

HOST A LOVE LETTERS SESSION IN NEX BENEDICT'S MEMORY

LOVE LETTERS FROM AND TO TRANS, QUEER, AND TWO-SPIRIT YOUTH

Nex Benedict, a 16-year-old, Chahta (Choctaw) student at Owasso High School died on February 8, 2024 following a physical altercation at school. In the weeks following, community members in Oklahoma and across the U.S. grieved and organized vigils. Many organizations demanded an investigation into the Oklahoma Department of Education and the removal of Oklahoma State Superintendent Ryan Walters.

We also want to hear from you: GSA clubs and Trans, Queer, and Two-Spirit youth. **Please join us in [writing love letters](#) to fellow trans, gender non-conforming, and Two-Spirit youth and students in Oklahoma and across the country.** Many students have to deal with hostile school climates daily, and we deserve so much better! Nex Benedict deserved a future.

This resource is a Facilitator's Guide to hosting a Love Letters session with your GSA. You can submit love letters here: <https://ourtranstruth.org/loveletters2tysubmissions/>

HONORING NEX



We are uplifting this excerpt from a blog post by Freedom Oklahoma. You can follow them at [@freedomoklahoma](#) on Instagram and online at <https://www.freedomoklahoma.org/news>

“Nex Benedict was a 16 year-old, Chahta (Choctaw) student at Owasso High School. Nex had widely used they/them pronouns and was transitioning to he/him pronouns with those closest to Nex. Nex loved cats, drawing, rock music, and was a straight-A student. Nex was an excellent cook, an artist, and a beloved

friend. Nex was bullied for over a year for being 2STGNC+ [Two-Spirit, Transgender, Gender Non-Conforming+] at Owasso High School, a space where hostility escalated with the implementation of state-mandated single-sex bathroom restrictions and the exit of an out teacher who was targeted by the hate-based social media platform Libs of TikTok. One day, at school, Nex encountered bullying in the bathroom that Nex was forced to use, one that did not align with Nex's gender. In that bathroom, a fight broke out, in which Nex experienced physical violence including having their head beaten. While other students were able to leave the bathroom unassisted, Nex had to be escorted by a school cop to the administrative offices where all students involved faced a punitive response from the school. Nex's mom was called to take Nex home, but instead, she took Nex to the hospital to have Nex's head trauma assessed. Nex was released and died the next day.

We need you to know as an Indigenous person who died on Indigenous land, we cannot talk about Nex's death without the intersectional context of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives (MMIR) crisis. MMIR exists within the framework of colonization and genocide, as colonizer governments have worked to erode tribal sovereignty, dehumanize Indigenous people, disrupt Indigenous history (especially that outside of the framework of colonial narratives) from being taught in public schools, and engaged in violence that disproportionately impacts Two Spirit and Indigiqueer relatives. For more resources on plugging into MMIR organizing being led on the ground in the area where Nex died, look to [NOISE](#) and organizers who continue to work on

justice for [Aubrey Dameron](#). For Two Spirit and Indigiqueer youth space, support the work of [Matriarch](#) sponsored youth group Cousins."

We encourage folks based in Oklahoma and within the 39 local sovereign tribal nations to get involved with Freedom Oklahoma!

GET READY TO HOST A LOVE LETTERS SESSION

This resource is designed to help you host a love letters session with your GSA, youth group, or even on your own! Please feel free to adapt the agenda and activities to your group.

1. **Pick a day** that you can host a love letters session with your GSA.
2. Check out the **meeting agenda** below and adapt it to your meeting time.
3. Let your GSA members know this will be a special activity and **encourage them to join you**.
4. Please review and share information with your group about **Nex Benedict, Nex's death**, and how Nex's death is another Indigenous loss in a long-time effort to organize around and stop the **Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives (MMIR)** crisis.
5. Get or ask members to bring **art materials for letter making** like basic art supplies, cards, cute stationary, colorful paper, fun pens, stickers, scissors etc.
6. **Host your session!**
7. **Submit the letters** together, or have someone (a GSA member, advisor, etc.) collect the letters at the end of the session and submit them to the website.

