

# ahead<sup>of the</sup> CURVE



## *Viewing Guide*

About the  
Film

Glossary

Discussion  
Questions

Classroom  
Activities

Learning  
Standards

Resources

Written by Andrea Pino-Silva and Maddy Leonard. Designed by Maddy Leonard.

FRANKLY SPEAKING FILMS

[curvemagmovie.com](http://curvemagmovie.com)

# About the Film

With a fist full of credit cards, a lucky run at the track, and a drive to connect her community, Franco Stevens launched Curve, the best-selling lesbian magazine ever published. At the start of the film, when Franco learns that Curve may fold within the year, she faces a crisis. She's been away from the helm for 10 years due to a disabling injury and must now question the relevance of the magazine and her own voice in the face of accelerating threats to LGBTQ+ community. To forge a path forward, Franco reaches out to women working in today's queer spaces to understand what's at stake.

Franco's contribution to the lesbian community inspires us, and it vexes us that like so many stories of influential queer women, her story is largely unknown. Franco's magazine was born in a time when writing the word "lesbian" on the cover of a publication was a triumph. At its heart, AHEAD OF THE CURVE is a story of building community. Franco created her magazine to meet her own needs, and in doing so connected her community in powerful new ways.

We made this film because we believe that understanding the story of Franco and Curve is critical to building community power that can cultivate a more expansive, inclusive vision of the lesbian and queer women-identified community. We are not a monolith; we inhabit a spectrum of identities and are the experts on these identities. Yet we're often excluded from decision processes about how our lives and communities are addressed or represented.

Amplifying community voices and growing grassroots power are core parts of both Franco's work and ours as filmmakers. That's why we center women and non-binary people's voices in front of and behind the camera. We are the authors of our own experiences and the people who can best tell our stories. In a world where visibility does not yet equal safety, the need for positive stories about queer women has never been stronger. Representing a spectrum of our stories, both to ourselves and to dominant culture, is one of our most powerful tools to forge a world that is safer and more equitable for all.

-Jen and Rivkah



JEN RAININ, Director & Co-Producer (left)  
RIVKAH BETH MEDOW, Co-Director & Producer (right)



# Discussion Questions

## ON LABELS AND IDENTITIES

- Since the beginning, Franco was very passionate about including the word “LESBIAN” on the cover of Curve magazine. When LGBTQ+ issues are part of mainstream discourse, what is the significance of their visibility?
- What was the effect on queer communities when they had little to no visibility in mainstream media? Were there other periods of time in US history when queer folks were represented and visible in mainstream culture? [Gladys Bentley](#) might be a fun research starting point on this topic!
- In her [TED Talk](#), storyteller Kim Katrin says she's identified as a bisexual woman and as a lesbian, but for her, queerness encompasses all of the layers that she is and how she loves. In conversation with Franco, Kim says that claiming a label is “reclaiming a power [queer people] have not had.” What is the power of claiming, rather than being assigned a label? Reflect inward. Have you ever been assigned a label by society or another structural power that you felt uncomfortable about?
- When Franco and the film team visit CLEXACON to host a panel on the words queer women choose to describe themselves, various audience members say that the word lesbian does not feel right, while some say it's the only label they claim. How do the words we use to describe ourselves telegraph our identities to each other and to dominant culture?
- At CLEXACON, Andrea described using the word “lesbiana” to explain her queerness to her abuela. For Andrea, it is impossible to divorce her queerness from her Latinx identity, both of which are a daily practice. How do language and culture impact queer identity? Why is it important to think about the intersection between different identities such as sexuality, gender expression and race?
- In the LGBTQ+ community, [Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminists \(TERFS\)](#) have claimed that Lesbian spaces are solely for cis-gender women who exclusively date other (cis) women. How do groups like this perpetuate harm within the LGBTQ+ community? How are Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist ideologies rooted in not just transphobia, but also white supremacy?
- Why do you think it's important for there to be publications and spaces that are exclusively for queer folks?



