QUEER WORDS

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Queer Words is an ongoing archive of writings by Friends' Central students, alumni, faculty, and staff of all sexual orientations and gender identities. The Gender and Sexual Orientation Alliance (GSoA) is thankful to all who contributed to this collection and is proud to publish these submissions.

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Queer Words began in 2002 after the following note was submitted anonymously to a teacher's mailbox:

"I don't know exactly what to say but I still want to add my voice here. I am gay... and it's really hard to even write that statement. I know Friends' Central is supposed to be really accepting, but I still have not come out to anybody. I guess I'm afraid. I don't want people to change around me. I will never be straight, but sometimes it feels good to pretend I am, so that I can just act the way I always have, and feel less out of place. I wonder how many other FCS students are in the same position: always pretending. I wonder how long it will be before I can't pretend any longer."

In response to this voice and others who felt silenced and afraid, *Queer Words* provides an outlet for expression to LGBTQAI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, asexual/aromantic, and intersex) members of the Friends' Central community. No matter how our voices are raised, even anonymously, taking the step to share one's views serves a dual purpose: it may provide a relief for the writer and it reveals to others in the community feelings that may often go unexpressed.

We hope that *Queer Words* will be a powerful resource for everyone who reads it. We hope that these selections may alleviate discomfort, deepen our understanding of the school and world in which we live, and encourage us to continue to build a safer, more supportive environment for each individual.

We hope that you appreciate the gift of these voices.



A Reflection From Our Graduating Co-President, Freddy

Being the Senior leader of GSoA this year has been a very fulfilling experience. I first joined the group in my freshman year and have had many fun experiences throughout my time in high school, including dances, movie nights, and the always fun meeting on Fridays. Senior year was no different. Our gang, which may have reduced in size but not in spirit, was able to partake in both fun activities and meaningful discussions. There were many new additions to our group including an additional faculty advisor, Ariel, who has offered many new ideas and perspectives to our crew.

The GSoA has always been an important place for me personally as it provided a place to be comfortable and talk about issues and feelings that I'm not always able to express or discuss. Walking into the drama room every Friday morning was always my favorite time of the week, and I always enjoyed planning and leading discussions based on various LGBT topics. One of my favorite meetings was when Ariel, Julian and I came up with various subjective questions and had everyone move to the side of the room based on whether they agreed or not. This meeting inspired many great conversations and it even encouraged people who normally didn't speak to share their opinions. Also it was interesting to see how people's views changed as more people shared or new information was added.

Together GSoA had many successes this year that I was proud of our group for being able to tackle. I was especially proud of the assembly we put on for the Transgender day of remembrance, and the information we helped distribute the week before. I heard positive feedback from members of our community and from some of my friends from other schools. Another big success we had this year was the change in name from the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) to the Gender and Sexual Orientation Alliance, which I think is a large step in making the club more inclusive. Our group was able to achieve most of our goals for this year, and we always had fun doing so. Overall I enjoyed my time as a leader of GSoA, and I'm sure the club will continue to be strong in the hands of Julian and Alexandria.



Freddy, Alexandria, and Julian

Lessons in Diversity at Friends' Central School by Zoe



NOTE: This article was published in the Spring Youth Supplement of The Philadelphia Gay News

Being out as an LGBT person is not always a luxury afforded to teachers. Just last spring, a teacher at Waldron Mercy Academy in Merion lost her job over her same-sex marriage. Down the street, however, at Friends' Central, there's a different atmosphere, where a number of teachers say they're comfortable being out.

As a Quaker institution, Friends' Central values diversity and encourages individuals to express their true selves. "I think the presence of difference allows FCS to more fully live the Quaker dimension of our mission and vision," said Head of School Craig Sellers. "I think it is a fair question to ask, for instance, how we could prepare students to peacefully transform the world if we did not include, celebrate and love a wide variety of talented people in our school."

Out middle school teacher Anne Kenealy would agree. "As a teacher, I want to guide students toward their most authentic selves. I understand that many situations prevent queer teachers from being out and I respect the choices that others make to separate their identities from their work. For me personally, it's a question of integrity: If I can't be my most authentic self, if I can't be whole, how can I expect students to make that attempt everyday?"

