

# Instructions for Queer Ancestry Ritual

## **Queer People of Tolerant Cultures:**

In your breakout room, make sure to introduce yourselves.

Your group represents all queer humans living in homo-tolerant cultures, from the dawn of humanity, up to about the 1850s. Some societies in the past never upheld any formal prohibitions against queerness. In some, queerness was tolerated, and in others, was celebrated and cherished. This category, called “Tolerant Cultures,” includes most societies that existed before one of the three major monotheistic religions. This includes indigenous peoples from all over the globe, European pagans, and ancient cultures ranging from Africa to the Far East.

Take a few minutes for each person to read through one of the informational posters. Take turns paraphrasing, in a minute, what you have read to the others.

When finished, each person should share for 1 or 2 minutes:

- In what ways are these societies different from our society today, in terms of their relationship to queerness?

*Imagine that you could speak to all the future humans that will live in intolerant cultures. What would you say to them? What would you want them to remember? What hope can you offer them? What warnings? You may wish to write down some of the phrases that feel the most potent to you.*



# We'wha

(pronounced Wee-waa)

**From the Zuni Tribe of New Mexico, We'wha (1849-96) was introduced to the American president as an “Indian Princess.”**

The anthropologist Matilda Coxe Stevenson said that We'wha was "the most intelligent of the Zuni tribe," with an "indomitable will and an insatiable thirst for knowledge."

"Strong character made her word law among both men and women with whom she associated. Though her wrath was dreaded by men as well as women, he was loved by all children, to whom she was ever kind."

Many Native American cultures made a place for men who dressed and lived as women. They served as mediators between men and women and were accepted and revered for their special nature, often taking a sacred role in tribal rituals. In many cases, they also had husbands.

A Zuni two-spirit named We'wha was highly valued by her tribe. She was a caretaker of children, a medicine woman, a mediator, singer, dancer, and an accomplished potter and weaver of baskets, blankets, dresses and sashes. She was considered the most elegant, intelligent, and strongest member of her tribe. This is why she was selected among with a few others to represent the Zuni's interests in Washington, DC to protect their land. Washington society was utterly charmed by We'wha and never knew she had been assigned male at birth. After We'wha returned to the pueblo, conflicts broke out between the Zuni and the U.S. government. We'wha was arrested, accused of witchcraft, and served a month in prison.

Sources: Wikipedia, "Two Spirits in American Indian Culture," by T.E. Heiatt



# Woman Chief

**Bíawacheeitchish was a bacheeítche (chief) and warrior of the Crow people.**

An account of woman warriors in American indigenous groups as portrayed by an American ethnographer: "No sooner does she reach the animal than she must watch his every movement, - keep an eye to her horse and guide him, - must look out for rifts and buffalo wallows on the prairies, - guard against the animal's forming an angle and goring, - manage bow and arrows, or lance, - and while both are at full speed, to wound him in a vital part; - to do all this requires great presence of mind, dexterity, and courage, - and few women are found amongst them willing to undertake or capable of performing it."

-Alfred Jacob Miller, 1873

For the large part, North American indigenous societies did not try to eradicate or punish two-spirits. Instead, two-spirits held special places in society.

Woman chief, a Crow two-spirit woman, was a unique mix of male and female. She pursued traditionally masculine activities, becoming one of the best riders, shooters, hunters and warriors of her people. She led war-parties, hunted on foot, and butchered the meat, returning with it on her back to camp. At one point, she supported four wives, attesting to the wealth she accumulated. Out of the Crow's 160 lodges, she held the third highest place, and also held the fifth highest position among Crow chiefs at an intertribal Crow and Cree council. She could go no higher, not because of her sex or gender, but because of her family's social position. However, unlike other two-spirits, she wore typical female clothing rather than adopting men's garments.

