



AIDS: A Pop Culture History

VH1 Music Studio
Cable in the Classroom

WEB RESOURCES

Note to Teachers: The programs viewed in conjunction with these educational materials may include references, consistent with the eras portrayed, to substance abuse, violent acts, and topics of a sexual and/or political nature. Because this may be considered inappropriate for classroom use in some communities, you are encouraged to review the programs before presenting them to your students, and if necessary, choose those sections that enhance your lesson and are acceptable for use in your classroom.

Web Resources

Informational Sites

Cable Positive

Cable Positive is a non-profit organization that works with media and telecommunications organizations to help educate the public on HIV/AIDS. This site contains valuable HIV/AIDS information in an easy-to-use format. The site includes interactive components that complement AIDS: A Pop Culture History.

<http://www.cablepositive.org/hivinfo.html>

Centers for Disease Control

The CDC is the government agency charged with understanding and preventing the spread of disease. As such, its HIV/AIDS portion of the site is massive and thorough. It has separate sections devoted to HIV/AIDS: surveillance of the disease, prevention research, prevention tools, treatment, testing, among others. It is an excellent starting point to learn the current state of AIDS research.

<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/dhap.htm>

Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria is an independent, public-private partnership working to increase funding to fight AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria and direct these funds to effective prevention and treatment programs, in the countries with the greatest need.
<http://www.globalfundatm.org>

Kaiser Family Foundation

The William J. Kaiser Family Foundation is a health-based organization with an extensive background in HIV/AIDS work. This part of its site is devoted to that subject, and it includes current events, research results, and statistics on the topic of HIV/AIDS. You can also find extensive information on many sub-categories of the disease and topics related to the disease.
<http://www.kff.org/hivaids/index.cfm>

Kaiser Family Foundation Youth

Part of the Kaiser Family Foundation's HIV/AIDS site deserves special mention: the Youth & HIV/STDs section. It includes a wide array of information that deals specifically with young people.
<http://www.kff.org/youthhivstds/index.cfm>

National Institutes of Health

Like the CDC's site, the NIH is a governmental site that is incredibly thorough. It is a site in which you can easily start down one road of information and end up down others from thinking of additional ideas to explore.
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/aids.html#nlmnhresources>

Rap It Up Classroom Connection

Black Entertainment Television (BET) has a public affairs initiative called Rap It Up, and part of that effort is an educational curriculum for high school health classrooms. Classroom Connection provides 10 stand-alone lesson plans created by experts and field tested in urban school districts.
<http://www.affiliatekit.com/networks/bet/bet/4cop/classroomconnection/index.html>

VH1

In 2003 VH1 embarked on its first-ever campaign dedicated to HIV/AIDS awareness. The campaign currently includes Public Service Announcements, Online resources and Programming that identify the growing concerns currently surrounding HIV/AIDS. This effort grew from a company-wide commitment by Viacom to devote resources to support HIV/AIDS prevention as part of the KNOW HIV/AIDS initiative.
http://www.vh1.com/interact/know_HIV/

VIACOM - KNOW HIV/AIDS

VIACOM - KNOW HIV/AIDS is an unprecedented, global media campaign that combats HIV/AIDS through public service messages (PSAs), television and radio programming, and free print and online content. The multi-year effort combines the public health expertise of the Kaiser Family Foundation with the power of Viacom's media brands and unmatched audience relationships to foster awareness of the disease and its prevention. More information about KNOW HIV/AIDS is available through the initiative's comprehensive Web site.
<http://www.knowhivaids.org> or toll-free number 1-866-344-KNOW (5669).

Films

***And the Band Played On* (PG-13)**

This 1993 film (based on reporter Randy Shilts' book of the same name) documents the early work on AIDS

research and the way in which communities dealt with the disease. Matthew Modine stars as Dr. Don Francis, a public health official at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) who works to understand the disease and stop its spread. One of the many tragedies the film depicts is the way in which some public health officials refused to cooperate with French health officials, so as not to share credit for research. That lack of coordination delayed the discovery of vital information.

***An Early Frost* (NR)**

This 1985 made-for-TV movie was network television's first attempt to portray AIDS within a dramatic story. *An Early Frost* stars Aidan Quinn as Michael Pierson, a character who is diagnosed with AIDS. The way in which his family and friends struggle over how they should act and react around Michael mirrors what NBC executives apparently grappled with in the movie's production. In order for NBC executives to approve an onscreen kiss between Michael and his grandmother, the movie's creators had to get the backing of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) that the kiss did not portray a risky behavior. Reportedly, the CDC actively encouraged the kiss in order to show people that the disease will not spread through kissing.

***The Hours* (PG-13)**

Based on Michael Cunningham's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Hours* is the story of three women from different eras whose lives intersect. Nicole Kidman, Julianne Moore, and Meryl Streep star in the 2002 film. Streep plays Clarissa Vaughan, who may be in love with a poet who is dying of AIDS, and the film is able to tie in her experiences with those of author Virginia Woolf (portrayed by Kidman) from the 1920s and Laura Brown (Moore) from the 1950s. Nicole Kidman won an Oscar for her portrayal of Virginia Woolf, and overall, the film was nominated for 9 Academy Awards. AIDS may not be the focal point of the film, but it does demonstrate how AIDS in 2002 can be treated as a "fact of life."

***In America* (PG-13)**

AIDS inserts itself into *In America* as a fact of life in America. Jim Sheridan's film (which he co-wrote with his two daughters) portrays the lives of an Irish family that has recently arrived in the United States to pursue a new life and the "American Dream." As the family struggles to make it work, daughters Christie and Ariel befriend an artist, Mateo (portrayed by Djimon Hounsou who was nominated for an Oscar). A fellow immigrant, Mateo is dying of AIDS, but he is far from dead. He imparts wisdom and understanding to Christie and Ariel that will help ensure that they succeed in their pursuit of the American Dream. Overall, the film was nominated for three Academy Awards.

