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# BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA LIFTS BAN ON GAY LEADERS

On July 27, 2015, the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) officially lifted its long standing ban on adult leaders who are openly gay. The Scouts' 80-member National Executive Board approved the resolution that drops its blanket restriction on openly gay adult leaders and employees. This comes on the heels of a pivotal speech in May 2015 in which Robert Gates, president of the Boy Scouts of America, urged the lifting of the ban, saying that it was "unsustainable."

In 2013, the Boy Scouts' National Council removed its restriction on membership to youth on the basis of sexual orientation but they kept the ban of its gay adult leaders. This policy change was criticized by people and groups on both sides of the issue; LGBTQ organizations felt it didn't go far enough and religious groups were against allowing openly gay youth to be members. Prior to this and for more than thirty years, the Boy Scouts of America's official position was to deny membership to individuals (members and leaders) who were openly gay.

This middle school lesson provides an opportunity for students to learn more about the evolution of the Boy Scouts' position on gay members and leaders, analyze Robert Gates' recent speech on the issue and explore students' own points of view by writing persuasive essays.

See these additional ADL resources: [Understanding Homophobia/Heterosexism and How to Be An Ally](#) (Grades 6-12), [Unheard Voices: Stories of LGBT History](#) (Grades 6-12), [What Is Marriage Equality?](#) (Grades 4-8) and [ADL Amicus Brief on 2000 Supreme Court Case](#).

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**NOTE TO TEACHER:** It is important to reflect on and consider that you may have students in your classroom who are LGBTQ or whose parents are LGBTQ and it is critical to be sensitive to that and prepared. Further, it is possible that if the student has not shared this previously, she or he may disclose it during the course of the lesson. That information should only come from the student directly. Be aware that young people do not always feel comfortable sharing this information with their friends and family, so do not assume that everyone in the young person's life knows this aspect of their identity.

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**Grade Level:** grades 6-8

**Time:** 45 minutes

**Common Core Anchor Standards:** Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening

**Learning Objectives:**

- Students will learn about the Boy Scouts of America’s recent policy decisions and the historical context of allowing gay members and troop leaders to serve.
- Students will analyze Robert Gates’ (president of the Boy Scout of America) recent speech about the ban of gay leaders.
- Students will explore their own opinions about the Boy Scouts of America’s policies by writing a persuasive essay or letter.

**Materials:**

- [True or False?](#) (one for each student)
- [Boy Scouts president: Ban on gay leaders ‘unsustainable’](#) (Washington Post, May 21, 2015)
- [Persuasive Essay/Letter Organizer](#) (one for each student)

**Vocabulary:**

Review the following vocabulary words and make sure students know their meanings. (See ADL’s [“Glossary of Education Terms.”](#))

- abate
- ban
- challenges
- compromise
- defiance
- discrimination
- gay
- lesbian
- LGBTQ
- opinion
- policy
- restriction
- sexual orientation
- status quo
- unsustainable

**BOY SCOUTS AND GIRL SCOUTS IN THE NEWS**

Ask students: *What do you know about the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts? Does anyone have any personal experience they want to share? Why were the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts in the news recently?* Allow students to briefly share their experiences and current information.

**TRUE OR FALSE?**

1. Explain to students that you are going to read five statements aloud and they will decide if they think each of the statements is true or false. After reading each statement, have students jot down whether they think the statement is true or false; they can use the [True or False?](#) worksheet to record their responses.
  - Statement 1: Any boy who wants to be can be a member of the Boy Scouts of America.

- Statement 2: The Boy Scouts of America allows openly gay people to serve as members, leaders and volunteers.
  - Statement 3: All local councils (in towns, cities and neighborhoods) must follow the national Boys Scouts of America policy on gay adult leaders.
  - Statement 4: The Girl Scouts of America has a ban on its leaders being LGBTQ.
  - Statement 5: The Girl Scouts recently turned down a \$100,000 donation because it came with restrictions about its LGBTQ members.
2. After reading all five statements aloud and students have recorded their responses, go through each statement one-by-one by first asking students: *How many people think this is true? How many think this is false?* Ask one or two students to share why they responded true or false. Then state whether the statement is true or false and the reasons why (see detailed information below).
- 1: **False.** Boys have to be in first grade or older to join the Cub Scouts and ten years old (or have finished fifth grade) to become a Boy Scout. Scouts are generally required to become part of a local Cub Scout pack or Boy Scout troop but in rare instances, a single youth can become a "Lone Scout." You do not need to be a U.S. citizen to become a member of the Boy Scouts of America.
- 2: **True.** On May 23, 2013 the Boy Scouts of America National Council removed its restriction on youth membership on the basis of sexual orientation; this policy went into effect on January 1, 2014. On July 13, 2015, the Boy Scouts of America Executive Committee unanimously approved allowing gay adults to serve as leaders. The BSA National Executive Board met on July 27, 2015 and ratified the resolution.
- 3: **False.** The policy that lifts the ban on gay adult leaders includes exemptions for faith-based groups. The BSA statement says: "This change would also respect the right of religious chartered organizations to continue to choose adult leaders whose beliefs are consistent with their own."
- 4: **False.** The Girl Scouts of the USA have LGBT-inclusive policies and have no membership restrictions on sexual orientation, stated as follows: "Girl Scouts of the USA and its local councils and troops value diversity and inclusiveness and do not discriminate or recruit on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, national origin, or physical or developmental disability." The Girl Scouts is an active member of several organizations that promote LGBT rights.
- 5: **True.** After an anonymous donor asked the Girl Scouts of Western Washington to ensure that their \$100,000 contribution (almost one quarter of the Council's annual fundraising goal) would not be used to help transgender girls, the chapter gave the money back. The group's leader stated: "Girl Scouts is for every girl. And every girl should have the opportunity to be a Girl Scout if she wants to."
3. Engage students in a discussion by asking:
- How did you come up with your answers to the five statements?
  - What did you already know and how do you know it?
  - Did anything surprise you? If so, what?
  - How do you feel about the information shared? Do you think it's fair or not fair that for a long time the Boy Scouts of America had a ban on gay youth members and adult leaders?

