



# AFTER THE FALL

## HIV GROWS UP

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### Curriculum Guide

A story that challenges the true meaning of bravery, hope and perseverance, inspiring an audience to rise against any odds and fight for fullness of life and dignity no matter the cost.



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This curriculum guide is designed primarily for teachers of high school students though it may be appropriate for middle school students as well. While it can be used in various classes, it has clear connections within ELA, Social Studies, Sociology, Psychology, Health, Film Studies, and Anthropology classes. The film can also be screened for clubs and organizations.

## A NOTE FROM THE FILMMAKER

In 1997, World Vision approached me with a request for funding. Several projects were proposed, but only one stuck out to me: a proposal to support a kid's club in Romania for children who were infected with HIV in hospitals and institutions in the late '80s and early '90s. The program, started by Venera Batescu, was aimed at providing a safe place for the children to socialize. The intent was that they would do crafts together and have outings to the Black Sea or the mountains.

I had been interested and involved in the HIV pandemic for many years. From the first mention, it was clear to me that I would be supporting this project. We assumed, in those early days, that the kid's camp would have a definitive timeline. The children were not expected to live more than 10 years. This was a program that would increase the quality of life for these kids while they were still here. There were no long-term goals, no projected outcomes, no strategic initiatives, since the children were not expected to live very long.

I remember visiting Romania for the first time in the fall of 1999. I met Venera at the World Vision office. I met Dr. Matusa in the hospital. The AIDS ward was packed. Dr. Matusa supervised the children, had school lessons, and fed them all. It was not a hospital—it was a home for these kids. I vividly remember one boy on the brink of death. He was lying on a bench in the schoolroom so that he could be close to his friends. He did not want to die alone in his room.

We visited families and went on field trips with several of the kids. In those days, the parents did not tell the children they were ill. In most families, only one child was infected. It would be the one child that was born into the window of time when contaminated blood was given in hospitals, or had the bad luck of getting a cold during that time, that contracted the disease. We were not allowed

to speak of it. The families did not want any of the children to know. It seemed, at that time, to be less about stigma from the outside, and more about letting the child have a stress free life in his short time on earth.

I returned in the fall of 2006. In those intervening years, ARV drugs became widely available in Romania. Though many children died, many more were living.

There were several things during that visit that made a great impact on me and led directly to the making of the documentary.

First: the children were now young adults.

Second: not only did they finally KNOW about their disease—they were becoming advocates and activists. They were going on radio shows, passing out safe-sex information on the beaches, speaking with government officials.

I left that trip with one image—a megaphone.

I wanted to be a megaphone so that a larger audience, perhaps even the world, could hear this story—the one that they, themselves, were telling. This is where the idea of a documentary first came to be.

It wasn't until two years after those initial thoughts when we started filming. There were so many issues to deal with—confidentiality being chief among them. But filming did begin, and other trips followed before completion of the documentary.

I continue to support these youth in Romania. The kid's club has grown and evolved to include scholarships, vocational training, and other assistance. We could never have imagined, back in 1997, just how strategic the kids club program would become. Through the heroic dedication of Venera, Dr. Matusa, and the countless other people who give their time and energy to these young adults, a generation is alive and paving the way for other HIV-infected youth to be able to dream about full and productive lives.

Sincerely, Kathleen Treat  
Creator/Executive Producer

# HISTORICAL & BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Beginning in 1965, Nicolae Ceausescu came to power and established a neo-Stalinist police-state. He denied the existence of AIDS in Romania, and thus no HIV/AIDS treatment or prevention education was provided. Ceausescu's government eventually fell in 1989, but by then the damage had already been done. Across Eastern Europe, doctors and nurses in Romania discovered they were dealing with one of the largest pediatric AIDS epidemics in the world.

*After the Fall: HIV Grows Up* is an intimate portrait of a group of Romanian young adults living with HIV and their efforts to integrate into society, marry, have families and embark on successful careers. They are heroes with inspiring stories that demonstrate triumph in the face of remarkable challenges.

Today, there are thousands of young adults living with HIV who need government and charity assistance in their battle with this disease. Unfortunately, discrimination against HIV positive people is still a fact of life, and funding for treatment is shrinking. *After the Fall* attempts to give a generation of those affected an amplified voice and garner support for them and for the prevention of HIV in the future.



# VIEWING PREPARATION & RESOURCES

Before watching the film, assess students' understanding about HIV/ AIDS and Communism, determining if you need to provide some instruction about either.

The following links may prove helpful resources:

## HIV/AIDS

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/hiv-aids/basics/definition/con-20013732>

<http://aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/hiv-aids-101/what-is-hiv-aids/>

<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/whatishiv.html>

## COMMUNISM & NICOLAE CEAUSESCU

[http://www.globalmuseumoncommunism.org/what\\_is\\_communism](http://www.globalmuseumoncommunism.org/what_is_communism)

<http://www.auburn.edu/~johnspm/gloss/communism>

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/100972/Nicolae-Ceausescu>



# PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

1 Prepare an anticipatory guide to generate conversations about issues and themes in *After the Fall*. Use a guide to gain insight into students' background knowledge and understanding about HIV, discrimination and/or Communism. The following links from AdLit.org and ReadingRockets.org may be helpful in developing an anticipation guide suitable for your class.

