



Lesson Title: Lipstick

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Emily hangs with her friends, plays soccer and looks forward to graduation. She also has a secret girlfriend. Will her friends accept her when she comes out?

The film examines sexual orientation by looking at friendship, ambivalence, peer pressure, self-awareness and acceptance. All Scenarios USA films also deal with relationships, communication, self-esteem and decision-making.

Story Behind the Story:

The production of *Lipstick* took place at a rapid pace, since acclaimed filmmaker Michael Apted had only a few days to spare before his next major Hollywood project. Three days after *Lipstick* won the national Scenarios USA REAL DEAL contest, Apted met with the writers in their hometown to discuss their story, begin re-writes and launch pre-production. At the same time, Apted and producer Philip Ruddy recruited 50 Hollywood professionals to work on the film and mentor youth volunteers on-set. With both the script finalized and the film crew in tow, *Lipstick* was ready for "Lights, Camera and Action!".

Or so they thought!

The final pre-production task was finding a location; the script called for a soccer field. The writers contacted all the high schools they knew of in their community, asking for permission to use their fields. School advisors were excited about the project at first, and offered their facilities for the shoot, but once they found out that the film dealt with sexual orientation every school backed out. With only three days to go before shooting, there was no location!

Complicating matters even more, Apted could not extend his time with the project. Without a location, Scenarios USA and the writers were faced with the possibility of losing their director and having to cancel the film! At the last possible hour, Fullerton College - a local community college - came on board and allowed the crew to film on their soccer field.

The troubled search for a location was not the only problem caused by the topic of the film. One of the high schools organized a school-wide reception to honor the young winners, but the writers and a guest speaker from Planned Parenthood were not allowed to mention the subject of the film. In fact, their speeches were screened by school officials. Michael Apted decided to use his speech (which was not screened by school officials) to address the issue of sexual orientation and recognize the courage of the young writers who persevered in the face of community opposition. When *Lipstick* was completed, it was shared with many administrators who turned down the opportunity to allow the film to be shot on their grounds. Many of them wrote to Scenarios USA letting us know that the film was being shown in the school.



Writers Bios:

Emily Alvarez, Dan Barnard, Roxanna Garcia, Simone Lance and Sophia Tavernakis were peer educators with Planned Parenthood of Orange and San Bernardino Counties in Southern California when they wrote the script.

Talent Bios:

Michael Apted is the director of numerous films, including the award-winning *Coal Miner's Daughter*, *Gorillas In the Mist*, and *Nell*. His films include the James Bond thriller, *The World is Not Enough* and the Jennifer Lopez vehicle *Enough*. He is also an acclaimed documentary filmmaker with credits such as the *7-UP* series and *Bring on the Night*. He received the International Documentary Association's highest honor, the IDA Career Achievement Award and served for two terms as the president of the Directors Guild.

Honors:

- Film Festivals: *Lipstick* was screened at over 60 film festivals around the world. Festivals include the Chicago Filmmakers Lesbian & Gay International Film Festival, Washington DC's Gay & Lesbian Film Festival, The Austin Gay & Lesbian International Film Festival, Dallas Outtakes Film Festival and The Melbourne Queer Film Festival.



DISCUSSION GUIDE -QUESTIONS FOR DIALOGUE

1. What do you think the scenes of Emily putting on lipstick as a child and then as a teenager with her friends symbolize?
(Point out that Emily is still the same person she always was. You can also discuss stereotypes that suggest lesbians are not interested in clothes or makeup. Note that wearing make-up is a learned social norm, as is sexuality and how we view it.)
2. When Emily's three friends are discussing her relationship, Jenny says to Amy, "...it's somebody she cares about, the way you care about Anthony." Is this comparison a good way to encourage her friend to understand Emily's relationship with her girlfriend?
(Note that GLBTQ relationships are, in many ways, just like any others. Encourage students to examine biases they may have that are based on a lack of understanding of GLBTQ relationships.)
3. Why do you think it is so difficult for Emily to talk to her friends about her relationship? What do you think she means when she says, "It's embarrassing"?
(Discuss the discrimination that GLBTQ people face. Also, point out that GLBTQ individuals may sometimes not be entirely comfortable with their own sexuality because they have grown up in a society that stigmatizes GLBTQ people.)
4. When Amy approaches Emily she says, "About yesterday, I'm not comfortable with it. One of my best friends has a girlfriend. I just need time to get used to it." Do you think Amy handles this situation well? Does Emily?
(Point out that it can be very challenging for someone to find out that a friend is gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. Yet, in being honest about her feelings, Amy is opening herself up to her friend, which Emily seems to appreciate.)
5. Is it possible that, in some situations, Emily and her girlfriend would have had a relatively easier time coming out than two gay men? What taboos are associated with being a gay man? A lesbian? Are these different? Where do these come from?
(Discuss how taboos are different for men and women, depending on gendered social expectations. Note how these taboos and norms often lead to differential treatment, depending on a GLBTQ person's gender and appearance.)
6. How can people show support for GLBTQ friends? If they are not comfortable with the situation, what could they do to educate themselves and reconcile their feelings?
(Direct students to local GLBTQ support groups or gay/straight alliances. Help students recognize that much prejudice stems from misinformation and ignorance.)



DISCUSSION GUIDE -THROUGH THE LENS OF A FILMMAKER

7. How do the writer, director, and actors deal with the sensitive subject matter of this film? What would you have done the same or differently?
(Discuss how the filmmaker's simple and honest approach contributes to the goal of revealing the characters' innermost feelings. Also, note how the writers address the topics of sexual orientation and prejudice by focusing on the universality of love and conflicted emotions.)
8. How do the director and writers capture the view points of the various characters?
(Discuss how conflicting and opposing views are effectively expressed, explored, and resolved. Also discuss how covering various viewpoints can be challenging in a short film.)
9. Comment on climax and conflict resolution.
(Discuss with students how the climax in this film [the kissing scene] creates an opportunity to explore critical issues, such as acceptance, understanding, confusion, embarrassment, and self-realization. Also note how the resolution demonstrates that an outcome can be reached that is acceptable to all of the characters involved.)
10. What role does costuming play in this film?
(Note that the characters are portrayed as a very specific ethnicity and class – suburban predominantly white females- the kind of young women that seem “every day” and “average” in media. Also discuss the fact that the main character's appearance does not differ substantially from her peers.)



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 ones 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.