

# Lesson Plan

## **AIDS child activist dies June 1, 2001**

### **Objectives**

Students will be able to:

- Explain the significance of Nkosi Johnson's choices.
- Examine the extraordinary difficulties faced by children who have AIDS.
- Write a reflective paper on what we can learn from Nkosi Johnson or formulate an annotated list of the individual strengths and qualities such children must have to lead fulfilling lives.

### **Standards**

Students know environmental and external factors that affect individual and community health.  
Students know essential concepts about the prevention and control of disease.

### **Materials**

CNNfyi.com article "Mandela honors AIDS child activist" ([scroll down on this page to find the article](#))

Internet access or off-line materials about Nkosi Johnson, Ryan White and the effects of AIDS on children in developing countries

### **Suggested time**

One class period

### **Procedures**

1. Ask students which age demographic they tend to associate with the AIDS epidemic. Do they tend to associate it with children victims? Ask if they have ever heard of Nkosi Johnson.
2. Assign the CNNfyi.com article "Mandela honors AIDS child activist" for reading. Then ask the following questions:

Who was Nkosi Johnson, where did he live, and how old was he when he died?

How did he contract AIDS?

What is an "activist"?

Why was Nkosi known as an activist?

What was he able to accomplish to help others in his short life?

How many South Africans are infected with the HIV virus? How is this figure expected to change within the next 10 years?

3. Allow students time to read more about Nkosi Johnson by using the related links below or off line news sources. Ask them to take notes on what they find out about his personality and his experiences. Hold a class discussion in which students express what it must have been like to live his life or to be any of the thousands of young children born with HIV/AIDS. You might also direct them to read about Ryan White, an American child who was also ostracized by classmates and adults when he contracted AIDS after receiving a blood transfusion.

### **Assessment**

Ask students to think about the qualities that Nkosi Johnson had to help him rise above the pain and sadness of his condition to thrive and, in fact, be of help to others, both in his daily example and his activism. Have students write reflection papers on Nkosi Johnson that include ways in which his example can help them in their own lives and as they consider their attitudes towards people with AIDS or with other debilitating or life-threatening illnesses.

### **Accommodation**

Direct students to list characteristics of Nkosi Johnson's personality and to write examples of the personality qualities listed.

### **Challenge**

Students can research ways in which countries with high incidents of AIDS are dealing with the ensuing problems of childhood AIDS and orphans of parents who have died from AIDS. Based on their findings they can issue recommendations on how first world countries can help those countries with pandemic problems from the disease.

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### **Mandela honors AIDS child activist**

June 1, 2001

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa -- Former South African President Nelson Mandela has paid tribute to a child AIDS activist for his struggle against the pandemic.

Nkosi Johnson's foster mother, Gail Johnson, said the 12-year-old died peacefully in his sleep at home in a Johannesburg suburb in the early hours of Friday morning. "It's a great pity that this young man has departed. He was exemplary in showing how one should handle a disaster of this nature," Mandela told reporters at his home in the capital, Reuters reported.

"He was very bold about it and he touched many hearts," added Mandela, who last year praised Johnson as an icon of the struggle against AIDS.

During his short life, Nkosi became one of South Africa's youngest and most well-known AIDS activists, with his fight to be allowed to attend school with healthy children his own age drawing a spotlight to society's treatment of people with the disease.

Four million South Africans -- about 10 percent of the population -- are infected with the HIV virus, a figure that is expected to almost double within the next decade.

### **National symbol**

Nkosi petitioned the nation's parliament, prompting lawmakers to enact new legislation forbidding discrimination against people with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

Nkosi, who was born HIV-positive, became internationally famous with a speech at the 13th International AIDS conference in Durban last year asking people not to shun those with the disease.

Gail Johnson took him into her Johannesburg home after he was taken from his mother -- who had the virus -- when he was two, said CNN Johannesburg bureau chief Charlayne Hunter-Gault.

Hunter-Gault said he had become a symbol for the nation, receiving thousands of visitors in his final months despite being very weak.

Nkosi collapsed in December with AIDS-related brain damage and viral infections and Johnson said he had been unable to eat solid food for several months.

In February, Nkosi was joined by friends, family and celebrities in marking his 12th birthday, a day many thought he would never see.