# Discussion Questions

## ON RACE AND INTERSECTIONALITY

- Racism, ableism, and homophobia are systemic issues in our society, but when you are a queer person of color, discrimination is usually layered. What added barriers might Black, and other queer people of color face that white queer people do not?
- Featured cast member Amber Hikes, when leading Philadelphia's Office of LGBT Affairs, developed the black and brown striped Pride flag to celebrate people of color in the LGBTQ+ community. Why are the black and brown stripes an important symbol to be included on the rainbow flag? Should more cities and communities adopt the black and brown striped flag in an effort to be more inclusive?
- With the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, police brutality and the fight for Black lives moved to the forefront in the United States and beyond. Yet, there is little outrage in mainstream culture about the Black trans women who are being systematically killed. Why are LGBTQ+

people less often represented in Black Lives Matter discussions, despite the fact that the founders of the BLM movement identify as queer?

## ON MEDIA REPRESENTATION

- When in conversation with Franco, poet Denice Frohman says that queer people often reach out to her, especially youth who connect with her poetry on queerness. Why do you think unapologetic, vulnerable stories told by queer people make things easier for others struggling to come out? Have you ever had a personal experience when you related to a piece of media, art, or culture so deeply that it taught you something about yourself?
- LGBTQ+ representation is not always advancement. Why is it important that Hollywood feature LGBTQ+ characters that are more than stereotypes? Who do you believe is writing the majority of queer stories?





## Discussion Questions

- AHEAD OF THE CURVE was made with an all-female and non-binary identified team, many of whom are queer. Does it make a difference if there are queer people writing and producing queer films?

### ON ACTIVISM

- What do you think you can do to help create safer and more welcoming spaces for queer folks at your school, university, or workplace?
- While the LGBTQ+ movement has been framed as its own struggle, every social movement and cause has been and continues to be a queer struggle. LGBTQ+ people encompass Black youth targeted by the police, undocumented immigrants, women who seek abortion, and D/deaf and disabled people. Why is it important to examine the interconnectedness of these movements?
- Historically, many have seen activism solely as protest, or as political involvement in social issues. Was Franco starting her magazine a form of activism and/or protest? Why or why not?
- Queer women have been leading across movements for generations. Audre Lorde, Pauli Murray, Alicia Garza, Emma Gonzalez, Gloria Anzaldúa: all these women have been powerful forces in racial justice, gun violence prevention, and Latinx immigrant rights, and were or are out queer women. How does queerness influence activism in the context of other struggles that aren't just about LGBTQ+ rights?




# Classroom Activities

Learning about social justice requires the ability to confront your own personal biases. Studies show that tolerance training can backfire if not accompanied by an implicit/personal component. Throughout the semester keep "Mindwatch" diaries of your immediate responses to people who were different from you. For each entry, identify the origin of your thoughts (culture, family, media) and describe how the reaction affects your behavior toward the "other." Don't deny or censor your initial reactions, just record them immediately. Explore the patterns in your reactions and reflect with the class. More information on Mindwatch diaries [here](#).

Take a deep dive into the [Curve/Deneuve archives](#). Browse through some of the magazines from the 1990s and early 2000s. Now browse some articles from the popular Queer publication [THEM](#). Compare THEM, which is an American online LGBTQ magazine that launched in October 2017, to Curve/Deneuve from the 1990s and 2000s. How did Curve/Deneuve evolve over time? What similarities and differences do you see between Curve/Deneuve and THEM? What kind of representation do you see in Curve/Deneuve vs THEM? Do you think the new online-only magazine THEM is effective for the LGBTQ+ community of today? Why or why not?

Do some research on the Stonewall Riots of New York City and the Compton Cafeteria Riots of San Francisco. Three important people who led the Stonewall Riots, Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, and Miss Major Gary, were trans women of color who in part were protesting the systemic attacks by police on sex-workers. Why do you think these women have historically been often overlooked in conversations about the Gay Rights Movement?