Many students eagerly commented on the way out teachers affect the school's community. An eleventh grader remarked that, "Representation is very important, so having members of the LGBT community in places of authority, power, and leadership has a big impact."

The range of identities among staff allows students to engage with people who might have different worldviews or experiences. Fellow eleventh grader Julian agreed, adding, "I think it's necessary for every community that is shaping young people in general to see a lot of different kinds of people. Any different life experience or struggle is an important one to hear about."

Some straight students express similar opinions when asked about the influence of out teachers on the community. Another eleventh grader believes these individuals have, "...strictly a positive effect. It's limited because I'm straight and cis... but...many people feel safer and like they have somewhere to go."

Steve Patterson, an English teacher, believes Friends' Central's approach reduces the possibility of a single story about LGBT people from developing in the community. "At FCS there are so many out teachers, each with very different personalities and politics and lives. That variation allows people to see how different, how unique we are. It reduces the likelihood of stereotypes. Students respond to us as individuals."

In many other environments, however, LGBT teachers say they have not felt as welcome. Courtlandt van Rooten, now a Spanish teacher at FCS, reflected on previous careers, saying, "For most of my life I knew that if it were known that I was gay, I might very well not get the job...or keep the job. The first place I have felt truly comfortable and able to be 'out' has been at FCS, and it is a remarkable feeling." History teacher Layla Helwa described her similar experience. "I used to work at a charter school in North Philly and I was never out there because I was scared that I would be treated differently by the administrators and I didn't feel that it was a safe environment for someone to be out. Then I came to FCS and saw everyone was out. Before the school year starts, all the teachers get together and I saw pictures of out teachers and their partners. I could see that I could be comfortable here with who I am without losing my job."

"I came here eighteen years ago as an out teacher and knew I had found a home", said sexuality educator and Chair of the English department, Al Vernacchio. "Being able to be out as one of the faculty advisors of the Gender and Sexual Orientation Alliance (our school's GSA) is such a gift!"

Every community needs to continue to grow, and English teacher Ariel Eure says there is more to be done. "I'd still like to see the school become more intentional about queer and trans access and representation in the school, especially for queer and trans students and teachers of color."

Some teachers claim that being out helps them engage on a deeper level with students and colleagues. "I got engaged over Winter Break, and upon my return told my class 'what I did over my vacation.'...But the best part was the cheerful applause that I got from my class, their cheerful sharing in my happiness, not to mention the open delight of my colleagues. Being able to live and work as who I am is liberating and affirming in ways that I cannot begin to describe, but for which I give thanks every day," said Mr. van Rooten.



A Year of GSoA Bulletin Boards

This year we wanted to make the GSoA Bulletin Board a dynamic tool for conveying interesting and important information about LGBTQAI issues. The board was changed monthly, highlighting a particular theme.



It started with an announcement...What was formerly the GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance) was now the GSoA (Gender and Sexual Orientation Alliance).

In October we celebrated LGBTQ history month...



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We forgot to take a photo of November's Board. It was in honor of Transgender Awareness Month





In December we observed World AIDS Day...

In January we displayed some of OUT Magazines "Top 100" LGBTQ newsmakers...



In February we honored notable LGBTQAI African-Americans ...



In March we observed Women's History Month with a trivia contest. How many of these RAD women do you know?...



In April (and May) we honored outgoing co-president, Freddy, by featuring his favorite thing: LGBTQ superheroes! Note that Freddy is the last hero pictured



And in June, to end the school year, we let our PRIDE show!





He Acts So Gay By Julian

Hey guess what world I'm not gay just because I talk and act a certain way does not affect my human attraction love has no direct correlation to my physical actions I move my hands while I talk and voice may be high doesn't mean I like another guy sexuality is something that comes deep from your soul a magnetic attraction like a compass drawn to a pole and sometimes it may feel confusing or wrong but fighting that feeling only makes you long for a while I too thought I was gay because everyone made me feel like I had no option to sway I guess because of my family everyone expects me to like a member of the same sex you will do you as the saying goes and if that involves unidentifiers, ladies, or bros accept your decision don't let anyone say you don't fit the part find someone who makes your soul sing and love them with all your heart





by Freddy

It's just a joke; it's just a joke?
I'm not like the others I can't pretend I don't care.
Everything, you say, everything you do, everything I hear It affects me,
It hurts me.

