



## TODAY I FOUND OUT



Runtime: 8 minutes

Laredo, TX

Category: Fictional Documentary

2001 South Texas Contest Winner

*A 14-year old girl tries to make sense of the world around her when she learns her best friend is pregnant. Deals with choosing abstinence, peer pressure and self-awareness.*

### STUDENT VIDEO GUIDE

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#### **Film Topics:**

“Today I Found Out” deals with choosing abstinence, peer pressure, and self-awareness.

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

“Today I Found Out” was Scenarios USA's first documentary-style production. The film was adapted from a personal essay by 14-year old Samantha Hernandez about living in Laredo, a U.S. border town with a high rate of teen pregnancy. In her essay she explores her thoughts about her choices, her future and what others expect of her.



Director Griffin Dunne shot the film in a documentary-style format without the use of a formal script. He wanted to capture the reality of Samantha's world on film and then craft the story in the editing room. Samantha was cast as the narrator and main actress of her story.

In preparation for the film shoot, Griffin met with a group of teenage mothers in Samantha's hometown. The girls shared private stories of how they got pregnant and what their lives are like as mothers. They wanted to let Griffin and Samantha know that they're no different from other teenagers and that they have dreams and aspirations just as all other youth do. All of the girls were still in high school. Meeting with the teen mothers reinforced the idea that, while it is important to encourage teens to avoiding getting pregnant and it is also important to not condemn those who do get pregnant. Both Griffin and Samantha felt the film should not discriminate against girls who choose to have a baby. Moved by the courage of the teen mothers, Griffin included the teenage mothers and their stories in the film.



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### STUDENT VIDEO GUIDE (CONT'D)

#### **Writers Bios:**

Samantha is a high school student in Laredo, Texas. She aspires to go to college and become a psychiatrist. Her experience at Scenarios showed that a few words can tell a big part of who you are and what you are about. By letting people hear your words, you can go a long way.



#### **Talent Bios:**

Griffin Dunne, an accomplished actor and producer, has quickly established himself as a director. Dunne's directorial debut was a short film called "Duke of Groove" which received an Academy Award nomination. He has also directed the full length features "Practical Magic" and "Addicted to Love". His production credits include "Running on Empty", which was nominated for two Academy Awards. As an actor, Dunne has appeared on Broadway and received a Theater World Award, as well as a nomination for a Drama Desk Award. Griffin has also had motion picture starring roles in "An American Werewolf in London," "Johnny Dangerously," and "After Hours." As a director, his most recent comedy was "Lisa Picard is Famous," about famished actors in New York City.

#### **Honors:**

"Today I Found Out" was selected a Finalist in the USA Film Festival/Dallas Short Film and Video Competition. It was aired on the Showtime Channel in February and screened at the Garden State Film Festival, the Taos Talking Picture Teen Media Conference, Cine Las Americas Film Festival, and New Latino Filmmakers Series. "Today I Found Out" is used in various school districts around the country.



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### DISCUSSION GUIDE - QUESTIONS FOR DIALOGUE

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**1. Samantha dreams that she cannot go out with her friends because she is pregnant. How do you think children are affected by mothers and/or fathers who spend much of their time with their friends, leaving their babies with someone else? What sacrifices would do people have to make if they or their partners become pregnant?**

(Note that having a baby does not simply involve “getting by”, but rather trying to be a good parent and offering a child the best life one can. This is also an opportunity to discuss the economic realities of having children.)

**2. At Samantha’s cousin’s christening party she talks about ways in which young men may try to convince their girlfriends to have sex with them. Do you think flattery or telling someone “I love you” works? How could this make a person feel?**

(Point out that while having someone express love for you may feel good, it doesn’t mean that sexual intercourse needs to be a part of the relationship. Furthermore, there is plenty of time to find a person that fulfills your wants and needs.)

**3. Samantha finds out that her best friend is pregnant. Some people may say, “She got pregnant, now she has to live with the consequences.” If a baby is viewed as a punishment or consequence, do you think this will affect how he or she is raised by the parents and/or family?**

(Note that teenagers with children may face many challenges and need help and support. Discuss the impact these circumstances may have on a child and on how the parents may interact with the child.)

**4. Samantha says that she thinks many teenagers have babies because they “want something they can call their own.” Do you think this is true?**

(Point out that while this feeling may be understandable, it does not ensure that a woman or man will be able to care for a baby. Help students develop a list of things they may call their own.)

**5. Many of the images in the film are of young women with babies. What role do you think teenage fathers play? What role should they play?**

(Many of the responsibilities associated with having children fall on mothers due to social pressures and norms. However, both mothers and fathers are, and should be, accountable for a child’s needs.)

**6. Do you think that in some families or cultures having a child as a teenager, is seen as a normal “rite of passage” into adulthood? What are other reasons that a young woman or man may want to have a baby?**

(Be certain that this point does not lead to placing blame, but rather to identifying community norms and to better understanding why some adolescents may want to have children. Be sure to emphasize that maturity and adulthood do not result from having a child, but should exist before deciding to have a baby.)

**7. What do you want your future to look like? What do you dream of doing?**

(Discuss ways in which having a baby may affect these goals and aspirations.)



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

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**1. The writer is also the main character. What benefits and challenges may have been associated with this casting decision?**

(Discuss the different skills involved in telling a story through writing versus acting. Also note the biases that may be involved when trying to fulfill both roles as well as the benefits associated with getting another perspective on how you tell your story.)

**2. How do the writer and director capture cultural identity? In doing so, is the film less meaningful for people in other cultures? Does it reflect all of Hispanic culture? Why or why not?**

(Language, costuming, colors, and music identify culture in the film. However, it is important to note that it does not necessarily attempt to speak to the experiences of all Hispanics.)

**3. How is the camera used to relate information to the viewer?**

(The camera provides perspectives and different ways of looking at people and situations. When Samantha talks directly to the camera, the viewer is brought into her confidence. At other times the camera is tracking her as she is with friends, at church, or walking on the bridge. In this way, the viewer learns about Samantha's life visually.)

**4. How does the writer capture a teenager's voice or point of view?**

(Note the use of slang that is familiar to teens, the setting (school), the costumes, and specific events (christening party). Also point out, however, that the writer indicates that there is no universal teen perspective by relaying the feelings of many different teenagers, some of which conflict with one another. For example, Samantha's feelings about having a baby conflicting with those of some of the teen moms).



## 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.