

# Nelson's Dream

## Aim

### • To stimulate students to read the book.

1 Tell students that "Nelson's Dream" is a Human Interest story set in a fictional country in Africa against a background of AIDS and its victims. Discuss what students know about AIDS already and write what they say up on the whiteboard.

**Suggested definition:** AIDS is a disease of the immune system that makes a victim more likely to catch infections. It is transmitted through blood or blood products that enter the body's bloodstream, especially by sexual contact or contaminated hypodermic needles.

2 Ask students to read Extract 1, which is a description of a woman who is dying from AIDS. Working in pairs, ask students to discuss the mood of the extract and suggest appropriate adjectives to describe it.

**Suggested answers:** sad, bleak, painful, etc.

Now ask students to identify the key words, phrases or images that create this atmosphere (e.g. the contrast in skin colour, cracked and bleeding lips, etc.).

3 In the same pairs, ask students to invent some information about the sick woman – e.g. her name, age, family background, usual job, etc. Pairs should share their thoughts with the whole class. How similar are their ideas about the sick woman's background?

4 Tell students that the hero of the book is 22-year-old Nelson, who has just returned to his country in Africa after completing a course in Hotel Management Studies in the United Kingdom. Now ask students to read Extract 2. Ask them what they have learned about Nelson's father and Nelson's relationship with him from the extract.

**Suggested answers:** he is angry, unkind and violent towards Nelson; perhaps stressed and worried too.

Ask pairs to report back to the class and discuss what reasons there might be for Nelson's father's behaviour.

5 Ask students to read Extract 3. Working in the same pairs, ask them to discuss what the extract tells them about the characters of Nelson and his mother.

**Possible answers:** Nelson – kind, caring, resourceful, and interested; his mother – hard, assertive, decisive, uncaring, closed-minded, worldly wise, etc. Students may also notice that the family is wealthy since they have a housekeeper.

Now ask students to share their ideas with the whole class and to give reasons for the words they have chosen to describe the characters of Nelson and his mother – i.e. what has the author done to create these impressions? (E.g. students might note the way in which Nelson's mother speaks to Philomena: she seems sarcastic, condescending and false; a contrast is drawn between Philomena's sincerity (her bright smile – 'a light in the dark') and Ruby's hypocrisy (her 'false little' one); Nelson is anxious to help the family, but Ruby refuses to consider his suggestions.

6 Now ask students to rewrite the extract, but in their version it should be Ruby (Nelson's mother) who is concerned about the family and wants to help, and Nelson who thinks it's nothing to do with them. They should write dialogue only, as if they are writing a scene of a play. When they have finished, ask students to get into groups of three. They should each take one of the characters and act out their scripts. After they have done this, the groups should discuss the mood of each student's piece. Does Ruby seem caring and concerned? Does Philomena seem worried about the children? Does Nelson seem hard-hearted? Ask students to suggest how the mood could be made more powerful. Those groups who wish to can act out their scene(s) in front of the whole class.

7 Ask students to read Extract 5. Now ask them who they think the person speaking is and where they are. (It is a TV journalist to camera.) Now ask them to rewrite the extract as an interview rather than a report. They should think of questions to ask the speaker that will provide the same information as in the report. E.g. Q: Who lives in this house? A: Daniel Mawadza and his brothers and sister? Q: How did their parents die? A: They died of AIDS.

8 Tell students to look at Extract 5 again. Ask them to pick out the words or sentences that are intended to shock. (E.g. 'They are facing a long, slow death from being poor, if not from being sick, like their parents.') Have a short discussion about why the reporter wishes to shock (to get sympathy and attention for the victims of AIDS). Now ask students to try to make the report even more shocking. (E.g. 'This is the home of Daniel Mawadza and his brothers and sister. They are all under eighteen. Their father died last year. He was thirty-eight. Two days ago their mother lay in the dirt dying. She was so thin her bones showed through her clothes. Her children watched her. She was all they had left and she now she too was leaving them alone in the world.)