So I guess I must be broke
If my all problems are just a joke.
Who even cares if I start to choke
it's like i am going through a stroke!

So laugh it off?

I try not to show it,
I just keep it inside.
I mean, as long as I'm fine
on the outside no one can know
no one will know.

But my silence leads to depression, which in turn causes compressions. It's like I'm going through a recession Because I have no self expression!

So laugh it off? Why should I?

They didn't mean it, right, they couldn't? I'll tell myself at night; it was a slip of the tongue. They weren't serious. It was a mistake, just a mistake.

Because they don't know how I feel! And that These wounds will never heal! As I go through this ordeal because to me my problems are real!

So laugh it off? How can I?

The next day everything will seem fine. We can all just continue on with our lives. 'Cause what they said, what they did, It won't affect me, we're all guys, right? They think no one got hurt, they think no one can get hurt. But your thoughts are in vain Until you can feel my pain! And when you treat me with disdain It rattles my brain!

So laugh it off? Why can't !?

Maybe it's my fault?
Everyone else is fine.
Maybe i'm too sensitive,
'cause men don't have feelings.
A real man doesn't cry;
a real man can't cry.

That's why I just can't win!
I let their comments under my skin,
And they don't care how I've been
'cause being me is such a sin.

So laugh it off?
Do you know what that means?

To laugh it off means that my problems don't matter!
To laugh it off means my pain is just a jape!
To laugh it off means that I don't matter;
I'm just something you can laugh at,
you can forget about,
that you will forget about!

That's why I cry before I sleep, because the pain - it cuts so deep, and what sanity will I keep as I take this giant leap?

So laugh it off? I refuse to!

Just 'cause I'm a male doesn't mean I have to shrug off anything that may bother me, just to have a false sense of masculinity! And I refuse to do it any longer! I refuse to not be myself any longer! So I guess I must be broke, because it hurts that all my problems are a joke!

Even if it causes me to choke, and feel like i'm going through a stroke! 'Cause my silence leads to depression, which in turn causes compression. It's like I'm going through a recession because I have no self expression! They don't know how I feel, which is why I couldn't heal, as I went through this ordeal, 'cause to me my problems are real! So your thoughts are in vain, 'cause you can't feel my pain! When you treated me with disdain, it made my soul feel like it was drained! That's why I couldn't win; I keep letting them under my skin, even if they don't care how I've been, because apparently being me is a sin! That's why I cried before I went to sleep, 'cause the pain, it cut so deep! But at least my sanity I'll keep, as writing this was a giant leap!

So laugh it off? No, but I'll laugh at that!