Watch this short video titled "[Kids Explain Intersectionality](#)." Write or discuss how you would explain intersectionality to someone either older or younger than you who is not familiar with the topic.





# Classroom Activities

Discuss the difference between Identity, Expression, Sex, Gender, and Sexual Orientation using the [Genderbread Person](#).

Watch this [TedTalk](#) where Kimberlé Crenshaw, the activist and educator who coined the term intersectionality, discusses why the concept is as important as ever in today's world. Have a round table discussion with your class about Crenshaw's presentation.

Spend 30-60 minutes researching one of [these](#) LGBTQ+ historical figures. Share out your findings and/or reflect on your research with your class.

As a class, create and distribute a list of community resources for queer youth.

Read this [New York Times magazine article](#) from 1897, "Girls Who Fall in Love with Each Other." Pay attention to this different era's vocabulary and stereotypes related to girls' behavior and their loving relationships with one another. Here are some questions to ask yourself in relation to this piece:

- Why would such a story appear in a reputable publication?
- What is the tone of the article? Is the article punitive or voyeuristic towards young girl-girl love?
- What does this article show us about the gender politics of the day?
- Is the writer a woman? Is she a mother or a school teacher or a journalist? Where does her authority come from? And is there any reason to think perhaps that it's a man?
- Why are girls' crushes on other girls newsworthy? Do you see any stereotypes from this article that differ from stereotypes of girl-girl love today? Are any stereotypes the same?



# Action Items

Franco and the film team of AHEAD OF THE CURVE made the film with one big goal in mind: to invest in and amplify queer women's stories. After the film, there are many ways to build on the energy and inspiration.

## FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

- When you hear homophobic or transphobic comments, calmly assert your belief in everyone's right to be treated with dignity and respect.
- Join the gay/straight alliance in your school. Start a gay/straight alliance, if one doesn't already exist.
- Ask to speak with adults in charge (of the school, agency, community of faith, etc.) about the importance of a 'zero tolerance' policy for homophobic and transphobic comments and actions.

- Write a letter to the editor of your hometown and/or school newspaper about a queer issue that is important to you.
- Ask for a panel discussion on LGBTQ+ issues at your school. Ask that LGBTQ+ youth participate on the panel.
- Demand a relaxed dress code that honors each person's individuality and unique gender expression.
- Demand that all teens be able to bring a date of their own choosing (same-sex, opposite sex, or other) to the prom, dances, parties, etc.





# Action Items

## FOR EDUCATORS

- Ensure you are intentional about including queer history and LGBTQ+ current events in your syllabus.
- Check out the podcast "[Queer America](#)" from Teaching Tolerance to find more resources for incorporating LGBTQ+ history and culture into your curriculum. In selecting the texts, books, and media for your curriculum, assess that you are selecting pieces that are inclusive and intersectional. Here are a few questions you can ask yourself:
  - Who wrote this text? What voices does this text include?
  - Does the text include stereotypes or misrepresentations of people? How are those stereotypes or misrepresentations treated?
  - Does the text accurately reflect lived experiences and cultures?
  - Are certain people or groups glaringly absent or given an insubstantial role?
  - Are certain questions or issues related to the topic left out/glossed over?
  - How might this text motivate, engage or enable my students?

- If you teach media studies, teach your students about Curve and other queer publications.
- Include and make space to hear from marginalized students in classroom discussions.
- Know your students' correct pronouns and names, use them in class and do not rely on "official" or roster information. You can act as a role model by sharing your pronouns and using them when introducing yourself.