Sources: Wikipedia, "Two Spirits in American Indian Culture," by T.E. Heiatt

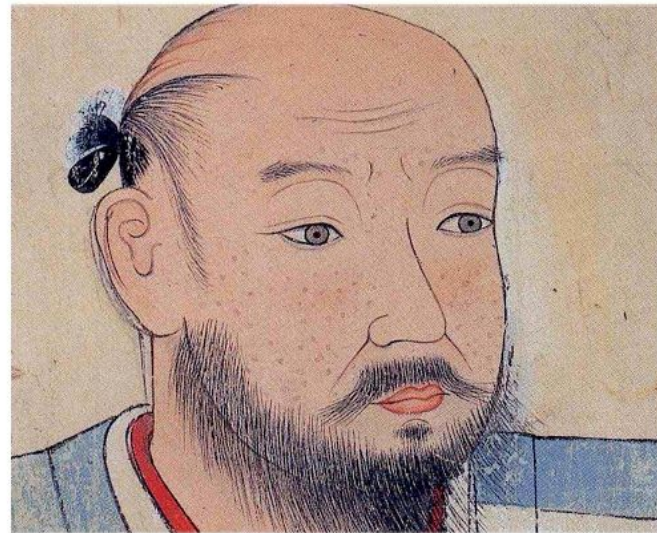
# Japanese Samurai

Samurai practiced *wakashu-do*, that is, “the way” of the young men.



As the samurai rose in prominence in the Imperial court in the 11-12th centuries, many of them also embraced the homosexual customs that had spread from the monasteries to the court. As boys, many of the samurai had been sent to the monasteries for their education where they would have participated in the idealized love relationships with the monks. The relationships between the samurai knights and their squires were infused with an idealism in which romance and valour in battle were closely linked.

Shoguns and prominent samurai knights frequently bestowed on their young male lovers titles, positions in the government, and land. Because of the social advancement and wealth that could come from a relationship with a powerful lord or knight, samurai families with teenaged sons went to great pains to interest knights or lords in their sons, even to the point of preparing their sons for anal intercourse. To prepare a youth for love making with a knight, his parents would have him relax and then insert a smooth wooden dildo-like instrument into his rectum to stretch it and help him adjust to penetration.



One such heroic death involved the overthrow of the 13th shogun, Ashikaga Yoshiteru (pictured above), who was killed in an attack. The shogun's squire, Odachidono, “fought so valiantly and with such intrepid spirit that all the rebels started to shout that he should not be killed, but be taken alive. Nonetheless, seeing his master die, and believing it a great dishonour to survive him, the youth cut open his throat and then his belly. Finally he killed himself by laying down flat with the dagger in his belly.”

Sources: James Neill. *The Origins and Role of Same-Sex Relations in Human Societies*

All of us are so  
fashioned by  
nature that we can  
live our lives free  
from error and  
nobly.

-Musonius Rufus



# The Early Ascetics

The first rejections of queerness came from pagan philosophers who viewed sensual pleasure as a distraction from gaining wisdom.

The ascetic philosophers had a strong influence on early Christian doctrine. Hebrew tradition had long viewed the sin of Sodom not as homosexuality, but as idolatry and pride. The Stoic Philo instead labelled the sin of the Sodomites a violation of nature which provoked the wrath of the gods, establishing the precedent for viewing men who commit homosexual acts as a threat to society itself. This began the long-standing tradition of rulers scapegoating homosexuals as a way to “purify” the kingdom of unnatural elements, becoming legal for the first time in the Code of Justinian in the 6th Century.

The most influential philosophical school of Greco-Roman times was Stoicism. Stoics often looked to the patterns they saw in nature for guidance. Since the role of sex among animals in nature appeared to them to be the perpetuation of the species (now known to be untrue), it followed that procreation must be the purpose of human sexuality. Thus, any non-procreative sex (including heterosexual acts) were considered “unnatural.” However, Stoics did not consider what was unnatural as immoral. They rejected many activities that were unnatural, but hardly immoral: swimming in heated pools, keeping plants indoors in pots, or trying to maintain youthful appearances. Stoics were more concerned with not allowing one’s passions to control behaviour, and many prominent Stoic philosophers had homosexual lovers.

Negativity towards sexuality advanced under Neo-Platonism, who held that the soul was a spiritual being trapped in the physical body, and saw the purity of the soul as polluted by sexual desire. They taught abstinence from all sensual pleasures, even condemning marriage and practicing self-castration.

Sources: Neill, James. *The Origins and Role of Same-Sex Relations in Human Societies*.



# Tang Dynasty

**A source of information on popular attitudes towards queers is humour. In 7-13th Century China, many jokes involved gay sex.**

The prose stories and humorous collections produced under the late Tang depict a social climate in which homosexuality is viewed as just another feature of day-to-day human relations, an aspect of sexuality that played a role in the lives of many ordinary men, and that was particularly associated with government officials, monks, students, and the unmarried, but also not unusual even among married men.