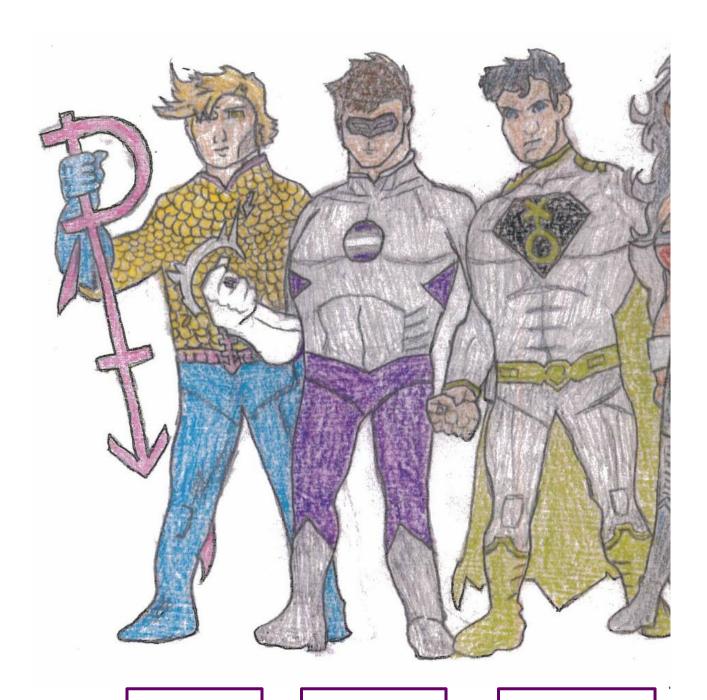


This contribution of the "Justice League of Sexuality" is courtesy of Mia and Sam!

Great work and thanks!!

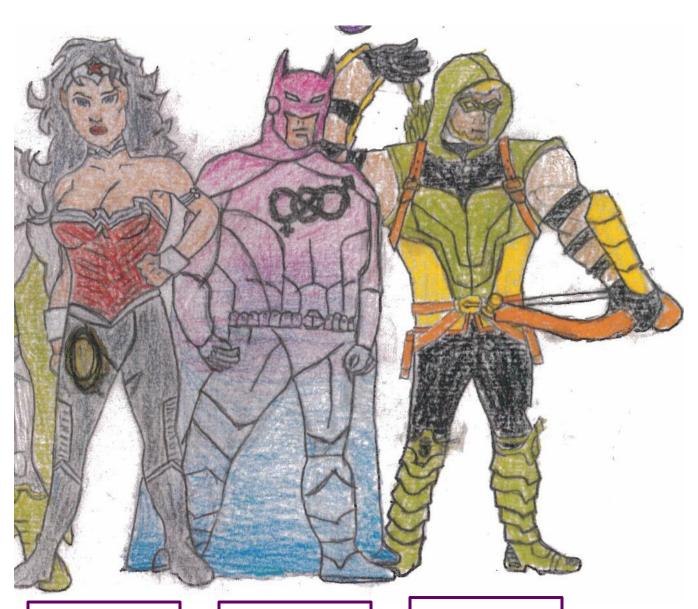
Character close-ups are available on the following pages.





Aquapan (pansexual)

The Gray Lantern (Graysexual) Superthey (genderqueer)



Wonder Woman (already fab just as she is!) Biman (bisexual) The Green Aromantic (aromantic)

Transgender Day of Remembrance Assembly

This year's GSoA Assembly was used to observe the Transgender Day of Remembrance which takes place each year on November 28th.

About the Transgender Day of Remembrance:

from The Transgender Day of Remembrance website: (https://tdor.info/about-2/)

"The Transgender Day of Remembrance serves several purposes. It raises public awareness of hate crimes against transgender people, an action that current media doesn't perform. The Day of Remembrance publicly mourns and honors the lives of our brothers and sisters who might otherwise be forgotten. Through the vigil, we express love and respect for our people in the face of national indifference and hatred. The Day of Remembrance reminds non-transgender people that we are their sons, daughters, parents, friends and lovers. The Day of Remembrance gives our allies a chance to step forward with us and stand in vigil, memorializing those of us who've died by anti-transgender violence."





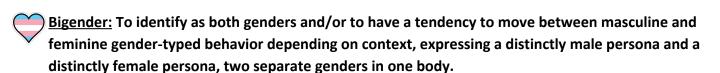
In preparation for the Transgender Day of Remembrance Assembly, we hung posters around school that contained these examples of cisgender privilege.

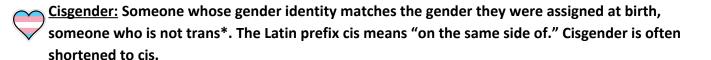
- Do you have to worry about whether or not you will be able to find a safe and accessible bathroom or locker room to use?
- Do you feel anxious or worry about being stared at when using locker rooms and store changing rooms?
- Oo you have to search to find role models and mentors with your same gender identity?
- ${igtriangledown}{ig$
- Do you have to decide whether or not to share your gender identity each time you meet someone new?
- 📆 Do you have to remind friends and family members to use the correct pronouns for you?
- Do you have to convince friends and family members of your true gender?
- Do you have to explain your gender identity to medical professionals before having an exam?
- Do you have to worry that your driver's license does not accurately represent your gender identity?
- Do people ask you what your "real name" is and then think they can use that instead of your preferred name?
- opeople define your gender by whether or not you've had surgery on your genitals?
- When filling out forms, do you have to write in your gender identity because it is not one of the options printed on the form?

