

## CHOICES: THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY



Runtime: 15 minutes  
Category: Drama

Orlando, FL  
2001-2002 National-East Contest Winner

*A collection of vignettes told from the perspective of three teenage boys, dealing with issues of passion, pregnancy, peer pressure and STI's.*

### STUDENT VIDEO GUIDE

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#### **Film Topics:**

“Choices” deals with passion, pregnancy, peer pressure and STI's.

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

Both director Tamara Jenkins and producer Susan Stover loved the raw and authentic dialogue in “Choices.” The Orlando school board officials, however, did not approve of the language; claiming it was written in slang and not proper English. For example, the school board thought that a guy asking a girl for her 'digits' (i.e. her phone number) did not make sense and "was not grammatically correct".

While the filmmakers and the teens' school supported the teenagers' desire to use their own language, the school board demanded a re-write. At one point during this heated debate, a school board official re-wrote the script. The teens rejected the officially written script and argued that if it was not written in their own words the film would not be a true reflection of the way they see the world. At the same time, the writers needed the school board to approve their script in order to be able to shoot the film on school grounds or participate in filming.



Scenarios USA was faced with a dilemma. School boards had always been partners in the film project and without their involvement the process was threatened. Finally, the day before shooting was scheduled to start, Jones High School and sister school Evan High officially came out in support of the writers, despite the lack of support from the school board officials. Scenarios decided to partner with the two schools to produce the film on their campuses and the schools went even further in demonstrating their support of the students and organized a ceremony to honor the students in front of the entire student body.

During the filming of “Choices,” both the Film Commissioner of the State of Florida and a Chief Aide to the Mayor of Orlando were on hand to recognize the writers' achievement and to show their support.

Through the rollercoaster events leading to filming, the writers of “Choices” gained a sense of empowerment. They realized not only the importance of sex education in schools, but also the power of fighting for what they believe is important. The conflict between the writers and the school board created much dialogue in the Orlando community. The Orlando newspaper covered the events in a front-page article, which was followed by a satirical editorial response of how a school-board member would grammatically fix a story written in street language.



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### STUDENT VIDEO GUIDE (CONT'D)

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#### **Writers Bios:**

Eve Liberus, Darius Moore, Carolyn Perry and Jermaine Wall attend Jones High School, a historically all-black high school in downtown Orlando. Jones High School has an abstinence-only policy, which prevents students from talking about sex in the classroom, so the students had to write their story in an after-school program.

#### **Talent Bios:**

Tamara Jenkins wrote and directed the movie "Slums of Beverly Hills," which premiered at the Directors' Fortnight of the 1998 Cannes Film Festival. Her short films, "Fugitive Love" and "Family Remains" have been shown at the Museum of Modern Art and have garnered prizes such as Special Recognition Award for Excellence in Short Filmmaking from the Sundance Film Festival. Ms. Jenkins is a recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship for Filmmaking.



#### **Honors:**

'Choices: The Good, The Bad, The Ugly' was shown at a Hip Hop Conference in Orlando, FL and at the Lower East Side Girls Club in New York City. It will air on Orange TV in Orlando. The writers were featured in USA Today. 'Choices' is used in various school districts around the country including the New York City School District.



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### DISCUSSION GUIDE - QUESTIONS FOR DIALOGUE

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**1. Why do you think the writers called this film, “Choices: the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly”? What choices do the characters make? Which are good, bad, and/or ugly?**

(Discuss the different opinions students might have about which of the characters' decisions are acceptable)

**2. How well does Chris, the teen father, seem to communicate with the mother of his child? How do you think their relationship may affect their child?**

(Note the tone of their conversation regarding child support.)

**3. Talk about the way Lou treats his girlfriend. Does he show respect for her?**

(Note his attitude towards her when she is at his door versus after his friends leave. Discuss the qualities of a healthy relationship.)

**4. What could Lou's girlfriend have said to him when he asked her, “Why we need protection anyway? You know me...”?**

(Recall that you cannot tell whether a person has a STI by the way they look. All types of people can be at risk for STIs.)

**5. What point is Ches trying to make to Monte in the library? What does this have to do with communication?**

(Suggest that Monte seems to think he is vocal with his wants and needs, but really is unable to communicate them in a mature and healthy way.)

**6. How would you rate the level of communication between the three couples on a scale of 1-10? Do the couples seem to have similar needs in their respective relationships?**

(Review the couples' conversations as well as what is left unsaid between them from the beginning to the end of the film.)



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

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**1. Why do you think the writers chose to leave this film open-ended? Would you have made the same decision?**

(Have students review the advantages of making the audience think for itself and create its own conclusions.)

**2. How do the three stories connect with one another? Do they build off of one another? Do the friends connect with one another?**

(Discuss how the director's depiction of the friend group in various situations, building off tension and camera angles, helps intertwine the stories. Also discuss if the lack of communication among the friends in this film is a realistic portrayal of real relationships. Ask students to discuss how communication about sensitive issues would have changed the plot.)

**3. What role does the segment in which the young man is filming the baby play in the film? How does the director use camera angle to her advantage?**

(Discuss with students how this perspective draws the viewer into the story line regarding the baby's parents without requiring further discussion between characters.)

**4. How may the writer's character descriptions have influenced how the actors portray feelings without the use of words?**

(Note the many cases in which it is obvious to the audience, but not to other characters, that an individual is unhappy about a situation. Discuss how body language and facial expressions are used to convey sometimes conflicting emotions.)



## 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.