

## NIGHTMARE ON AIDS STREET



Runtime: 5 minutes  
Category: Drama

San Juan, TX  
2000 South Texas Contest Winner

*17-year old Isabel knows she can't take back what happened during one hazy night with a guy. She decides to take responsibility and bravely face her greatest fear.*

### STUDENT VIDEO GUIDE

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#### **Film Topics:**

The film deals with testing, friendship, self-confidence, and taking responsibility.

#### **Story Behind the Story:**

15 year-old Nicole Zepeda had her first experience in film as a crew member on the 1999 Scenarios film "Don't Dance With Death" along with nearly 150 of her classmates. The following year, in 2000, Nicole submitted a script to the Scenarios contest on coming of age in the era of AIDS. She wrote from experience, about what she saw going on with her peers and what her friends told her. She used imagery and special effects to tell her story. She was surprised as anyone when she learned that she had won the contest. Her winning marked the second year in a row that Scenarios would be working at Pharr/San Juan/Alamo North High School (PSJA North).



Nicole's involvement with Scenarios brought her other exciting experiences...

In August 2001, Nicole got a call from Hollywood. They wanted her to audition for an HBO film entitled "Real Women Have Curves." Nicole had a first audition in San Antonio and then, by the time she drove the three hours home, the director had called and wanted her to fly to Los Angeles the following day. Arriving in Los Angeles, Nicole was picked up in a limousine and taken to meet the director. She auditioned for six hours, opposite actors who had already been cast. The director told her she was trying to choose between Nicole and one other actress. Though Nicole didn't get the part, it was an experience of a lifetime and confirmed her love for film. Now a senior in high school, Nicole is applying to film schools.



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### STUDENT VIDEO GUIDE (CONT'D)

#### **Writers Bios:**

Nicole Zepeda, 16, is a junior at Pharr-San Juan- Alamo North High School. She has worked public relations and promotions in Texas, New York, and Florida. Nicole has performed in over 12 theater productions with the award winning P.S.J.A. North theater department, and is an active member of the nationally recognized P.S.J.A. television production department. She also has a passion for music and has won numerous awards for her accomplishments with her violin. Nicole plans to attend a university to prepare her for a career in filmmaking and the arts.



#### **Talent Bios:**

Kinan made his directorial debut in 1994 at El Teatro Campesino, where he co-directed their biannual Christmas production, La Virgen Del Tepeyac. Since that time, his imaginative and creative style has continued to leave an indelible mark on ETC's productions. Kinan's film credits include King Lear, I, Priista, the award winning video short Little Louise, and Ballad of a Solider, an independent feature film adaptation of Luis Valdez' one act drama Soldado Razo.

#### **Honors:**

"Nightmare on AIDS Street" has appeared in numerous film festivals and was awarded the Henry Hampton Award for Excellence in Media from the Council on Foundations. It was also a finalist at the 32nd Annual USA Film Festival in Dallas. "Nightmare" premiered along with "The Monster" at Rikers Island. "Nightmare" is used in various school districts around the country, including the New York City and Miami-Dade School Districts.



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### DISCUSSION GUIDE - QUESTIONS FOR DIALOGUE

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**1. As decisions that Isabel has recently made pass before her eyes, a little girl appears who both startles and comforts her. What does the little girl represent to you?**

(There may be many interpretations of this imagery. Suggest that the little girl may represent Isabel's youth and innocence.)

**2. Isabel defends her boyfriend to her friend, saying that she trusts and loves him. What can a person say to a friend who feels this way about his or her partner and, therefore, does not use protection? Can using protection demonstrate one's love for a partner and for oneself?**

(Note that loving a person does not change whether or not he or she has an STI. Also, discuss that while some people may think they do not need to use protection because they are in a monogamous relationship, the reality is relationships do not last forever in most cases)

**3. Isabel imagines various people in her life, including her teacher and her mother, becoming very angry with her when they find out what she has done or that she has contracted a sexually transmitted infection. How does this make her feel? What could Isabel say to a friend who was afraid of this happening and, therefore, reluctant to get tested?**

(This is an opportunity to talk about the stigma associated with having a STI and how shame can prevent people from getting the treatment they need. Note that the only way to detect and treat a STI is by seeing a health care professional.)

**4. Isabel calls her boyfriend to ask what happened between them. When he simply says, "You know....," she becomes very scared. What type of thoughts could one have after being in such a situation and not remembering what he or she did one night? What could he or she do to handle this situation?**

(Talk about scenarios in which this could happen, including drinking excessive alcohol or taking drugs. Note that it takes courage to overcome regret and recognize the importance of getting tested for infections and/or pregnancy.)