» <http://www.adlit.org/strategies/19712/>

» [http://www.readingrockets.org/strategies/anticipation\\_guide](http://www.readingrockets.org/strategies/anticipation_guide)

2 Use discussion questions to prompt your students' thinking about various aspects of the film.

What are the challenges you face as a young adult in your day-to-day life?  
How do you tackle those challenges?

What are the privileges you enjoy as a young adult in your day to day life?  
What allows you to enjoy those privileges?

Discuss the impact your national government has on your day to day life.  
To what extent do laws, or the enforcement of laws, have a significant impact on your personal life and well-being?

What, in your opinion, constitutes a family? What role does family play in your life?

3 The young adults featured in *After the Fall* are described as heroes. Have students make a T-chart of people they consider to be heroes and what makes them heroic.

4 *After the Fall* highlights how being educated and informed can transform lives. Have students free-write in response to one of the following quotes:

*"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."*  
— Nelson Mandela

*"When you know better, you do better."* — Maya Angelou

*"Prejudices, it is well known, are most difficult to eradicate from the heart whose soil has never been loosened or fertilized by education: they grow there, firm as weeds among stones."* — Charlotte Bronte



## DURING-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

1 The young adults featured in the film have faced the challenge of living with HIV since childhood. Note additional challenges each young adult faces as a result of having HIV.

2 *After the Fall* juxtaposes the themes of fear and hope as well as the themes of loneliness and love. Identify parts of the film about fear and hope. Identify parts of the film about loneliness and love.

3 Traditional families are scarce in the film. Track places where you see evidence of relationships that resemble those within a traditional family.

4 *After the Fall* explains, "Romania, under communism, in many ways provided ideal conditions for the spread of a virus like HIV, particularly among an most unlikely population, children." Document the ways this epidemic began and how it was exacerbated by the communist leader, Nicolai Ceausescu.

# POST-VIEWING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1 Family is so important to the young adults featured in *After the Fall* despite their lack of traditional families. Consider what constitutes a family for Mioara, Asica and George. What is the importance of family to them? To you?

2 The photographer Frank Fournier calls Dr. Rodica Matusa “a monument.”  
What is the meaning of this metaphor?  
Do you think it is an accurate description of her? Why?  
Who might you describe similarly? Why?

3 Eduard Petrescu, UNAIDS National Country Advisor explains, “Talking with them it’s clear that the biggest challenge is to be normal. For us, it’s boring to be normal. For them, it’s really challenging.”

What did he mean by this?

What does it mean to be normal?

Is ‘normal’ boring, something you work hard for, or something else?



4 Discrimination against HIV positive people is still a fact of life. Use these quotes to discuss Alex’s, Mioara’s, and Asica’s responses to sharing their stories on film.

*“It is important to keep my face hidden because there are some people, no matter how much we try to inform them, we still cannot get them to accept us.” — Alex*

*“You can’t hide it all your life.” — Mioara*

*“So what if I have HIV? No one wanted it to be like this, but that’s how it is and I have to go on. I don’t have to cover my face in front of the camera.” — Asica*



## POST-VIEWING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS CONTINUED

5 When individuals are uninformed about the facts underlying an issue, social change can be complicated. Discuss how the following quotes reveal complications of social change.

*“The problem is with the parents - not with the children. In school, children learn about HIV/AIDS from an early age. They learn how to protect themselves, and how to accept others.”*  
— Cristi Iftene Lawyer/ Advocate

*“My parents wouldn’t let me go to school. I was sick and they thought I didn’t need school.”*  
— Mioara

*“She got extremely scared. She even started to cry. She couldn’t believe that such a clean, beautiful, and intelligent child like me could have HIV. She couldn’t believe it.” “Are you one of those kids from the 90s?”* — Mioara’s employer

*“All my friends and family, except my husband, were afraid to meet me, to go out and eat or do things we used to do together.”* — Dr. Rodica Matusa

*“But it was a terrible fight to get Asica in school because no school inspector, no school, and people generally were not ready to accept HIV infected children or persons in society. Legally they could do nothing against so they registered Asica in school, but soon after that parents started to put pressure on us and on children and Asica had a hard time in those years.”*  
— Venera Botescu

6 Hope and fear are prominent themes throughout the film. Discuss the contrast between feelings of hope and feelings of fear for the health care workers, journalists and the young adults featured in the film.