If your answer is "no", you may have cisgender privilege.

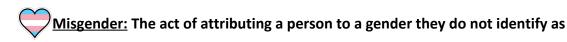


We also hung posters to build community familiarity with terms that increase our ability to be an ally to people of all gender identities and expressions





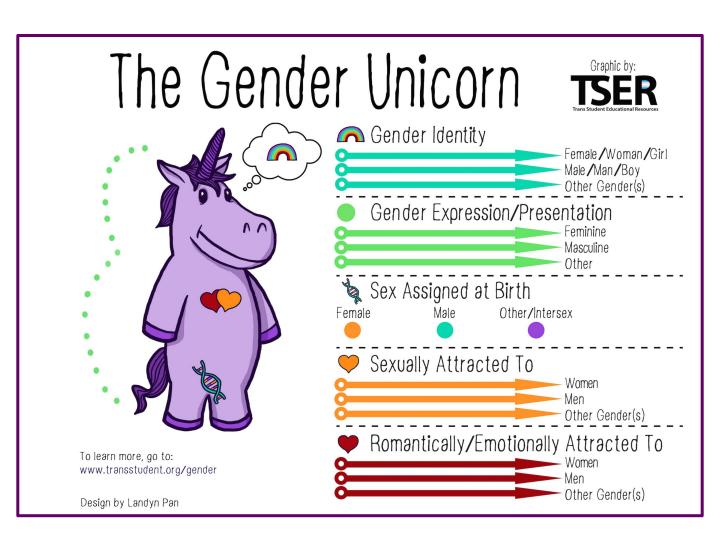
- Cisgender Privilege: The privileges cisgender people have because their gender identities match their assigned gender and because they are considered "normal".
- Gender: A complex combination of roles, expressions, identities, performances, and more that are assigned gendered meaning by a society. Gender is both self-defined and society-defined.
- Gender binary: The pervasive social system that tells us there can only be masculine cis men and feminine cis women, and there can be no alternatives in terms of gender identity or expression.
- Gender Expression: How one chooses to express one's gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, hairstyle, voice, body characteristics, etc.
- Gender Identity: An individual's internal sense of being male, female, or something else. Since gender identity is internal, one's gender identity is not necessarily visible to others.
- Gender neutral pronouns: Pronouns other than the usually gendered he or she. Some examples are ze/hir/hirs, and they/them/their but there are many others.
- Gender nonconforming (GNC): Not fully conforming to gendered social expectations, whether that be in terms of expression, roles, or performance.
- Gender role: Cultural expectations for what people should do with their lives, what activities they should enjoy or excel at, and how they should behave, based on what their gender is.
- Genderqueer: A term which is used by some people who may or may not fit on the spectrum of trans or be labeled as trans but who identify their gender and sexual orientation to be outside of the binary gender system, or culturally prescribed gender roles.



- <u>Transgender:</u> a person whose gender identity does not match their birth sex.
- Trans man, FTM, or F2M (Female-to-Male): Term used to identify a person who was assigned a female gender at birth or is female bodied, and who identifies as male, lives as a man, or identifies as masculine.
- Trans woman MTF or M2F (Male-to-Female): Term used to identify a person who was assigned a male gender at birth or is male bodied, and who identifies as female, lives as a woman, or identifies as feminine.

<u>Transphobia:</u>

- 1. The fear, hatred, or intolerance of people who identify or are perceived as transgender.
- 2. Fear and hatred of all those individuals who transgress, violate or blur the dominant gender categories in a given society.



At the assembly, we watched a video of young trans people speaking to their older selves. Our own Quinn agreed to write a letter to his own older self and share it at the assembly. It was a powerful and beautiful moment!