## CLASSROOM RESOURCES

- [How Gay Culture Blossomed During the Roaring Twenties](#)
- [It Gets Better](#)
- [Queer America Podcast](#)
- [Teaching Tolerance's Best Practices for Serving LGBTQ Students](#)
- [Transgender Law Center](#)
- [The Trevor Project](#)
- [Why I Am Passionate About Intersectionality](#)

**This Is What a  
Lesbian Looks Like**

Performance  
poet and author  
Staceyann Chin  
on marriage,  
coming out and

**Gold Is the**

It's awards season again in  
women took home statues at  
The GLAAD Media Awards  
20th anniversary with ceremony  
York, Los Angeles and San  
spring. In New York, Suzanna  
home the Vito Russo Award for  
out media professional  
rights, while the San Francisco  
honored *Milk* screenwriter  
Black. *The L Word's* Ilene Chaiken  
were gold-ified at the Los Angeles  
Establishing Triangle honored

## Action Items

### FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

- Does your university have an LGBTQ+ Center? Reach out to your university Center and find out ways that you can coordinate a campus screening of [AHEAD OF THE CURVE](#). And if you're an ally, ask if there are other ways you can support the organization!
- If you are a part of a student group, make sure you are intentional about including queer participation.
- LGBTQ+ people have been part of every major social movement. Examine how you show up in LGBTQ+ spaces, in other movement spaces, and in dominant culture spaces. Show up for causes you care about authentically and openly as an LGBTQ+ person or ally, whenever you feel safe.

### FOR LGBTQ+ FOLKS AND PROFESSIONALS

- Get involved with or support monetarily your local LGBTQ+ community organizations.
- Support other movement spaces as an LGBTQ+ person.
- Examine the diversity of your professional and social groups and their leadership.
- Look at how many women are in your spaces. Come up with ways you can advocate to ensure that queer women have prominent roles.

### ENGAGE WITH THE FILM TEAM

Facebook: [@CurveMagMovie](#)

Instagram: [@CurveMagMovie](#)

Twitter: [@CurveMagMovie](#) and tweet  
[#AheadoftheCurve](#)



# Glossary

**AFAB/AMAB:** Assigned Female at Birth / Assigned Male at Birth; descriptions referring to non-cisgender people (transgender, non-binary, or genderqueer) who identify as a gender different from that which they were assigned at birth.

**AROMANTIC:** A romantic orientation generally characterized by not feeling romantic attraction or a desire for romance.

**AFFIRMED GENDER:** The gender by which one wishes to be known. This term is often used to replace terms like “new gender” or “chosen gender,” which imply that a person’s gender was chosen rather than simply innate.

**AGENDER:** Describes a person who does not identify with any gender identity.

**ALLY:** A person who does not identify as LGBTQ+, but stands with and advocates for LGBTQ+ people.

**ANDROGYNOUS:** Used to describe someone who identifies or presents as neither distinguishably masculine or feminine.

**ASSIGNED SEX:** The sex that is assigned to an infant at birth based on the child’s visible sex organs, including genitalia and other physical characteristics. Often corresponds with a child’s assigned gender and assumed gender.

**ASEXUAL:** The lack of a sexual attraction or desire for other people. Asexual individuals may still experience attraction but this attraction doesn’t need to be realized in any sexual manner.

**BIPOC:** An acronym signifying Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

**BISEXUAL:** A person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.

**CISGENDER (CIS):** Describes a person whose gender identity (defined below) aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth.

**DENEUVE/CURVE MAGAZINE:** The best-selling Lesbian magazine founded by Franco Stevens.

**GAY:** A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender. Gay is often used as an umbrella term.

**GENDER:** A set of social, physical, psychological and emotional traits, often influenced by societal expectations, that classify an individual as feminine, masculine, androgynous or other. Words and qualities ascribed to these traits vary across cultures.

**GENDER DYSPHORIA:** Clinically significant distress caused when a person’s assigned birth gender is not the same as the one with which they identify.

**GENDER EXPRESSION:** External appearance of one’s gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being masculine or feminine.

**GENDER ROLES:** The social behaviors and expression that a culture expects from people based on their assigned sex (e.g., girls wear pink; boys don’t cry; women care for home and child; men are more violent), despite a spectrum of various other possibilities.