9 Song Lyric competition. Ask students to read Extract 6, which is a song lyric that appears in the book. Now divide the class into two groups – A and B. Working in pairs, ask those in Group A to write a list of happy images and words, and Group B to write a list of sad images and words. Now tell the two groups to write song lyrics using their lists as inspiration – Group A a happy song lyric, and Group B a sad one. When they have finished, ask them to read their lyrics to the whole class. Students could vote for their favourite ones.

# Nelson's Dream

---

## Extract 1

She was quiet today. She lay on the earth floor, wrapped in a blanket with another on top. Once, her skin had been clear and dark like chocolate, but now that she was sick, large parts of her face and arms were white and dry. She was shivering with cold. Her lips were cracked and bleeding, and she was so thin that her bones showed through both blankets.

## Extract 2

Mr Mbizi turned and stood in front of Nelson, chin to chin. 'In my eyes, you still have to prove you're worth it!' he said. The whites of his eyes had thick red veins in them.

Nelson tried a different technique. 'You see, Dad, there's a reason I need some real money now. There's a family of kids I've met. They've lost both their parents.'

'Which family?' barked Mr Mbizi.

'They live in ... Sector D, Dad. They ...'

His father made a sudden movement and punched Nelson in the face. 'What do you know about Sector D? What the hell have you been doing?' screamed Mr Mbizi.

## Extract 3

Nelson turned from the window to look at Philomena.

'Oh, I'm sorry, Mr Nelson.' Philomena's smile was like a light in the dark by the door. 'Welcome back. I didn't know you were here.'

'Thank you, Philomena,' Nelson said. 'Good to see you.'

'I'll come back later, madam.' Philomena turned to go.

'Was it something private?' asked Ruby Mbizi.

'Not really, madam. But it's important. I wanted to ask you for help for some children. They've just lost their mother and their father and they're orphans now.'

Nelson saw his mother's face harden.

'Well, Philomena, if I helped every child in that situation I would have nothing left within a week, isn't that so?' Mrs Mbizi said with a false little smile.

'That's true, madam.' Philomena looked down at her shoes. Nelson turned back to the window. 'It was the mother's dying wish that I asked you,' she said.

'Well, now you have. Is there anything else?'

'No, madam.'

'That's all then, Philomena. Thank you.'

Nelson waited until the door had closed and then asked his mother, 'Couldn't you give something to the church and ask them to help that family? Then you needn't say the money's from you and you won't have others begging ...'

'Nelson my dearest, there are now thousands and thousands of AIDS orphans in this country. There's nothing anyone can do about it.'

'There must be, Mum. There must be organisations ...'

'Well, I'm not an organisation.'

'Perhaps Philomena just doesn't know who to ask.'

'Well, nor do I. So there's an end to it.'

## Extract 4

'This is the home of Daniel Mawadza and his brothers and sister. They are all under eighteen. Their father died last year. He was thirty-eight. Their mother died two days ago, so they are now orphans. The illness that killed their parents was AIDS. They want me to tell you about it.'

'If they'd known what was wrong earlier, maybe their parents could have found treatment. If people could accept that this illness must not be hidden away, then they could talk about it more easily. Daniel and his family have nothing and no-one. They are facing a long, slow death from being poor, if not from being sick, like their parents.'

'This is happening all over Africa. Why are the governments of our countries doing so little? I'll tell you why. Because they're frightened by this illness. Because you can get this infection from sex. There'd be no children without sex, and yet, in African cultures, men and women don't talk to each other about it. But because our leaders feel fear and shame, thousands of people die every week, thousands of new graves appear, thousands of families are left without income, thousands of children are orphaned.'

## Extract 5

*You have no heart, they say.*

*You ran away, they say.*

*With a bottle in your mouth,*

*And a girl round your neck,*

*You didn't even check,*

*Your little brother wasn't crying,*

*While your mother finished dying*