You can watch the original video here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=SY6W4chuTGg



Dear 27-year-old Quinn,

Hey buddy. Hope things don't suck as much as they do now. But, really, things don't suck as much as they did a year ago. Or six months ago. Or last week. You're getting better at dealing with these things: The dysphoria, your mom, the frustration of having to wait another year until you can start HRT.

Right now, it feels like no one sees me for who I am. I hope you look, sound, walk, sing, and feel like yourself. Even more than you do now. Because right now it's the stupid metamorphosis metaphor—caterpillars and a chrysalis and all that. It's cheesy and it's oversimplified, but it's true. You see yourself as this ugly, twelve-legged, speckled horror, and one day (ONE DAY, I SWEAR) you'll be who and what you're meant to be. For now, you're learning, and you're growing. You're young, everyone feels this way in some form or another, right? This is just...you.

And sometimes you lament you weren't born like you wish you were, and sometimes it hurts more than you think you can take, but you're still here, and you're still going. And you'll get there. I know you will. Because you have to.

And I speak from a place of love, not seeking pity. I am on a journey of Becoming, and each day I know myself more fully, more richly colored, more peacefully. The more peace I make with myself, the more I find I can handle being misgendered, hearing my dead name, hearing words spoken in hate against me. I hope you've gotten somewhere above this.

And forget the people who try to stop you, and forget the people who don't want to help you. Because they don't mean anything, and they haven't done the learning and growing that you have.

The person that you are now is looking forward to being you. Looking forward to not just your body, but your thoughts and your heart. I am fragile sometimes, I am weak sometimes, but I have become so much more than I thought I would a year ago when I stood on weak knees and shaky words in Meeting. I know I am not alone. I know I am stronger than I think I am, and I cannot fathom who I will be when I read this in ten years. Hats off to you, buddy. You made it.

We closed the assembly by sharing the names of trans people whose lives ended in 2015.

May they rest in peace and in power.



Papi Edwards - January 9, 2015 - 20 years old - Louisville, Kentucky

Lamia Beard - January 17, 2015 - 30 years old - Norfolk, Virginia

Ty Underwood - January 26, 2015 - 24 years old - Tyler, Texas

Michelle (Yazmin) Vash Payne - January 31, 2015 - 33 years old - Los Angeles,

California

Taja Gabrielle DeJesus - February 1, 2015 - 36 years old - San Francisco, California Penny Proud - February 10, 2015 - 21 years old - New Orleans, Louisiana Bri Golec - February 13, 2015 - 22 years old - Akron, Ohio Zander Mahaffey - February 19, 2015 - 15 years old - Austell, Republic of Georgia Kristina Grant Infiniti - February 19, 2015 - 46 years old - Miami, Florida Ash Haffner - February 26, 2015 - 16 years old - Charlotte, North Carolina Keyshia Blige - March 7, 2015 - 33 years old - Aurora, Illinois Blake Brockington - March 25, 2015 - 18 years old -Charlotte, North Carolina Taylor Alesana - April 2, 2015 - 16 years old - San Diego, California Diosvany Muñoz Robaina - April 26, 2015 - 24 years old - Pinar del Río, Cuba Cameron Langrell - May 1, 2015 - 15 years old - Racine, Wisconsin