**HETERONORMATIVITY:** Refers to a societal assumption of certain norms: 1) that there are two distinct sexes; 2) that male and female functions and characteristics are distinctly different; and 3) that traits such as attraction and sexual behavior correspond to anatomy.



# Glossary

**INTERSECTIONALITY:** A term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a UCLA professor, civil rights advocate and expert in critical race theory. It's the study of social identities overlapping each other, affecting the individual's experience and oppression.

**INTERSEX:** An umbrella term used to describe a wide range of natural bodily variations. In some cases, these traits are visible at birth, and in others, they are not apparent until puberty. Some chromosomal variations of this type may not be physically apparent at all.

**LESBIAN:** A woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other women.

**LGBTQQIP2SA:** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Pansexual, Two-Spirit, Asexual. Sometimes abbreviated as LGBTQ+.

**MISGENDER:** To refer to someone in a way that does not correctly reflect the gender with which they identify, such as refusing to use a person's preferred pronouns or name.

**NON-BINARY:** Non-binary or genderqueer is a spectrum of gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine—identities that are outside the gender binary. Non-binary identities can fall under the transgender umbrella, since many non-binary people identify with a gender that is different from their assigned sex.

**PANSEXUAL:** Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to people of any gender though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.

**QUEER:** A term people often use to express fluid identities and orientations. Often used interchangeably with LGBTQ+. Once a pejorative, the term has been reclaimed and is used by some within academic circles and the LGBTQ+ community to describe sexual orientations and gender identities that are not exclusively heterosexual or cisgender.

**TRANS EXCLUSIONARY RADICAL FEMINIST (TERF):**

Used to describe cisgender women who self-identify as feminist but who are opposed to including transgender women in spaces they reserve for people who were assigned female at birth. This is because they believe trans women are men and since men cannot coexist with their feminist ideologies, they exclude them from their beliefs and support. In fact, they often believe trans people should be denied rights and sometimes advocate for harm against them.

**TRANSGENDER (TRANS):** An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.

**TWO-SPIRIT (2SP):** An umbrella term in Native culture to describe people who have both a male and female spirit within them. This encompasses many tribe-specific names, roles and traditions, such as the winkte of the Lakota and nadleeh of the Navajo people. This term often describes Native people who perform roles and express gender associated with both men and women. This term should be used only in the context of Native culture.

**WORDS TO AVOID:** homosexual; sexual preference; tranny/transvestite

**PREFERRED TERMS:** gay or queer person; sexual orientation; transgender person or trans person (if they so identify)

**Sources:**

[GLAAD](#)

[It Gets Better](#)

[HRC](#)

[Teaching Tolerance](#)





# Learning Standards

## HIGH SCHOOL COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.6

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.9

Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2

Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.6

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.4

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4

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

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.3

Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

## MEDIA LITERACY STANDARDS

We live in a world where technology mediates a large portion of human interaction and the exchange of information. Every projected image, every word published on a page or a website, and every sound from a speaker reaches its audience through the medium, through the language of the device. The ability to parse the vast array of media messages is an essential skill for young people, particularly in a mainstream commercial culture that targets youth as a vulnerable, impressionable segment of the American marketplace. Most students already have a keen understanding of the languages different media use and the techniques they employ to inspire particular emotions or reactions, but they often lack the skill or awareness to fully deconstruct the messages they continuously receive. Analysis of a media message—or any piece of mass media content—can best be accomplished by first identifying its principal characteristics:

- (1) Medium: the physical means by which it is contained and/or delivered
- (2) Author: the person(s) responsible for its creation and dissemination
- (3) Content: the information, emotions, values or ideas it conveys
- (4) Audience: the target audience to whom it is delivered
- (5) Purpose: the objectives of its authors and the effects of its dissemination.

Students who can readily identify these five core characteristics will be equipped to understand the incentives at work behind media messages, as well as their potential consequences. Media literacy education empowers students to become responsible consumers, active citizens and critical thinkers.