***It's My Party* (R)**

Starring Eric Roberts and Gregory Harrison as Nick and Brandon, *It's My Party* (1996) also includes an ensemble cast who gather for one final party for Nick. AIDS has led to health conditions that Nick knows will end his life quickly. Before he goes (and before he is too weak to enjoy it), Nick organizes a party for himself. Brandon is a former boyfriend who left Nick upon learning that Nick was HIV-positive. Needless to say, Nick's friends detest Brandon for abandoning Nick, so they are shocked when Brandon shows up at the party. The film is a tear jerker accented with funny moments.

***Longtime Companion* (R)**

Some have called this film the first major release to put a human face on AIDS. Set in New York City in the 1980s, *Longtime Companion* centers on the lives of gay men in the early days of AIDS (when the disease was referred to as Gay-Related Immune Disorder), through the end of the decade when it was THE story in the gay community. The 1990 film uses a documentary-style presentation, which is one way that *Longtime Companion* powerfully frames the drama. The film's title refers to the way in which the *New York Times* would list survivors

of AIDS victims: they were not boyfriends, partners, or lovers; they were “longtime companions.”

***Philadelphia* (PG-13)**

Many regard this 1993 film (directed by Jonathan Demme) as the first mainstream film to present AIDS to audiences. The critical and commercial success of *Philadelphia* is an important moment in the timeline of AIDS. Tom Hanks won the Lead Actor Oscar (his first) for his portrayal of Andrew Beckett, an attorney who is infected with AIDS and is subsequently fired by his law firm. A homosexual, Beckett hires Joe Miller (Denzel Washington) to represent him in court against his former firm. Miller is a character who initially shows his distaste and fear of homosexuality and AIDS, a perspective that many audience members may have shared. In 1993, many of the real-life and fictional AIDS victims that had generated an outpouring of sympathy from the general public had not been gay males. Andrew Beckett’s character, however, is a homosexual who strikes a chord among many viewers.

***The Visit* (R)**

Hill Harper stars as Alex Waters, a character in prison who is visited periodically by family and friends. This 2000 film focuses on many issues surrounding the incarceration rates of African-American males, with AIDS being one of them. The film unapologetically and almost matter-of-factly presents these issues through the vignettes of visits to the prison. Billy Dee Williams plays Alex’s father and was one of the four Independent Spirit Awards nominees. Throughout the film, it is clear that AIDS is among many ways in which someone (particularly African-American males) can be imprisoned.

Plays

Angels in America

Angels in America is Tony Kushner’s two-part epic play that examines AIDS and homosexuality in the U.S. in the 1980s. In 1993, *Angels in America Part I: Millennium Approaches* won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. The next year, *Angels in America Part II: Perestroika* won the Tony for Best Play. The epic play weaves in social, political, and personal themes and experiences with AIDS as a central theme. AIDS and homosexuality are present in all of the characters’ lives, even if some of the characters themselves don’t actually intersect with one another. In the final (and very powerful!) scene in *Millennium Approaches*, an angel crashes through the ceiling to visit Prior Walter, a character who is dying of AIDS, and *Perestroika* picks up the story from that climactic scene. (The play was adapted into a miniseries in 2003.)

Love! Valour! Compassion!

Debuting in 1994, this Off-Broadway hit written by Terrence McNally earned a Best Play Tony in 1995. Because the eight central characters in the play are gay, HIV/AIDS is an occasional topic of discussion, and one that is always bubbling under the surface. Throughout one summer, the eight characters gather at a large home over three different weekends (Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day) to socialize. Their relationships progress and digress as the summer marches on. The character who grapples most with HIV/AIDS is Buzz, who is HIV positive. The play was adapted into a movie in 1997 with many of the actors reprising their roles from the stage production.

The Normal Heart

This 1985 play by Larry Kramer was one of the earlier dramas to take on AIDS. The play is, in fact, extremely autobiographical with Kramer’s character coming in the form of Ned Weeks. In the early 1980s, Weeks is distressed over the disease that has infected his friend and lover. The response to the disease by the government

and within the gay community further distresses him and sets him on a course toward activism. His call to action alienates him among many of his gay friends, but Ned eventually finds someone who is willing to help him in his call to action: a *New York Times* reporter, Felix Turner. In hindsight, it is clear that Ned Weeks (Kramer!) was not an alarmist but one who raised his voice when many others would not.

Books

My Brother by Jamaica Kincaid (non-fiction)

My Brother is Jamaica Kincaid's personal reflection on her brother Devon's battle with HIV/AIDS. Her memoir centers on the author's return to her native Antigua where her younger siblings live (including her brother infected with AIDS). Kincaid has not lived with her family since she was 16, and although she hardly knows her brother, she is able to help Devon's physical health (temporarily). However, in her attempt to improve his psychological well-being and help him make something of the life he has left, she fails to convince him to stop engaging in risky behavior. One reviewer describes the book's writing style as resembling "images of flowing water in a stream: constantly in motion and yet reflective."

The Day Eazy-E Died by James Earl Hardy (fiction)

Despite its name, *The Day Eazy-E Died* is a work of fiction and an engrossing work of fiction at that. James Earl Hardy's novel follows a slice of life in the world of the character Raheim, a successful African-American model who is shaken a bit when the world learns of rapper Eazy-E's disclosure that he has AIDS. (Eazy-E was part of NWA, a well-known group in the earlier days of rap.) Eazy-E's status convinces Raheim that he should get tested, and the novel spotlights the time that he awaits the results. Raheim's family (including his 7 year-old son) take on added importance.



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