**5. When Isabel goes to a clinic to get tested for HIV, the counselor asks her why she thinks she needs a test. What are the different reasons a person may want to get tested?**

(Note that many people are embarrassed to get tested, but it is important to realize that it is actually a very common, healthy, responsible, and mature decision. Suggest that students consider talking about clinic visits with friends to provide support for each another.)



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### DISCUSSION GUIDE - THROUGH THE LENS OF A FILMMAKER

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**1. All of the actors in this film are students, rather than professionals. Why do you think the director cast this way? How does this casting decision help or impede the film in reaching its audience?**

(Ask students to discuss how the use of real students provides authenticity to the story. Also note how the realistic portrayal of the characters highlights the fact that all of the people involved in the story, good and bad, are “everyday” teenagers.)

**2. How does the writer use symbolism in the film? How does the director address this same issue?**

(Note how the portrayal of non-reality through a nightmare draws the audience into the emotions of the story and makes the film more interesting and powerful. Also discuss how the lead actress’ innocence, depicted by the little girl, portrays her feelings about herself.)

**3. Does the point of view change in the film? If so, for what reason?**

(Discuss how images of the actress watching herself in different situations relates her internal struggles, as well as how the viewers are provided with an opportunity to assess how they perceive her decisions.)

**4. Comment on location and setting. How does it add to the film?**

(Point out that the clinic setting that is used has a cold, white, sterile feel. In contrast, the party is full of color, noise, excitement, and confusion. Note that contrasts in setting used in this film are the primary means of expressing the main character’s feelings of loneliness and isolation.)



## LAYING THE GROUND WORK

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The questions contained in this guide are designed to utilize critical thinking and dialogue to promote teenagers' self-awareness and understanding of relationships and sexual health. Working through these questions will provide adolescents with a forum to discuss their own opinions and choices, hear others' viewpoints, and to analyze the behavior of the characters they see in the films. This process will encourage the sharing of valuable information and the development of skills that can help young people make positive decisions that will affect their health and their lives.

Much of the dialogue that is generated may involve sensitive subjects. Therefore, teachers may wish to offer students an **Anonymous Question Box** in which they can insert questions before or after class. If this is done, it is important for teachers to be prepared to recognize, in some appropriate fashion, all issues that are raised and to let students know that

- No question is wrong or silly
- Anyone who contributes a question to the box will remain anonymous, and
- All questions will be addressed, either by the primary instructor or a facilitator who is invited to cover specific issues.

Given the nature of the material, it is useful to introduce **Ground Rules** that may be posted in the classroom. These may need to be referred to regularly, particularly when sensitive issues arise. As an ice-breaking activity, teachers can allow students to develop their own ground rules and help them discuss their importance. Such a list may include the following:

1. **Right to Pass:** We will respect one's choice to abstain from the discussion.
2. **Respect:** We will listen attentively to what others have to say, allowing one person to speak at a time.
3. **Sensitivity:** We will recognize that it may be difficult for our classmates to share stories about themselves and their feelings.
4. **Supportiveness:** We will not criticize other people, although we may disagree with their point of view.
5. **Understanding:** We will be aware that others may differ in their religion, cultural background, or in other ways and we will, therefore, be thoughtful about the comments we make.
6. **Confidentiality:** We will not repeat anything that is shared within the group to anyone outside of the group. While we may talk about the content of the group discussion, we will not identify who has raised a particular issue or who has disclosed a personal story or feeling.

## SCENARIOS USA—A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

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Scenarios USA is an award-winning non-profit organization dedicated to helping youth make smart decisions about their lives by giving them a creative forum to explore who they are and how they see the world. Scenarios USA holds the annual story writing contest called "What's the Real Deal?," in which teenagers in Miami, South Texas and New York City are asked to write and submit stories on such topics as HIV/AIDS, pregnancy, and relationships.

The winning stories, selected by a group of young people, educators, filmmakers, and health professionals are made into short films in partnership with the young writer and a Hollywood filmmaker. Directors who have worked with Scenarios include Doug Liman (*The Bourne Identity*), Michael Apted (*Gorillas in the Mist*), Tamara Jenkins (*Slums of Beverly Hills*), Jim McKay (*Our Song*), and Griffin Dunne (*Practical Magic*). The winning writers participate in all aspects of the production of their stories and attend a premiere of their films in New York City.

The finished products are innovative films used by school teachers, community groups, and after-school programs across the country to facilitate discussion and present information connected to teen sexual health. In addition, Scenarios films have been seen on MTV, Showtime, PBS, and Oxygen. Scenarios has been recognized with Porter-Novelli's Award for Excellence and Innovations in Social Marketing, Council on Foundations Award for Excellence in Film & Digital Media, and numerous honors from film festivals.