

DEFENESTRATED**By Jim Martin**

Commissioned by Plan-B Theatre Company and Utah AIDS Foundation. Read as part of Plan-B's Script-In-Hand Series on April 6, 2011 with the following cast:

Actor #1	Lane Richins
Berenice/Lilly	JJ Peeler
Teacher	Yolanda Wood

Directed by Mark Fossen.

Stage Directions read by Heidi Hackney. Stage Managed by Marcine Lake.

ACTOR #1

The State Board of Education shall establish curriculum requirements...that include instruction in: community and personal health; physiology; personal hygiene; and prevention of communicable disease.

TEACHER

Boys and girls. As you grow older, it is important that you follow some basic rules of proper living. Your bodies will begin changing. To stay healthy, you should eat right and exercise daily.

(Ding of approval)

You should wear deodorant under your armpits. As we get older, our bodies emit odors that could be unpleasant for others around us.

(Ding of approval)

We should wear clean clothes every day and brush our teeth before going to bed.

(Ding of approval)

We should cover our mouths when we cough. Coughing into your arm is best as it avoids spreading germs with our hands. Watch as I demonstrate:

(She coughs into her arm as a ding sounds for approval)

As you grow older, your body will begin to change. Boys will experience what is called an erection (ding) and girls will begin their menstrual cycle (ding). There will be attraction between the sexes (ding, ding, ding) and you will experience certain urges (ding). Of course, it is natural for you to act on these urges and to use proper contraception to protect yourself from disease and/or unwanted pregnancy.

(Teacher waits for her ding. It does not come.)

Um—OK. Maybe I misspoke. Help?

(Actor #1 comes to her aide and whispers in her ear.)

Thank you, thank you. I am so sorry. I was wrong. Silly me. Actually, you should not act on those urges until you are married. Then there will be no reason to use contraception as you will be in a monogamous relationship, the purpose of which is to produce lots and lots of babies.

(Ding of approval. Teacher is relieved.)

Now sometimes, the urges do not come as I described. Sometimes, men are attracted to other men and women are attracted to other women.

(Beat...she is looking around for approval).

This is called homosexuality and is a perfectly acceptable way of life (loud buzzer sound)...is normal (buzzer)...is a fact of life (buzzer)...is a sexual practice that cannot be talked about at school because it falls in the range of non-marital sexual activity due to the fact that gays are not permitted to marry except in overly permissive and liberal states like Vermont? (Ding)

Now if you happen to be sexually active (buzzer)...

If you are THINKING about being sexually active (buzzer)...

Oh come one! Give me a break here!

(Actor #1 comes rushing to the teacher and whispers again in her ear.)

Seriously? You have got to be kidding me? No. I can't say that.

ACTOR #1

You have to. It's right here. (He opens his binder and shows her.)

TEACHER

(reading) That's not what it says! (She looks at Actor #1 who is looking disapprovingly.)
Oh fine. (returning to audience) There is only one kind of sex that you should be concerned about and that is sex within the confines of marriage. (Ding) You will meet someone that you fall in love with. You will get to know that person and you will get married under the laws of the state. You will live happily ever after, disease free. (Ding, ding, ding)...unless you happen to be homosexual (buzzer). In that case, you will not be permitted to marry (buzzer) and will have no other choice but to consummate your relationship (buzzer overlapping) without the benefits of legal marriage (long buzzer).
Oh fuck it! Fuck it! Fuck it! Fuck it!

(Teacher retrieves a bowl of condoms and begins handing them out to the audience.)

Here, Here. Take one. Please consider using this. Stay safe. Etc. etc.

(Actor #1 marches in and angrily grabs the bowl of condoms from the teacher.

He takes the teacher nametag from around her neck and marches off. Lights out on teacher as lights up on Actor #2, currently playing School Board Member Berenice.)

