

GETTING STARTED

**BASIC
INFORMATION
ABOUT
“WHAT’S THE
REAL DEAL?”**

WHAT IS IT?

“What’s the Real Deal?” is an annual scriptwriting contest, sponsored by Scenarios USA, for young people aged 12-22 living in Miami/Dade County, FL or the Rio Grande Valley in Texas. The contest asks participants to write stories about relationships and personal behavior. Winning students get partnered with prominent filmmakers (such as Michael Apted [Gorillas in the Mist] and Doug Liman [The Bourne Identity]) to produce their stories into short films that are, in turn, distributed nationwide. Scenarios USA films have been aired on MTV, Showtime, and the Sundance Channel, and have been featured on ABC’s World News Tonight.

FOR WHAT PURPOSE?

The purpose of the contest is to help young people make safer and healthier decisions about their lives and relationships by giving them a creative forum with which to explore their own identity, engage difficult questions about personal choices and their consequences, and weave stories from their experiences.

WHAT IS THE DEADLINE?

December 10, 2003. Send submissions to Scenarios USA, 44 W. 28th Street, 7th floor, New York, NY 10001.

WHAT DO STUDENTS HAVE TO DO?

To enter, students submit a short script, story, poem or song on a broad range of matters, such as relationships, friendships, pregnancy, love, HIV/AIDS, responsibility, desire, coming-out and making decisions.

WHAT DO TEACHERS AND FACILITATORS HAVE TO DO?

Explain the contest and its purposes to students, and show them some previous “What’s the Real Deal?” films. We encourage you to work with other teachers to mentor students in writing scripts that convey important messages about health and decision-making.

HOW MUCH TIME DOES IT TAKE?

Teachers can decide how much time to devote to the contest. You can do it as a single class assignment, use it as the focal point for a major project, or weave it into your learning objectives throughout a semester.

WHY SHOULD WE PARTICIPATE?

“What’s the Real Deal?” inspires young people and provides community uplift; some of your youth could write a script for a film that would be seen by—and affect the personal decisions made by—millions of other young people.

WHY DO THE CONTEST HERE?

Your community would participate because your schools and your young people, together, can develop stories and film scripts that speak to, and address the needs of, young people everywhere.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

The potential benefits of participating in the contest include (1) Achieving a lower rate of health risk behaviors and their consequences among youth; (2) using an innovative learning tool for health, language arts, social studies, and theatre arts/drama educators; (3) strengthening your community’s young people and highlighting their ideas and creativity; (4) increasing the comfort young people have in discussing important issues that affect their lives; and (5) the possibility of winning the contest!

DOES IT WORK?

The nine films produced through 2003 have supported efforts to improve health and relationships among young people in schools, after-school programs, and community organizations.

DOES THE CONTEST PROMOTE RESPONSIBLE DECISIONS?

“What’s the Real Deal?” emphasizes healthy, safe decisions and encourages students to focus on long-term, rather than immediate, outcomes and rewards.

WILL PARENTS BE SUPPORTIVE?

Yes. What matters the most to Scenarios USA—the health and safety of our young people—matters most to parents and leaders in your community as well. We are all striving to achieve the same overarching goals.

DO I NEED TO BE A HEALTH EXPERT?

No. Scenarios USA wants the contest to stimulate interdisciplinary teaching and to forge stronger linkages between schools and communities. Other teachers and community resources can contribute specific health knowledge when it is needed.

WILL IT INCREASE MY WORK?

No. Since you can link the preparation of scripts and stories for the contest to important curricular objectives, “What’s the Real Deal?” is just a new way to accomplish your educational goals. It provides new ways to work with students and colleagues but does not add new burdens, requirements, or responsibilities.

IS THE CONTEST ENJOYABLE?

Yes! Both students and their teachers enjoy preparing submissions. For students, the contest is an exciting way to learn—with the opportunity to win and work with a famous director to turn their script into a film. Participating teachers say that the entire experience was both fun and challenging (in all the right ways!).

DOES IT COST ANYTHING?

No. There is no fee to participate. The contest is very economical and completely cost-effective. There are only opportunities!

WHAT IS SCENARIOS USA?

Scenarios USA, based in New York City, is a not-for-profit organization that supports and gives voice to young people through “What’s the Real Deal?”

WHAT TEACHERS SAY...

It’s easier to get kids in the Rio Grande Valley to play ice hockey than to get them writing. Scenarios USA gets kids thinking about themselves and that gets them writing.

—GILBERT ZEPEDA

PSJA NORTH HIGH SCHOOL, PHARR, TEXAS

It was one of the proudest moments of my teaching career...when I saw all the kids putting in the effort and heard so many people say, “Wow, these kids are really good.” It put fuel in my tank...I thought, “Oh good, I did something right.”

—TIM FLAY

HIALEAH MIAMI LAKES SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL, MIAMI, FL