



**Lesson Title: Just Like You Imagined**

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Six teens hope to avoid heartbreak, HIV, and hard truths about their relationships while remaining true to who they are.

The film addresses HIV, pregnancy, testing, sexual orientation, and taking responsibility. All Scenarios USA films deal with relationships, communication, self-esteem and decision-making.

**Story Behind the Story:**

Students in Miami learned about Scenarios USA in their drama classes and almost all of the Miami-Dade schools entered the REAL DEAL contest.

17 year-old Verena Faden wanted to write a story that told the truth about what teenagers deal with in relationships and, at the same time, made teens aware that their everyday choices may affect the rest of their lives. Her inspiration for her story came after the HIV/AIDS instructor told her drama class that the HIV virus can be transmitted through oral sex. Bam! That would be the start of her story.

Originally called 'Sex Sights,' Verena's script was selected by Scenarios USA's 17-member selection committee because the story effectively dealt with a variety of adolescent health issues. Director David Frankel's only concern was that the story was too long for a 10-15 minute short film. Both David and writer/producer Frances Negrón-Muntaner suggested that Verena scale down her story; possibly focusing on one of the three couples in her script. Verena, however, was adamant in keeping her story the way it was. She argued that the film needed complete stories of the three couples in order to truly capture many of the issues teenagers face. After some debate and many drafts, Verena's story was told as she had originally conceived.

*Just Like You Imagined?* was shot in Verena's hometown of Hialeah (a suburb of Miami), and her whole high school was involved in the filming. David and his crew took extra time out of shooting to mentor dozens of high school students and explain the filmmaking process. The cast and crew shot the film over two 22 hour days... yep, from 6am to 4am!

Scenarios USA premiered the film at a screening party in downtown Miami for over 200 guests. Miami-Dade County Mayor, Alex Penelas, honored Verena and David and proclaimed the date "Scenarios USA Day."



### Writers Bios:

Writing the story for *Just Like You Imagined?* allowed Verena Faden to discover her powerful narrative voice, and that was just the beginning of what would become a life-changing experience. The film earned Verena a scholarship to the School of Visual Arts (SVA) in New York City, a “Verena Faden Day” in Miami bestowed by the mayor, and accolades from film festivals across the country.

Verena grew up in Hialeah, FL in a Cuban-American family in which, as she says, “[you] don’t leave the family to go to college” and especially not for a career in filmmaking. The process of creating *Just Like You Imagined?* presented a powerful opportunity for both Verena and her family, who have supported Verena after witnessing her passion and potential for speaking out through film.

Verena completed a feature film entitled *Category 5* for her graduating senior project at SVA. *Category 5* features acclaimed actor Steven Bauer (*Scarface*, *Traffic*) and premiered in New York City with a screening in Miami.

### Talent Bios:

David Frankel is a writer-director living in Miami. His films include *Miami Rhapsody* and *Dear Diary*, for which he won the Academy Award for Best Short. He directed several episodes of HBO's *From the Earth to the Moon*, which won the Emmy for best mini-series. He directed two hours of HBO's *Band of Brothers*, which won an Emmy Award for Directing and a Golden Globe for best mini-series. His television work also includes *Grapevine* and *Sex and the City*. David directed *The Pennsylvania Miner's Story* for ABC and *The Devil Wears Prada*.

### Honors:

- Festivals: Made in Miami Film Festival, Taos Talking Picture Teen Media Conference, Garden State Film Festival and the Fort Lauderdale Film Festival.
- Aired on Showtime



## DISCUSSION GUIDE -QUESTIONS FOR DIALOGUE

1. How do you think Kristie is influenced by Willy telling her that he could see himself “falling for her”?  
(Identify ways she could have gotten to know Willy better. Point out, however, that her failure to get to know him well does not justify his failure to take responsibility for his actions.)
2. When Kristie approaches Willy to tell him that she is pregnant he says, “It’s not my problem. You’re on your own.” How familiar does this situation seem? What should each person’s role be under these circumstances?  
(Discuss the responsibilities regarding sex and pregnancy that both men and women should share.)
3. At one point in the film Willy also says, “I just have to be more careful next time. I’ve just gotta pick girls that will never give me a hard time.” What does this reveal about what he thinks of the young women with whom he has sexual relationships? Where do attitudes like Willy’s come from?  
(Discuss how certain gender norms and roles may fail to challenge attitudes such as these as well as how people behave as a result of them.)
4. Erica is angry with Matt because she thinks he knew that he could be HIV-positive, but never told her. What issues are important for people to discuss prior to engaging in a sexual relationship? What other things should a couple do before having sex?  
(Point out the importance of discussing past risky behaviors as well as each person’s expectations. Also note how a couple might benefit from getting tested together before having sex, or delaying sex until they are comfortable enough with each other to talk about it)
5. Enrique seems to want to move faster than Gary. How can they come to an agreement about how they should proceed with their relationship?  
(Acknowledge that they may or may not share similar perspectives and, therefore, must make a decision about whether it is best for them to continue their relationship, and whether or not the relationship will involve sexual activity.)
6. How is Enrique and Gary’s relationship similar to the other characters’ relationships? Can the issues that Enrique and Gary are facing arise in heterosexual relationships?



(Discuss the fact that homosexual couples experience relationship issues similar to heterosexuals. These issues can involve communication, commitment, pressure, and decision-making.)

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

7. How does the writer try to maintain focus while following three stories at the same time? Is this effective? Can you name other films that use the same techniques?  
(The director often cuts from a high moment in a scene to a personal insight regarding that moment. This ensures momentum and saves time in the storytelling. The director also overlaps the settings of the characters twice to show how lives intersect.)
8. Are there points of climax and resolution in the film?  
(Note that each of the three stories climax at the point of conflict, yet there is not necessarily resolution in each situation. Discuss how individual characters successfully or unsuccessfully reach agreement with their partners or take responsibility for their actions.)
9. How would you have ended the film?  
(As a facilitator you may want to stop the film at certain points and have the group discuss possible endings. The varied responses can lead to a rich discussion of why individuals think the film should end in a certain way highlighting assumptions, stereotypes, and gender roles.)
10. How do the writer and director establish intimacy between the audience and the characters? What are the advantages of this style?  
(By having the actors dialogue with the camera, the viewer is made to feel connected with the characters and able to hear their thoughts. Having all of the actors directly address the camera exposes the viewer to a variety of perspectives. Note that not all of these points of view are ideal, yet providing them allows the viewers to think through the situation for themselves.)



## LAYING THE GROUND WORK

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**

Scenarios USA is a non-profit organization that uses writing and filmmaking to foster youth leadership, advocacy and self-expression in underserved teens. Scenarios USA asks young people to write about the issues that shape their lives for the annual “What’s the REAL DEAL?” writing contest, and thousands have responded with their raw and revealing insights. The winning writers are partnered with some of Hollywood’s finest filmmakers to transform their stories into award-winning short films. 15 million people a year watch the Scenarios USA films at film festivals, on television, and in high schools nationwide. Scenarios USA believes that by valuing youth and listening to their opinions, we can have an impact on promoting healthy relationships and lowering the rate of HIV, STDs and pregnancy among teens.

*About the lesson plan author:* Stacy Weibley, MPA. Ms. Weibley holds a PhD in Public Health, with a concentration in women's health, from Johns Hopkins University.