BERENICE

I would like to speak on a very important topic tonight. For the first time, we are attending a conference sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This conference promises to provide the very latest information on HIV/AIDS prevention, as well as other STDs, in hopes that local leaders will legislate to prevent further and unnecessary spread of the disease.

I am concerned about this disease. HIV I mean. As concerned as anyone else. We have a responsibility to the students of this state to ensure that our policies are up to snuff.

I am concerned though that with this conference being out of state, we may not experience the same level of integrity in content that we might expect. I mean, we in Utah have a different standard. I worry that some Utah attendees, including members of our board, may come back confused. You know, lacking clarity relative to the very specific work we have to do here in Utah. Work that looks different than it may look in a state like New York or Massachusetts.

ACTOR #1

Wait a minute, Berenice. Are you saying that you don't trust us?

BERENICE

No. I am not saying that at all.

ACTOR #1

That is certainly what it sounds like. It sounds as if we do not have the brains to sort out

what is right and not right for the Utah communities we serve. Give us some credit.

BERENICE

Well, with the recent changes in our anti-harassment policy to include sexual orientation and gender identification, I fear that we are becoming a bit too...well, liberal.

ACTOR #1

There we go. The L word. And I don't mean the Showtime series.

(Berenice has not made a connection to *The L Word* TV series because she has never seen it. She just blinks, blankly).

ACTOR #1

Never mind. Ever since we began discussions about revising the anti-discrimination policy, to make it possible for employees and students of this state to have greater protection, especially from harassment and bullying, I have had to endure passive aggressive comments from you. Call me liberal. I don't care. Maybe I am.

BERENICE

I fail to see how anger will get us anywhere. I DO have a right to express my opinions, don't I?

ACTOR #1

Of course. I'm sorry Berenice. Go ahead. What would you like to see happen with the conference? Should we stay home? How will that benefit the students of Utah?

BERENICE

No, no, no. I think that we ought to pay our registration. We have a relatively large contingency attending the conference. We probably could pull some weight. If we told them beforehand that we expect a balance of content. You know, we expect abstinence to be well-represented on the menu of offerings.

ACTOR #1

And what will Abstinence be wearing as she represents this great state of Utah?

(Another blank look.)

ACTOR #1

Sorry. I will save my sense of humor for a more appropriate time. But I am confused, Berenice. What would balance look like exactly?

BERENICE

Well, there should be as much effort toward abstinence as there is on other options. Abstinence happens to be the preferred Utah approach to HIV/AIDS prevention. An equitable conference would ensure that abstinence was more than just peripherally mentioned.

(There is a pause.)

That's all I'm saying.

ACTOR #1

I think we should attend the conference and see what they have to say. About what is working across the country. Who knows? We might just learn something that gets us thinking out of the box. What do you think Berenice?

BERENICE

I'm not sure I can attend in good conscience unless...

ACTOR #1

Unless the conference caters to your beliefs? That doesn't make sense! Why attend a conference if you already know it all! Maybe you should throw your own abstinence-only conference while the rest of us attend the one being sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention?

(Lights out on Actor #1)

BERENICE

I fail to understand your hostility. We're all entitled to our opinions, aren't we? We should be representing our constituencies, not ourselves.

(Lights out on Berenice and up on the Teacher who is seated. Actor #1 stands behind her.)

ACTOR #1

So let me get this straight. You violated state code by responding to student inquiries regarding sexual activity, intimating that it would be acceptable to engage in sexual activity outside of marriage.

TEACHER

I disagree. I informed students that state code advocates abstinence before marriage. They laughed at me. No, no. They guffawed. They were in hysterics. They said that state code is out of touch.

ACTOR #1

Well thankfully, young people do not get to distinguish what should be taught in the public schools and what should not. If we left this to them, they might opt to skip mathematics or literature. And that would not be best for them, wouldn't you agree?

TEACHER

I would agree that students need math and literature. But—

ACTOR #1

Simply answer the question, Miss.

TEACHER

I would agree.