- Do you know why the Boy Scouts of America was in the news lately?

### READING ACTIVITY

1. Distribute a copy of the article [Boy Scouts president: Ban on gay leaders 'unsustainable'](#) to each student and explain that the article discusses a speech delivered by Robert Gates, president of the Boy Scouts of America, urging the ban on gay adult leaders to be lifted. Give the students ten minutes to silently read the article. Embedded in this article is a 3-minute video segment of his speech, which would be helpful to show to students if possible.

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Note to Teacher: If you require reading material with lower/different reading levels, you can use [Newsela Newsroom](#), a website that publishes high-interest news articles daily at five reading levels, as an alternative to the above article. You have to register (free) to access the articles. Here are Newsela's articles on [Robert Gates' speech on the ban of gay adult troop leaders](#) (which include articles starting at grade level 4). Follow the same discussion process as below.

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2. After reading the article, have students turn and talk to a person sitting next to them and instruct them to take one minute per person to share with their partner: (1) something they liked or didn't like in the article/speech and (2) additional question(s) they have about the issue.
3. Have students come back to the large group and engage them in a discussion by asking:
  - What is the main theme or message of the article?
  - What is Robert Gates' point of view?
  - What does he mean by this quote: "We must deal with the world as it is, not as we might wish it to be."
  - What is the "compromise" to which the article refers?
  - What kind of pressure do you think the Boy Scouts were under to change their policy?
  - Why are LGBTQ organizations in support of lifting the ban on gay adult leaders?
  - Why do you think some religious organizations want to keep a ban on gay members and leaders?
  - Do you think it is fair or not to allow local councils to make their own decisions regarding allowing gay leaders? Please explain.
  - Did Robert Gates' speech and his point of view change your opinion? How so?

### WRITING ACTIVITY

1. Ask students: *What is the difference between a fact and an opinion?* Elicit from students that facts are absolutely true statements (something that truly exists or happened) and opinions are what people feel and think about something; there can be a wide range of opinions or points of view about something. Ask students to share an example of a fact or opinion or share this example of a fact from the "True or False?" activity (e.g. "Boys have to be in first grade or older to join the Cub Scouts") and an opinion (e.g. "Boy Scouts have better activities than Girl Scouts.").
2. Explain to students that they are going to write a short persuasive essay or letter about the Boy Scouts of America policy on gay members and leaders. Explain that there are a variety of opinions they can address—their support of the lifting of the recent ban on gay adult leaders, their opinion about the past bans of both leaders and members, their point of view about how local Councils can still decide not to hire openly gay leaders, etc. Have them reflect back on some of the statements in the article they read and the speech by Robert Gates, having them pay attention to their reactions to the material.

3. Give students 10-15 minutes to begin writing their persuasive essay or letter using the [Persuasive Essay/Letter Organizer](#). You can give them the option to talk with a partner in order to think through their thoughts using the worksheet. If you haven't already taught persuasive essays, explain that students should state their opinions clearly, provide at least 2-3 main reasons (including quotes, statistics, examples or other information) to support their opinion and what they would say to those with a different point of view. If more time is needed, they can finish the essay for homework.
4. When students have completed their essays, have some share aloud with the class.

**CLOSING**

Do a go-round with each student completing this sentence: If I was Robert Gates, the President of the Boy Scouts of America, I would \_\_\_\_\_.

**ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES**

- [3 Big Differences: Boy Scouts Versus Girl Scouts](#) (The Advocate, December 19, 2012)
- [Boy Scouts executive committee endorses ending ban on gay leaders](#) (Washington Post, July 13, 2015)
- [Boy Scouts of America votes to end ban on gay adults](#) (BBC News, July 13, 2015)
- [Boy Scouts Move to Lift Ban on Gay Youth Members](#) (New York Times, April 19, 2013)
- [Dr. Robert Gates -- Boy Scouts of America Speech](#) (YouTube video, 27 minutes)
- [Dr. Robert M. Gates: National Annual Business Meeting Remarks](#) (Full Transcript of Speech, May 21, 2015)
- [Excerpts from Robert Gates' remarks on Boy Scouts' ban on gay leaders \(LA Times, May 21, 2015\)](#)
- [Why Do the Boy Scouts Exclude Gays? \(New York Times, Room for Debate, July 19, 2012\)](#)

**COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS**

Content Area/Standard
Reading
Standard 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
Standard 2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
Writing
Standard 1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
Speaking and Listening
Standard 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

# TRUE OR FALSE?

For each statement, check either true or false.

	True	False
1. Any boy who wants to be can be a member of the Boy Scouts of America.		
2. The Boy Scouts of America allows openly gay people to serve as members, leaders and volunteers.		
3. All local councils (in towns, cities and neighborhoods) must follow the national Boys Scouts of America policy on gay adult leaders.		
4. The Girl Scouts of America has a ban on its leaders being LGBTQ.		
5. The Girl Scouts recently turned down a \$100,000 donation because it came with restrictions about its LGBTQ members.		