SAMPLE AGENDA

Estimated time of this workshop: 30 min

FACILITATOR NOTE: Every space is unique in its offerings and how it supports the needs of its members. Does your space focus on music to connect? Or offer a lot of time to discuss current events? You know your group's interests, values, and patterns. Use that information to develop your approach to facilitating this group activity in a genuine and meaningful way for your group.

OPENING UP THE MEETING (5-10 min)

FACILITATOR NOTE: Here are some options to get your meeting started. Choose one of the following or mix and match if you have the time.

- **Check-ins:** Go around the room and share your name, pronouns, how are you doing, and your access needs for today
- **Review Group/Club Agreements/Rules:** Consider adding some for this session
- **Opening Songs:** Pick music that helps to set the mood! For this session, we suggest hymnal/somber/reflective music. For instance: [Beautiful Chorus](#)
- **Opening Video:** ALOK, Funeral poem (5.5 min)
<https://youtu.be/VLeObePNRa8?si=O36sPICMB6LaEfBn>
 - **Note:** This poem is best suited for high school and up. Content warning for deaths, mention of suicide, transphobia. If you are showing a poem, provide at least 5-10 min for reactions and a brief discussion. How did this poem make you feel? What did this poem make you think about?
- **Move Your Body:** A lot of grief gets wrapped up in our bodies and we don't have time to think about how it restricts us. What parts of you are hurting? What parts need more focus and care?
 - Stretch your arms and look up
 - Roll your neck around
 - Get up and lean over and try to touch the floor

SETTING THE SCENE (5 min)

FACILITATOR NOTE: In this section of the meeting, focus on giving context for the Love Letters Session and talk about Nex Benedict. The suggested script is just a suggestion to help you hold this session; feel free to put it into your own words!

SAY: Today we are going to participate in a love letters campaign to bring attention to the voices and experiences of young trans, queer, Two-Spirit youth. This love letter campaign is in honor of Nex Benedict, who I will share about in a little bit.

SAY: We will spend time together to hold space and reflect on lives lost to violence. Please understand that this is a somber space for sadness and reflection.

- What this space will offer today: starter space for you to hold and share your grief, music, friendship, chance to share your feelings with others
- What this space may not offer today: a one-and-done remedy for your grief, all the answers you need for processing or getting over a feeling

SAY: Here are some ways that we can show respect for Nex and other lives lost. Can everyone agree to these expectations for today?

- Not interrupting those sharing stories
- Allowing space for discomfort and soreness
- Not making off-topic jokes or inappropriate commentary
- Please feel free to share other suggestions

SAY: You are welcome to leave at any point and you are welcome to do what you need to remain in the space, such as having snacks, water, or paper for journaling.

SAY: Recently, our community lost Nex Benedict.

READ: Read the “**HONORING NEX**” excerpt from **Freedom Oklahoma** on page 1 of this resource.

SAY: Nex is one of many lives taken and this tragedy once again brings us into a time of mourning, sadness, and remembrance of all those we have lost, all those who have had too short a time on this earth. Internationally and domestically, we are experiencing major losses that will forever alter us and the world in ways known and unknown.

SAY: Freedom Oklahoma is an organization that has been supporting their community’s grief around Nex’s death. One of the calls for support is for youth to show their support for Nex and trans, gender non-conforming, Two-Spirit youth in Oklahoma by writing letters of support, care, and love. Freedom Oklahoma is also collecting love letters in Oklahoma and will be creating a zine. We will be submitting these online where they will be displayed for people to see.

NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE: Some folks may be unfamiliar with the term “Two-Spirit,” sometimes abbreviated as “2S.” This quote from Hendrix O. (they/them), who is a member of GSA Network’s [Two-Spirit Initiative](#) advisory board and staff member with New Mexico GSA Network (a program of The Mountain Center) explains the origins of the term:

“Two-Spirit refers to “Indigenous people who have both feminine and masculine spirits. Depending on the tribe, a person’s Two-Spirit identity can describe how they express themselves, what work they do in the community, and/or what role they may have in traditional ceremonies. The term was created at the 3rd Annual Native American Gay and Lesbian Gathering in 1990, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.”

LOVE LETTER WRITING BETWEEN TRANS, QUEER, TWO-SPIRIT PEOPLE (5-10 min, optional)

FACILITATOR NOTE: Feel free to include this section if your meeting is longer than 30 minutes.

Otherwise, you may need to move on to the Letter Writing section! You can present the quotes, have them written up on a board, or have someone read them out loud.

SAY: The love letter campaign is one of many, many examples of trans, queer, Two-Spirit people leaning into aromantic love and putting love into action. Before we get into love letter writing, take 1-2 minutes to think about how you want to share and receive love. Check out these quotes for inspiration:

"I feel our nation's turning away from love...moving into a wilderness of spirit so intense we may never find our way home again. I write of love to bear witness both to the danger in this movement, and to call for a return to love." – bell hooks (2000)

"Upon closer inspection, the card said: To Satya, From Satya.... She had declared that she did not want to feel left out. After all, she had asked, why shouldn't she also have a card that's folded in half, with a felt heart sticker, and with a Happy Valentine's Day message inside, just for her." – Sunu P. Chandy (2023)

ASK: How do you want to share and receive love? [take responses, if there's time]

LOVE LETTER & ART-MAKING TIME (10-30 min)

FACILITATOR NOTE: Now move into the love letter campaign. Play some background music and give time for participants to craft, write, and submit their letters.

SAY: We are going to move into writing Love Letters to Trans, Queer, and Two-Spirit Youth in Oklahoma and others impacted by Nex's death. At the end of this session, we will submit our letters online! Handwritten and creative notes are highly encouraged.

Here are some reflection prompts to help with your letter if needed:

- Who are you and what do you love about trans, gender non-conforming, Two-Spirit youth in your life (and the broader community)? How did Nex's story impact you?
- What are some affirmations you would like to share?
- What do you wish for trans, gender non-conforming, Two-Spirit youth in Oklahoma and everywhere?
- What commitments do you want to make to support trans, gender non-conforming, Two-Spirit youth?

FACILITATOR'S NOTE: Handwritten letters and physical/digital art can be submitted as a photo or file. Participants can also submit text in the form if they only have text! To submit the letters, you can either:

1. Have each participant submit it at the end of session - this one may be easier as the form asks for contact information for each submission
2. Hand their letters to your GSA Advisor or a GSA representative who will take responsibility for submitting all the letters

FACILITATOR: Share with everyone the link for submission.

<https://ourtranstruth.org/loveletters2tysubmissions/>

SAY: Once the letters or art are submitted, they will be shared online. You can follow this campaign on social media platforms ([@ourtranstruth](#) and the website <https://ourtranstruth.org>), and share this call with friends and allies to amplify this message.

CLOSE OUT (2-10 min)

SAY: We are one of many GSAs across the country who are participating in this love letter campaign. We have so many messages of love... power... resilience... hope... kindness... and strength to share and receive. It's a reminder that we are not alone.

ASK: Who has already submitted your letter? [raise hands] For those who have not submitted your letter, can you commit to submitting your message today? If not, what about this week? [make sure people commit!]

IF YOU HAVE TIME, ASK: Does anyone want to share your letter?

FACILITATOR: Feel free to share resources to continue conversations on grief, resources for grief support, and connections to community resources. Closing discussion could include:

- How can we continue to support and care for one another?
- Offer time for the group to share names, lives, and stories of those lost. It is not mandatory to share any details of how their life ended. Share what they meant to you, what you learned from them, and how you continue to honor their memory.

SAY: Thank you for participating!