Kyler Prescott -May 18, 2015 - 14 years old - San Diego, California

London Chanel - May 18, 2015 - 21 years old - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Mercedes Williamson - May 30, 2015 - 17 years old - Rocky Creek, Alabama Carol Melo - June 3, 2015 - 30 years old - Manaus, Amazonas, Brazil Andréia Amado - June 4, 2015 - 29 years old - Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil Kelly Silva - June 9, 2015 - 31 years old - Uberaba, Minas Gerais, Brazil Kuane da Silva - June 13, 2015 - 35 years old - Santa Maria, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil Laura Vermont - June 20, 2015 - 18 years old - São Paulo, Brazil Jasmine Collins - June 23, 2015 - 32 years old - Kansas City, Missouri Bruna J. Mendes - June 29, 2015 - 27 years old - Itapebi, Bahia, Brazil L.R.O. Dorta - July 12, 2015 - 26 years old - Pernambuco, Brazil Vanessa Calaça - July 12, 2015 - 27 years old-Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil India Nascimento - July 12, 2015 - 29 years old - Pernambuco, Brazil Ashton O'Hara- July 14, 2015 - 25 years old - Detroit, Michigan Mia Henderson - July 16, 2015 - 26 years old - Baltimore, Maryland Erika Aguilera - July 16, 2015 - 25 years old - Dourados, Brazil Gabi - July 19, 2015 - 26 years old - Valparaíso de Goiás, Brazil India Clarke - July 21, 2015 - 25 years old - Tampa, Florida Nephi Luthers - July 21, 2015 - 20 years old - Georgetown, Guyana

K.C. Haggard - July 23, 2015 - 66 years old - Fresno, California

Shade Shuler - July 29, 2015 - 22 years old - Dallas, Texas

Patricia - August 3, 2015 - 29 years old - Santa Terezinha, Piracicaba, Brazil

Amber Monroe - August 8, 2015 - 20 years old - Detroit, Michigan

Kandis Capri - August 11, 2015 - 35 years old - Phoenix, Arizona

Elisa Walker - August 13, 2015 - 20 years old - Salisbury, North Carolina

Tamara Dominguez - August 15, 2015 - 36 years old - Kansas City, Missouri

Zella Ziona - August 15, 2015 - 21 years old - Montgomery Village, Maryland

V.H.A dos Santos - August 24, 2015 - 25 years old - Campos dos Goytacazes, Rio de
Janeiro, Brazil

Flower - August 27, 2015 - 39 years old - Parintins, Amazonas, Brazil

Waleska Rayala - September 2, 2015 - 21 years old - Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil

C.N. Alves de Matos Jr - September 25, 2015 - 21 years old - São Paulo, Brazil

Skylar Lee - September 29, 2015 - 16 year old - Madison, Wisconsin

L.A. de Souza - September 30, 2015 - 22 years old - São Paulo, Brazil

Emmet Castle - October 3, 2015 - 14 years old - San Diego, California

Keisha Jenkins - October 14, 2015 - 22 years old - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Vicky Thompson - November 13, 2015 - 21 years old - West Yorkshire, England Yoshi

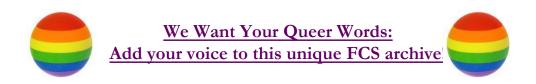
Tsuchida - November 18, 2015 - 38 years old - Tokyo, Japan

Deshawnda Sanchez - December 3, 2014 - 21 years old - Los Angeles, California Leelah Alcorn - December 28, 2014 - 17 years old - Kings Mill, Ohio

"While we remember, we must also resist. There are so many trans people who are doing the amazing work of surviving, caretaking, organizing, and transforming. Today is a day to support that work and those fights."



ROMMY TORRICO



How to submit:

- Email submissions to avernacchio@friendscentral.org, aeure@friendscentral.org, or to gsoa@friendscentral.org
- Drop submissions into Mr. Vernacchio's or Ariel's mailbox in the FCC
- Give submissions to any GSoA member

What to submit:

- Any kind of writing—poetry, personal essay, fiction, nonfiction, or two-dimensional artwork.
 - Here are some ideas to get you started:
- Something you wrote for a class that speaks to LGBTQAI issues
- Sour perception of queer issues at FCS. Is it a welcoming and supportive community? Is it both LGBTQAI-friendly and LGBTQAI-safe? Is it too focused on sexual orientation?
- Coming out anecdotes (someone coming out to you or you coming out to someone else) or imagine what it would be like if a close friend or relative came out to you.
- Your role as a straight ally in our community. What's it like to be a straight person at a school that deals with queer issues the way we do?
- A short story, poem, etc. that speaks to queer issues, experiences, or sensibilities.
- Your experience or observations of what it's like to be queer at FCS, at home, in the world, etc.
- Words of advice or comfort for those who are questioning or in the closet.
- Anything you think would be good for our community to know about LGBTQAI issues.