Because of the male-oriented nature of this society, discussions of sexuality that didn't include men were rare. However, what is portrayed in the literature shows that homosexuality was likely just as frequent among women as men.

A priest seduced a young disciple, who became very aroused to the point of erection. When the priest entered him from behind, the youth reached such arousal that the semen started oozing out of his penis. At that point the priest reached around and, grabbing the penis, exclaimed, "Oh Amida Buddha, it's pierced all the way through," thinking that it was his own penis he had grabbed.

A man and woman went to bed on their wedding, whereas the man immediately grabbed on to his wife's buttocks, attempting to have anal sex with her. "Your doing it the wrong way," exclaimed the wife. "But I've been doing it that way since I was very young - what's wrong with that?" he answered. "Well, I've been doing it since I was very young, too, and it wasn't that way!"

A man arranged a wife for his young, male lover. Having done this, he moved freely within the new family circle and didn't avoid anyone. When the wife's mother visited, she asked her daughter, "Which relative is he?" "My husband's husband," she replied.

Sources: James Neill. *The Origins and Role of Same-Sex Relations in Human Society*

# The Iliad

Central to the great epic written by Homer is the love and devotion between two warrior-heroes: Achilles and Patroclus.

Achilles, a great warrior, is angry at Agamemnon, the Greek king, for bringing ruin upon the Greek army. Without Achilles' support, the Greeks were greatly demoralized and began to lose ground in the war against Troy. Eventually, Patroclus is so distraught over the suffering of the Greek armies that he chooses to lead the Greek armies in the next battle, in which he dies.

Hearing the news of Patroclus' death, Achilles was devastated: "And the black cloud of sorrow closed on Achilles. In both hands he caught up the grimy dust, and poured it over his head and face, and fouled his handsome countenance... When his friends came to comfort him, Achilles mourned, '*There is nothing worse than this I could suffer, not even if I were to hear of the death of my father... or the death of my dear son.*'"

Throughout the text of the Iliad, the two heroes are constantly shown in each other's company, only separated twice in the whole epic. The sort of domestic involvement depicted between the two men is the sort usually seen only in love relationships. The intensely exclusive nature of their relationship is made clear in Achilles' prayer that only he and Patroclus would survive the war, with all the Trojans and Greeks perishing, so that the two comrades, alone together, would share the glory of taking Troy.

Sources: Neill, James. *The Origins and Role of Same-Sex Relations in Human Societies*.



Many modern scholars have tried to deny the sexual nature of the bond between the two heroes. However, the Greeks in the classical era would find it natural that such an intense relationship would involve a sexual bond, as love-inspired valour was a frequent theme in Greek culture. In his Symposium, Plato praised the courage and valour that were inspired by such love relationships as a great ideal and one of the great benefits to the society of homosexual love. Such an army, called the Sacred Band of Thebes, was assembled in the 4th century BC. It was composed of 150 pairs of lovers, and was renowned during the period for the valour of its warriors and extraordinary military success.



# The Temple Whore

**This role was believed necessary to insure the success of crops and fertility of livestock.**

The first culture known to disapprove of homosexuality were the Israelites. During the trauma of their captivity in Babylon, the identity of the Hebrews as a people had narrowly escaped extinction. The stresses and uncertainties of being a conquered people led to a pessimistic outlook towards worldly things. Among human's weaknesses, the greatest was considered to be the lure of sex. This attitude resulted in both the distinctly negative treatment of women and the stringent code on sexual behaviour that was included in the law codes developed after the period of the Babylonian invasions.

From the earliest Mesopotamian cultures up to Roman times, a significant percentage of the personnel of both temples and palaces were individuals who were viewed as being neither male nor female, but more like a third sex. Their name, the "Gala" priests, was written using the signs "penis-anus," an explicit reference to the sexual role taken by these priests.

A key part of the Mesopotamian worship of the goddess Inanna (called Isis by the Egyptians) was a ceremony called the sacred marriage, in which the sexual union of the goddess and a mythical bull were enacted. Similar sexual rituals were also performed throughout the year with laymen seeking divine protection. An important function of the temple whores was to stand in for the goddess in copulation with ordinary male worshippers, whose semen would be deposited into the bodies of the temple whores as an offering to the goddess, while the fee that was paid for the services would go to the upkeep of the temple. This custom has been called "temple prostitution," but the term is misleading because the practice was an integral part of worship and not merely for sexual pleasure.