

Children and AIDS

by

Shout! Youth Theatre

Filmed at Corby Trades and Labour Club for NLGA on World AIDS Day 1999.

SYNOPSIS:

A group of children are confronted with the threat of AIDS and deal with rumours and myths until they find reliable information. Meanwhile a classmate has AIDS and is bullied. In the later scenes they expose how it feels to be a child with AIDS and look at the statistics on the spread of HIV.

NOTE: This could be performed as a play, although we actually filmed each scene separately and produced a video.

CHARACTERS:

The piece can be performed with a variable-sized cast but requires one dancer and a minimum of 11 other performers.

CHILDREN 1-9 – TV viewers/HIV Victims

CHILDREN 2, 5, 7 – Myth spreaders

CHILDREN 1, 3, 4, 6 – Bullies

TV PRESENTER / RIBBON MAKER / RIBBON HOLDER 2

AIDS INFORMATION DISTRIBUTOR (A.I.D.) / RIBBON HOLDER 1 / COUNTER DANCER / HIV

STAGING AND SET:

A red ribbon is stretched across the front of the stage. One hard-backed chair.

COSTUMES AND PROPS:

The **DANCER** wears a white hazmat suit. The **HIV CHARACTER** is a pantomime villain with scary mask, crazy wig and a full black cloak with “HIV” written on the back. All others wear normal clothes.

Three large signs on tearable paper 3ft by 1ft, 30 red AIDS ribbons, large box containing AIDS information leaflets with “AIDS INFORMATION” written in very large letters. Ten Hula hoops.

SCENE 1: MISINFORMATION

*A group of CHILDREN are sitting watching TV.
The TV PRESENTER states facts about AIDS boringly.
They don't listen and spread misinformation as rumours.*

CHILD 1: (To Child 2:) Turn the tele on then!

CHILD 2 turns on an imaginary TV set.

TV PRESENTER: I'm here today to tell you all about AIDS. *(In a boring monotonous voice and with total disinterest:)* Blah blah blah blah sexuality.

CHILD 3: Did you hear what she said about sexuality? *(Whispers in the ear of the child next to her who passes on the rumour along the row.)*

TV PRESENTER: *(Drones on whilst each rumour is being spread:)* Blah blah blah blah blah. *(By the end of the "Chinese whispers" the information is garbled and false.)*

CHILD 2: *(Announcing confidently:)* Only gay people can get AIDS.

Others react disgustedly.

TV PRESENTER: Blah blah blah blah hygiene.

CHILD 4: Did you hear what she said about hygiene?

The rumour is passed around.

CHILD 5: Eeugh, you can get AIDS from sharing a cup.

TV PRESENTER: Origins.

CHILD 6: Hear what she said about...*(The rumour is passed around.)*

CHILD 7: You can get AIDS from monkeys.

CHILD 1: (To **CHILD 2:**) Turn the tele off! *(CHILD 2 turns off imaginary TV.)*

SCENE 2: MYTHS

CHILDREN 2, 5, and 7 stand in a line across the front of the stage with signs stating their myth: "Only gay people get AIDS". "You can catch AIDS from sharing a cup". "You can get AIDS from monkeys".

They march to the back of the stage and stand with their banners held high.

CHILD 5: You can catch AIDS from sharing a cup.

CHILD 2: Only gay people get AIDS.

CHILD 7: You can get AIDS from monkeys.

DANCER (called **RACHEL** in our production) – a child with AIDS – sits on a chair in the middle of the stage cowering as four other children walk around the chair saying horrible things, displaying their lack of information, and showing how a child with AIDS is shunned. Their pace gets quicker and quicker.

CHILD 1: You realise you're gonna die now?

CHILD 3: Imagine the gravestone. Rachel – 23rd November 99 – R.I.P.

CHILD 4: I'm not going near you anymore. I might catch something.

CHILD 6: Why did you do it Rachel? You were my best friend.

CHILD 1: You forgot to pull up your knickers, didn't you?

CHILD 3: Are monkeys your ancestors?

CHILD 4: Been shagging people.

CHILD 6: You're disgusting.

CHILD 1: R.I.P. Rachel.

CHILD 3: I dare you to touch her.

CHILD 4: R.I.P.

CHILD 1 and **CHILD 3** go to DSR and sit facing audience. **CHILD 4** and **CHILD 6** go to DSL and sit facing the audience. **DANCER** is framed by the three **CHILDREN** and their signs at the back and the four **CHILDREN** at the front.