ACTOR #1

Thank you. (He makes a note on his clipboard.) And when you presented premarital sex as an acceptable option, you also stated that students should consider protecting themselves. Another clear violation of state code.

TEACHER

Again, I dispute the charge. Students said that it's unrealistic to expect abstinence. That they took offense at the lack of honest information being provided by the school system. I suggested that they ask their parents about options. I also suggested that they seek additional sources of information that would address their concerns about sexual activity and appropriate protections.

ACTOR #1

Did you suggest specific sources?

TEACHER

Other than parents, no. Although I probably should have.

ACTOR #1

No, you were lucky that you did not provide this information. It would have constituted unapproved curriculum, which would have been a further violation of state code.

TEACHER

Am I going to lose my license?

ACTOR #1

You are currently on administrative leave with pay while we investigate the matter. Your cooperation is of utmost importance.

TEACHER

I'm cooperating.

ACTOR #1

Now...what have you told students about homosexuality?

TEACHER

What have *I* told students about homosexuality?

ACTOR #1

That's what I said.

TEACHER

I think you should rephrase the question. Your question should read: what have *your students* told *you* about homosexuality?

ACTOR #1

I see. (He is scribbling furiously.) Please go on.

TEACHER

You see, my students teach me far more than I am able to teach them. All I try to do is create a forum where it is safe to talk. I know that I am bound by all of these restrictive codes and policies. I know that when I would like to reach out and hug my gay student and tell him, “It is OK to be gay”—big brother is watching me and would categorize that response as “advocacy of homosexuality.” I thought you hired me to be an advocate—of the young people that I teach. They are more than just students to me—they are human beings with wants and desires. They need a chance to discover those desires without condemnation and fear, but with support and information. Unfortunately, I am unable to be the kind of advocate that I would love to be.

(Lights down on Teacher and Actor #1. Lights up on Actor #2, now playing high school student Lilly).

LILLY

Our school had a scare recently. Letters were sent out to all of our parents notifying them it had come to the school’s attention that up to 50 students could have been exposed to HIV. Not much more information was provided other than to assure parents that it had nothing to do with tattoos.

You should have seen the response. The local news was all over it, especially after our school worked with the local and state school boards to provide all students with free HIV testing. Parents threatened to remove their students from the school. Students sobbed as if the world were ending. Even other schools in the district jumped on the bandwagon referring to us as the AIDS school.

In the end, the threat wasn’t nearly what was thought. We don’t know for sure, but it seems no more than one person is infected. None of us is even sure that this one person is a student. There hasn’t been much talk about what precipitated such widespread exposure, which has led to a really tense atmosphere at school these days. It was determined by those in power—the higher ups, I like to say—that maybe there should have been more investment in HIV prevention. That maybe this whole scare could have been avoided with additional information.

A situation like this makes you realize all the misinformation that is out there. People just don’t know. They act like AIDS is not something they have to worry about any longer. Like it was something of the past. They’ve never really known anyone with AIDS and so they haven’t had to think about it. Until now. This all brought it close to home.

Laissez faire. This is something we have learned about in our civics class. It means that we've become lazy about something—that we have a blasé attitude about it. That's how high schools, especially students, treat the whole HIV thing. Like it's no big deal, right? Like people don't really get HIV anymore because there is so much information out there. And even those who do get it can live a really long time. It isn't as much of a death sentence.

I think these attitudes are just ignorance. The less AIDS is talked about, the more difficult it becomes to talk about it. The more shame that accompanies seeking out information to protect yourself, or to go in for an HIV test.

The good thing that came out of this whole mess is that parents are finally talking to their kids about HIV. At least my mom is. She's asking me questions about my choices for the first time and really helping me get answers to my questions. Also, the schoolwide testing that was available for free to any interested student. People who would never have gotten tested otherwise took the opportunity. Let's hope that this begins a new, more long-term conversation at our high school and in our district—maybe even in the state. Let's hope that the urgency doesn't get swept under the rug as anxiousness subsides.

