



SALLY!

HIGHER EDUCATION MODULE

Reaching Across Divides

The documentary *Sally!* was born from a simple question:

**“How come you’ve never heard
of Sally Gearhart?”**

Now, these film-based modules extend that inquiry to undergraduate and graduate students, inspiring additional research, inviting critical thinking, and actively seeking to redress the historical omission of women and LGBTQ+ individuals from academic discourse.

Through the *Sally!* Modules for Higher Education, students in Gender Studies, Women Studies, LGBTQ+ Studies, Sociology, Political Science, Theology, Education, and more can engage and learn about the life and legacy of one of second-wave feminism’s* most cherished leaders through her voice and the testimonials and stories from her beloved community of colleagues and friends.



*** Second-wave feminism (1960s-1980s) fought for women’s issues, including preventing domestic violence, advancing racial justice, protecting reproductive rights, ensuring LGBTQ rights, gaining pay equality, and more.**

(Source: [National Women’s History Museum](#))



“REACHING ACROSS DIVIDES” MODULE

“She wanted all of us to see the spirit in one another. She wanted all of us to see the possibilities in one another, the possibilities that we could be our better selves, and to do that, you have to reach across the aisle. You have to communicate, and ultimately, you have to love one another. You even gotta love your enemies.”

- Dorothy Haecker, Colleague and Friend of Sally's



The “Reaching Across Divides” Module examines the complex dynamics of communication and advocacy in a polarized society by drawing inspiration and learning from the life and work of Sally Gearhart.

By engaging in this interactive learning, students will explore:

- How Sally balanced being “outrageously radical” with her ability to connect with diverse individuals across the political, economic, and cultural spectrum.
- The effectiveness of radicalism as a tool for challenging the status quo, and its potential limitations.
- Political strategies and tactics employed to reach across the aisle and achieve legislative gains.
- Overcoming differences between people and groups that allow for relationship building and connecting across ideological divides.
- The reasons behind our difficulty in “crossing the aisle” and potential strategies for communicating despite our differences.
- Current opportunities on a local, state, or national level where Sally Gearhart’s approach could help bridge ideological divides.

Upon completion of the “Reaching Across Divides” Module, students will:

- Understand and analyze effective communication techniques in the context of social and political activism.
- Model communication and interpersonal techniques used by Sally Gearhart.
- Evaluate the benefits and potential drawbacks of radical approaches to social change.
- Develop personal strategies for engaging in constructive dialogue with those holding different viewpoints.

TOPIC 1

Reaching Across the Aisle

(Working Within Institutions)

QUESTIONS

- Why is it important for our elected officials to “reach across the aisle”?
- What do you think many politicians are missing these days that Sally embodied?
- In today’s hyper-divisive political climate, what do elected political leaders need to do and model that fosters respectful disagreement?
- What do you think are the most pressing roadblocks preventing politicians from reaching across political divides?

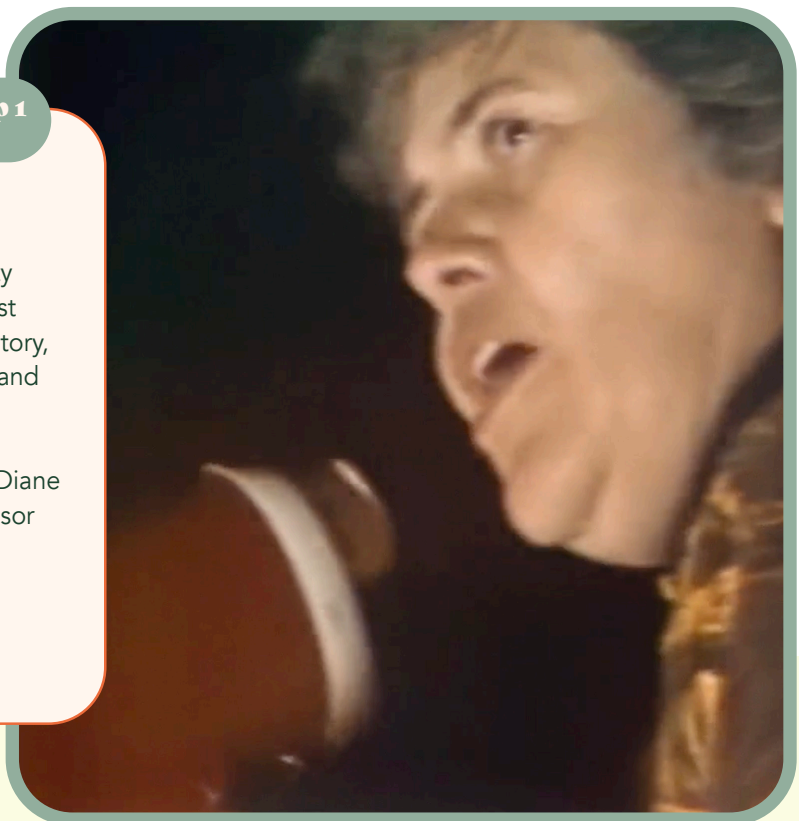


Watch *Sally!* Clip 1
3 minutes

Description: This clip documents Sally’s ability to connect with people during one of the most difficult periods in San Francisco’s political history, the assassination of Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk.

Start: 0:17:25 (Card: “November 27, 1978.” Diane Feinstein: “Both Mayor Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk have been shot and killed.”)

