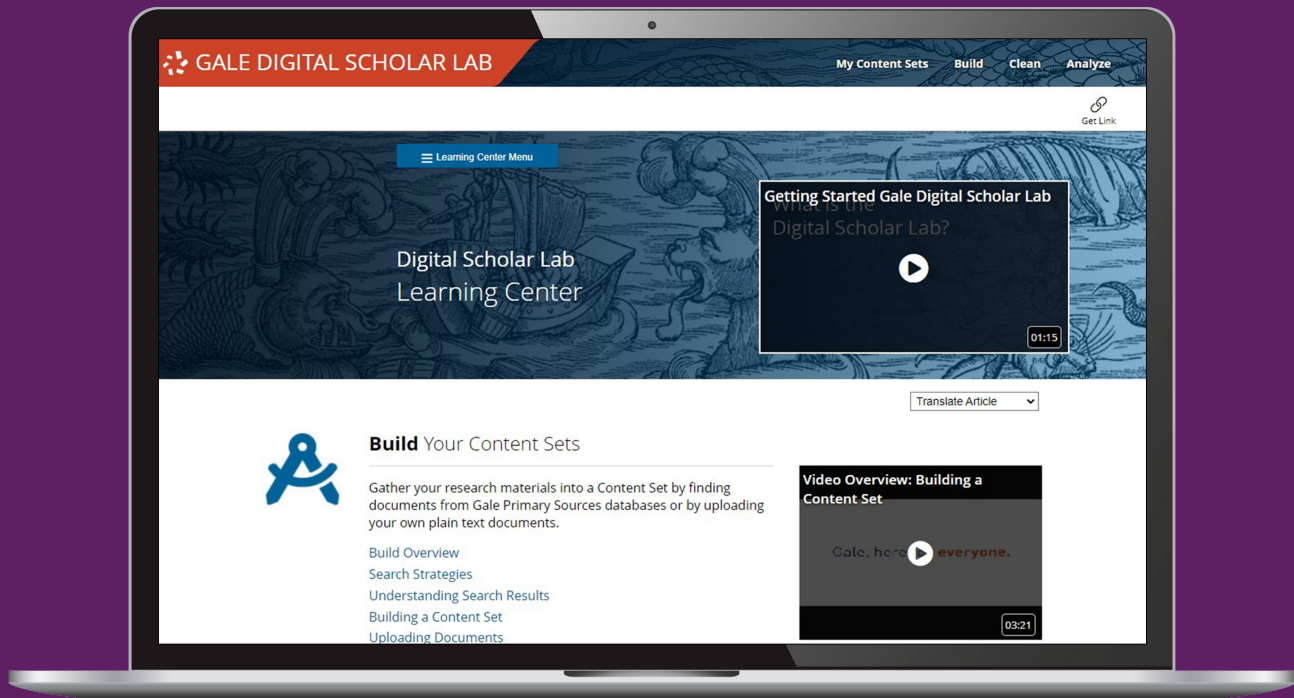
Access to Gale's *Archives of Sexuality and Gender* and the *Lab* helped Ladner produce a usable unit plan for his high school government course, which takes students beyond the headlines and encourages them to develop critical-thinking skills. With access to multiple, disparate sources conveniently curated in a single research environment, he was able to save time and dive deeper into the material.

"Gale provides significant accessibility to materials that one may otherwise have to travel a long distance [to find] and spend hours sifting through a physical archive in order to obtain and curate," the high school teacher shares.

"As a queer teacher myself, it was incredibly meaningful for me to have this opportunity to examine the experiences of other LGBTQ+ educators who have paved the way for me to be able to work freely today and to even be able to reflect critically with my students on what it means for someone like me to have that right. I hope to use the Gale archives again in the future and to continue my development as a digital humanities scholar."

"My work in the [Gale] digital archive has invigorated my interest in doing more of this type of research in the future—both as an educator and as an aspiring historian."





Powerful Research Tools Bring LGBTQ+ History to Life

Want to learn more about the resources Ladner used to expand his research and develop his digital humanities skill set?

Discover the possibilities of *Gale Digital Scholar Lab* at gale.com/digital-scholar-lab

Find more information about the *Archives of Sexuality and Gender* at gale.com/primary-sources/archives-of-sexuality-and-gender

Interested in learning more about CLGBTH?

Find more details about CLGBTH, including the society's initiatives and events, at clgbthistory.org