Students are on the look out for students who might be HIV positive. They say that these students have a “shifty” look. They avert their eyes out of shame. I'm not sure there is anything scientific about their theory, but it does speak to the kind of misinformation, fear and shame that are floating around out there.

(Lights down on Lilly and up on Actor #1 and Teacher in same positions as before.)

ACTOR #1

Did you pass out condoms and literature on the street as students came to the football game?

TEACHER

I did. On my own time and dime.

ACTOR #1

You are a public servant. As a public servant, you're never on your own time. You are always a representative of public education. If you were a stripper at a local club, this would reflect badly on the teaching profession. We could terminate you for this.

TEACHER

And you would be terminating an educator who loves her students, who teaches well-planned and engaging lessons, who has good relationships with parents and the community, and who is trusted as a local educational leader. You would be terminating an asset to the profession. But I guess you have to weigh the cost-benefit and determine

your best course of action.

ACTOR #1

So did you or did you not pass out condoms and unapproved literature?

TEACHER

I did. And I would do it again. And while you're writing down notes, please make sure you get this: I lose sleep at night. I lose sleep because I am failing my students. Our silence around sexuality is disarming students. They are experiencing the world without information they need to be successful. Some of them will make it in spite of us. But some will not. We wouldn't dream of sending students to calculus without algebra. We would call it malpractice to throw students into *The Scarlet Letter* without first teaching them how to read. And yet, we don't flinch at expecting students to navigate their sexual identities without the support of the school system. I lose sleep worrying that my students—because of ignorance, shame, and yes, silence—could be in danger. Did I violate state code? I guess it depends on your interpretation. But did I, or anyone else in this school, do enough? *That* I am convinced of. No.

(Beat)

Did you get all that?

ACTOR #1

Every word.

TEACHER

And?

ACTOR #1

We will review your testimony and render a decision within the week.

TEACHER

I look forward to your decision. However, I've made a decision of my own. To move on.

ACTOR #1

You're resigning?

TEACHER

I am. I may be able to accomplish more outside of education.

ACTOR #1

It may be for the best.

TEACHER

Thank you for your time.

(All three of the actors face the audience for the following section. Some of the lines can and even should be overlapped.)

ACTOR #1

Instruction shall stress the importance of abstinence from all sexual activity before marriage and fidelity after marriage as methods for preventing certain communicable diseases; and personal skills that encourage individual choice of abstinence and fidelity. At no time may instruction be provided, including responses to spontaneous questions raised by students, regarding any means or methods that facilitate or encourage the violation of any state or federal criminal law by a minor or an adult.

TEACHER

I will always be a teacher even if I lack the formal title. I may have made the wrong decision—to quit. We probably can affect greater change from within than without. The more strong educators—strong enough to challenge the boundaries and definitions of state code—the more likely change will occur.

LILLY

It would be nice to have some adult leadership. We have to turn to other students our age for answers. That doesn't make any sense. We're all in the same boat and yet we're turning to each other for direction. The cool teachers—the ones who would be honest—are afraid to do so. Who does that leave? Some of us have parents, but these conversations are difficult with parents, you know?

ACTOR #1

The materials adopted by a local school board shall be based upon recommendations of the school district's Curriculum Materials Review Committee that comply with state law and state board rules emphasizing abstinence before marriage and fidelity after marriage, and prohibiting instruction in: the intricacies of intercourse, sexual stimulation, or erotic behavior; the advocacy of homosexuality; the advocacy or encouragement of the use of contraceptive methods or devices; the advocacy of sexual activity outside of marriage...

TEACHER

We teachers have more power than we credit ourselves with. And it is high time we coalition for the advancement of this power. Our young people are asking—no, they are begging for it. Our young people look to us as their advocates. That is why they feel mistrust and disappointment when we allow those injustices to pass in silence. I do not advocate for any belief or sexual practice. Instead, I advocate for my students. I am an advocate.