DANCER performs an interpretive dance to music of her choice, expressing through movement her fear, sadness, aloneness and desire to be free. She reaches out and implores the audience for help, and then turns to **RIBBON MAKER** who is sitting quietly USR holding handfuls of red AIDS ribbons. **RIBBON MAKER** responds and takes the ribbons to the **DANCER** who is now standing on the chair. **DANCER** offers the ribbons to the audience then clasps the ribbons to her for a moment before throwing them into the air, scattering them across the stage.

SCENE 3: AIDS INFORMATION

CHILDREN 1, 3, 4 and **6** are joined by **CHILD 8** and **CHILD 9**. All pick up a ribbon and then look everywhere as if searching for something. The three **CHILDREN** with signs begin

to sway from side to side and continue to do so silently until they are dragged to the front of the stage.

ALL: *(repeat over and over, gradually getting louder and louder:)* AIDS information!

They eventually end up in a line across the front of the stage. Each child in turn runs to front of stage, holds ribbon up high as if it is key to knowledge, calling out where they got the information.

CHILD 1: Leaflets!

CHILD 3: School!

CHILD 4: Friends!

CHILD 6: TV!

CHILD 8: Magazines!

CHILD 9: Family!

They end up forming a line across the front of the stage.

*Enter SL the **AIDS INFORMATION DISTRIBUTOR (A.I.D.)**, carrying a large cardboard lucky dip box with the words AIDS INFORMATION clearly on the front.*

A.I.D.: Roll up, roll up! Get your AIDS information here! Here you go – all you need to know.

*All run to box and eagerly take out a leaflet and start reading. As the facts sink in they realise they have been lied to, and go and get the Myth Holders – **CHILDREN 2, 5 and 7** – and drag them to the front of the stage.*

CHILD 1: *(Dragging **CHILD 7** to the front:)* You liar. What you on about?

CHILD 3: *(Dragging **CHILD 2** to the front:)* You lied. Anyone can get AIDS!

CHILD 4: *(Dragging **CHILD 5** to the front:)* You can't get AIDS from sharing cups.

CHILD 1: *(to **CHILD 7**:)* That's not true. You can't get AIDS from monkeys – it says so right here!

CHILD 6 rips up **CHILD 7**'s sign.

CHILD 8 rips up **CHILD 5**'s sign.

CHILD 9 rips up **CHILD 2**'s sign.

SCENE 4: SYMPTOMS

*CHILDREN 1-9 are huddled in the centre of the stage. The two **RIBBON HOLDERS** pick up either end of the red ribbon from the front of the stage, and walk around until they have wrapped it around the group and created an AIDS ribbon shape. They kneel holding the ribbon in place. The group begin to tell what it is like to have AIDS.*

- CHILD 1:** At the age of seven, I started to feel sick.
- CHILD 2:** It started with coughs and chest pains and that was followed by fever.
- CHILD 3:** My parents took me to the hospital. They did tests but found nothing.
- CHILD 4:** It was awful – I was in agony and in pain.
- CHILD 5:** Even though I was little, I wanted to know what was wrong with me.
- CHILD 6:** During winter it was too difficult for me to go outside and go to school.
- CHILD 7:** I had to be very careful. I had to wrap up warm in case I caught cold.
- CHILD 8:** I felt isolated and alone.
- CHILD 9:** I got very depressed and stressed out when I was ill.
- ALL:** I couldn't take it any longer. Life just wasn't worth living.

SCENE 5: STATISTICS

*CHILDREN 1-9 stand evenly spaced around the stage, each with a Hula hoop, making simple motions as if children playing. The **COUNTER** sits on a chair DSC and slowly counts backwards from 10 to 1 repeatedly, whilst the **HIV CHARACTER** (dressed as a pantomime villain in a cloak with HIV written on it and a scary mask and wig) slowly stalks around the stage “infecting” each child with HIV as it passes them. This is depicted by surrounding them with the cloak whilst they sink to the floor trapped in the ring of the hula hoop on the floor. When playing they smile. Once on the floor they look weary and ill.*

- COUNTER:** (As **HIV CHARACTER** stalks slowly towards another victim:) 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.
- TV PRESENTER:** (Whilst **HIV CHARACTER** swoops cloak:) Every 10 seconds a child or young person is infected with HIV.

*Repeat this sequence until all children are on the floor. **HIV CHARACTER** retreats to back of the stage and takes up a victorious posture with cloak spread wide next to the **COUNTER**.*

TV PRESENTER: (*Walks between the fallen children looking desolate. Turns to audience from centre.*) In Britain there are more than 600 HIV-positive children under the age of 14 years old.

THE END