End: 0:20:21 (Cleve Jones: “She was an extraordinary woman.”)



TOPIC 2

Connecting Across Divides

(Working Within Communities)



QUESTIONS

- How do you understand the idea of “showing up” in and for your community?
- How did Sally both connect across community divides as well as remain separate?
- In today’s polarized political climate, what type of activism allows for respectful dialogue across differences?
- What do you think are the most pressing barriers preventing community leaders from being able to reach across community divides?



Watch Sally! Clip 2
5 minutes

Description: This clip celebrates Sally in her older years, as a community member in Willits, connecting with men and women across the political spectrum, including her good friends Margie Handley and Vivian Sotomayor Power.

Start: 1:24:21 (Willits sign over street with cars)

End: 1:29:14 (Cherrie Moraga: “It wasn’t everyone who fit the model of the perfect lesbian who are your home in the end.”)



MODULE EXERCISE:

A TOOLKIT TO WORK ACROSS POLITICAL DIFFERENCES

Today, we are clearly living in increasingly polarized communities. There is no prescription for building consensus and finding common ground among individuals or groups with different worldviews, values, or priorities, but some individuals stand out as bridge-builders. Sally, with her joy, tenacity, and strong sense of faith and humor, often demonstrated how to forge connections across political, economic, and religious differences.

To celebrate Sally, you are going to build a "Toolkit to Work Across Political Differences." This exercise invites creativity, imagination, hope, and idealism, offering a set of accessible strategies for anyone to address our country's most pressing challenges. More than ever, we need to find commonalities to nurture and uphold our constitution and democratic principles.

Let's get started!

Educator Note: First, create a set of "Issue Cards" each listing one political issue. For example, "Gun Control," "Climate Change," "Immigration," "Healthcare," "Energy," "Education," "Taxes," etc.

1. Divide into small groups (3-4 persons each).
2. Each group will randomly draw an "Issue Card."
3. Groups will have 15 minutes to brainstorm one innovative strategy that can be used to help bridge a divide between groups that may have differing views.
4. The strategy must be:
 - Actionable (meaning it is a reasonable and attainable strategy)
 - Non-partisan
 - Empathy-focused
5. Each group will be responsible for creating a visual representation of the strategy (poster, infographic, short video, etc.).
6. Each group will pitch the strategy to the class.
7. After all groups have presented, the class will vote and the top 3 strategies will be included in the official "Toolkit."

Closing

Take a moment for students to reflect on the process of coming up with their strategy. What was easy? What was more challenging? When differences arose, how did the group navigate coming to a resolution?

RELEVANT WEBSITES:

[AllSides](#): Presents news from different perspectives to promote understanding across divides.

[Braver Angels](#): An organization that brings together red and blue Americans for structured conversations.

[Living Room Conversations](#): Facilitates conversations between individuals of differing views on various topics.

[Reconciling Ministries Network](#): Focuses on creating understanding between LGBTQ+ individuals and religious communities, particularly within the United Methodist Church.

[The Human Rights Campaign's "Project One America"](#): Works in conservative states to change hearts and minds about LGBTQ+ equality.

[The National Institute for Civil Discourse](#): Works to promote healthy and civil political debate.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Scholarly Articles

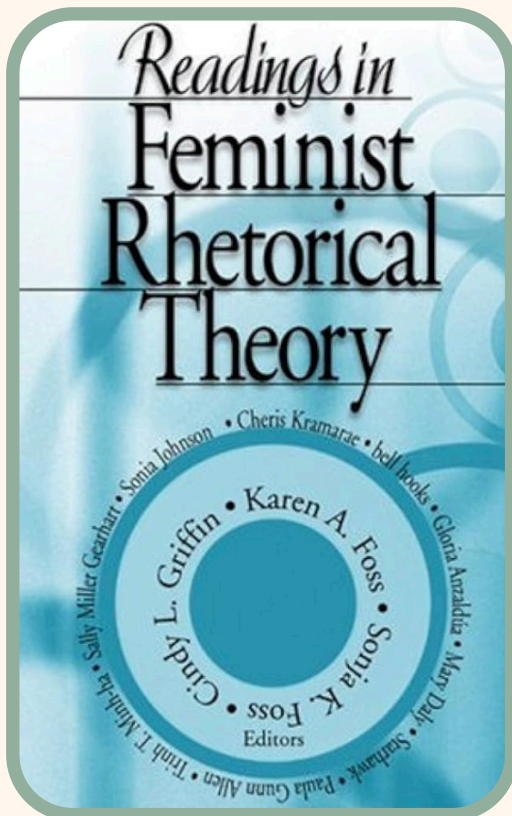
Campbell, Karlyn Kohrs. "The Rhetoric of Women's Liberation: An Oxymoron," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol. 59, no. 1, 1973, pp. 74-86.

Foss, Karen A. "Feminist Scholarship in Speech Communication: Contributions and Obstacles," *Women's Studies in Communication* vol. 12, no 1, Spring 1989, pp. 1-10.

Foss, Sonja K. and Cindy L. Griffin, "Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric," *Communication Monographs* vol. 62, no. 1, 1995, pp. 2-18.

Gearhart, Sally Miller. "Notes From a Recovering Activist," *Sojourner: The Women's Forum*, vol. 21, 1995, pp. 8-11.

Gearhart, Sally Miller. "The Womanization of Rhetoric," *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1979, pp. 195-201.





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SallyGearhartFilm.com