



DON'T DANCE WITH DEATH

Runtime: 3.5 minutes
Category: Mystical

Pharr, TX
1999 South Texas Contest Winner

Based on the Mexican myth "Devil in the Dance Hall," a night of fun turns serious for four chicas when an unwanted image appears.

STUDENT VIDEO GUIDE

Film Topics:

The film deals with condom use, relationships, and friendships.

Story Behind the Story:

Two weeks after the production of the 1999 NY film "He Said, She Said," the Scenarios gang rushed down to the small border town of Pharr, TX to shoot "Don't Dance With Death." Similar to their experience in NY, Scenarios was on an extremely tight budget. Nevertheless, Scenarios was able to attract extremely talented people to work on the production. After working on "He Said, She Said," producer Avram Ludwig insisted on producing "Don't Dance with Death." And acclaimed cinematographer Lee Daniel, a resident of Austin, joined the Scenarios team and recruited a high caliber team from the Texas film community to participate in the project.



The residents of Pharr, TX came out and showed their support for the production. Part of the film was shot at a nightclub, where 125 kids from the local high school joined the cast to bring the dance sequence alive! Grammy Award nominated artist Jennifer y Los Jetz and her band donated their talent and songs to the film.

The four lead actresses of "Don't Dance With Death," flew to New York to meet the writers of "He Said, She Said" and present their film at a glamorous premiere.



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STUDENT VIDEO GUIDE (CONT'D)

Writers Bios:

"Don't Dance With Death" was written by students at Options and PSJA North High Schools in southern Texas.

Talent Bios:

Hector Galán has been involved with television for over 25 years. He has operated the Austin-based Galan Productions, Inc. for 15 years, during which time he has directed and produced numerous award-winning documentary projects. His accomplishments include eleven episodes of the highly acclaimed PBS series Frontline, two projects for the PBS series, The American Experience, and three independent specials - all of which have been broadcast nationally. Hector acted as Series Producer for the landmark PBS series Chicano! History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement. Hector is a frequent guest lecturer and keynote speaker at universities and national conferences throughout the country. His company is currently producing Visiones, a bold and exciting television series about Latino art and culture in the United States for PBS.



Honors:

In 2000, "Don't Dance With Death" was shown at CineFestival and CineSol, two Latino film festivals in Texas. The film aired on the Oxygen Network and on the south Texas NBC affiliate, along with a live interview with one of the actresses. "Don't Dance With Death" was honored with Porter Novelli's Excellence and Innovations in Social Marketing Award. The film 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

1. What does Dona Rosa mean when she gives one of the young women a packet and says if she uses it, her "love will be protected"? How can using condoms protect a relationship?

(Note that communicating about contraception can not only protect one against sexually transmitted diseases and unintended pregnancy, but can also strengthen a relationship.)

2. What do the skeleton faces at the dance mean to you?

(Help students think about various fears associated with sexuality, many of which can be minimized with education and the adoption of safe and responsible behaviors.)

3. The young woman brings a condom to her partner. What do you think of the gender roles in this film? What lessons can we learn from them?

(Note that the young man is very happy that his girlfriend has brought a condom. Discuss with the class the fact that men and women can carry condoms, and that it is the responsibility of both to ensure that they are used.)

4. Why do you think it takes potions and remedies to introduce the idea of using a condom? Is it difficult for people to talk about using condoms?

(Discuss the fact that talking about using condoms may be difficult, especially between teenagers; however such a conversation can easily become a very comfortable and standard practice.)

5. Is it easier for a person to talk about using condoms and contraceptives than it is to have intercourse? What could be easy or difficult to do in each case?

(Note that some people have intercourse without talking about taking care of their health. Discuss how putting health and well-being first makes sense if each member of a couple cares about one another.)



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DISCUSSION GUIDE - THROUGH THE LENS OF A FILMMAKER

1. The band playing at the dance, Jennifer y Los Jets, is actually a well-known group in southern Texas. How does their appearance contribute to the film?

(Debate how using a popular group or figure can draw notoriety and demonstrate celebrity support for the message of a film.)

2. What types of decisions were made about costuming in this film?

(Note that the characters in the film are dressed to attend a "tejano" music dance, similarly to how people dress in certain ways for other dance styles, such as country western. This is not necessarily how teenage Texans dress on an average day, but the costuming makes the film more culturally specific.)

3. One hundred and twenty drama students play the roles of the young people at the dance. Why do you think they were placed in these roles? Could the roles have been as effectively played by professional actors?

(Discuss with students how using everyday teenagers creates authenticity and realism, which helps teenagers identify with the film and connect with the message. Also note that using such young people may effectively depict the writer's actual community.)

4. Comment on the symbolism of the death masks.

(These death masks are an important, culturally specific element in Mexican culture, and are a logical representation of a possible threat or danger.)

5. What elements are used to emphasize culture in the film?

(Note how the masks, as well as the music, costuming, car, and the natural healer all play prominent roles in the film and help make it culturally specific and relevant.)



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 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.