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## POST-VIEWING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS CONTINUED

### 6 CONTINUED

*"I used to be afraid but as the years went by I said STOP. I have so many dreams that I want to come true. So I don't think about the disease anymore, about what could happen, if I'm going to die or not. You have to look to the future. No matter what." — Mioara*

*"I had hope from the beginning when nobody had hope for them." — Dr. Rodica Matusa*

*"It was hard to keep hope. No matter how much we work and how much we take care of these children, they still will die." — Venera Botescu*

*"No one dared speak about HIV and when they did speak they were told to shut their mouth and mind their own business." — Dr. Ilie Marcu, Romanian Centre for Hematology*

*"It was a new disease that we didn't know much about and were afraid of. It was a disease that scared Europe and the whole world." — Dr. Rodica Matusa*

*"After a long dark night, dawn finally broke for the Romanian people and hope spread quickly in the streets. Yet there was little hope in the clinics." — Narrator*

7 Love and Loneliness are themes discussed in the film. Discuss the contrast between feelings of love and loneliness for the young adults featured in the film.

*"Because if I feel loved then it's okay." — Marion*

*"No matter how much you love, you are happiest when you are loved. If you love and are not loved back, you're not happy. If you feel loved, of course you will love too."  
— unidentified speaker*

*"From the moment I met these kids, I noticed that they were cheerful. But I also noticed in interviews and in our meetings, they speak often about loneliness."  
— Gabriel, Spiritual Counselor*

8 Eduard Petrescu describes the young people featured in the film as heroes, saying, "To find out that they have a deadly disease, to be outcast from their community, to be thrown out from school, from a hospital, and still to be there, and still to have the power to want to do good. It is amazing. They are heroes. If you ask me, anyone of them can qualify as a genuine hero." What is a hero? Do the young people in the film fit your definition of a hero? Why?

## POST-VIEWING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS CONTINUED

9 Discuss the importance of education for HIV positive young people and education for society in order to change cultural norms. Is educating children enough? Is there more that needs to be done?

10 What does it mean to have a right to education? Should being infected with HIV affect your rights? Why or why not?



11 Before viewing *After the Fall*, what image(s) came to mind when someone mentioned HIV and AIDS patients? Did what you saw confirm or challenge those images? What did you learn from the film about people diagnosed with HIV and AIDS? How is your opinion the same or different from those portrayed in the film?

12 One of the most powerful statistics from *After the Fall* is that in 1992, 80% of the world's pediatric AIDS cases were in Romania. The film, in showing how "HIV Grows Up", demands that we consider these questions: What can we do for young adults like the ones featured in the film who are infected with HIV? What actions can we take to ensure that the rights of all people with HIV are guaranteed?

13 The adults featured in the film showed tremendous courage and determination throughout this crisis in Romania. Consider the following statements and discuss what it means to be courageous. In what ways did these people show determination and courage. How do individuals demonstrate determination and courage both in the film, and in your community?

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## POST-VIEWING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS CONTINUED

### 13 CONTINUED

*"It's very hard to appreciate what she did, with no medication, no understanding, nothing, Dr. Matusa brought an incredible quality of life for those children."*

*— Frank Fournier, photographer*

*"Everybody recognized that we had a problem. We began treating and testing children from the orphanages. To our surprise half tested HIV positive." — Dr. Rodica Matusa*

*"It was a period when nobody knows what to do. How to grip the thing and do something for them. Nobody, at that time, know for sure if they are doomed or they have some future. But for me, it was one thing very clear, it was HIV, it was AIDS. "*

*— Carmen Sandu, Romanian Journalist*

*"No matter how much we work and how much we take care of these children, they still will die."*

*— Venera Botescu*

*"Whatever I had to do, I did." — Dr. Rodica Matusa*

**14** Dr. Rodica Matusa, Venera Botescu, and Kathy Treat show the power that one individual can have on the lives of others. Discuss how Dr. Matusa, Venera Botescu, and Kathy Treat, filmmaker, demonstrate the power of an individual. What other individuals demonstrate the power that one person can have? How might you and/or others have a similar impact in the world?





## BEYOND THE FILM POST-VIEWING ACTION

Make your impact. Take informed action on issues that impact your world by demonstrating the power that an individual can have to enact positive change.

**ROCK YOUR WORLD** is a well-designed curriculum that provides lessons to support students becoming informed on issues that matter to them and taking action in response to those issues.

To get started, visit [www.rock-your-world.org](http://www.rock-your-world.org) to access lessons to support students in finding issues that inspire them and becoming experts on those issues.

Once students are ready to take action, use the lessons to support them in developing multi-media campaigns, creating public service announcements, writing commentaries or letters.

**ROCK YOUR WORLD** also provides lessons to support student filmmakers in producing short documentary films. Kathy Treat contributed as a filmmaker on a panel for Incredible Indies: Documentaries. The segment, which includes highlights from *After the Fall: HIV Grows Up*, ends with a discussion about young people inspired to make their own documentaries. Andrew J. Muscato, producer of *Schooled: The Price of College Sports*, offers this advice: "If you have a story and you have a digital camera, do it." Barbara Rick, founder of Out of the Blue Films, says, "If you feel that urge to make that movie, make it."

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

BBC News: "In the Romanian 'Canyons of Horror'"  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8428283.stm>

BBC News: "Timeline: Romania"  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/europe/country\\_profiles/1058027.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/1058027.stm)

The National Center for Biotechnology Information:  
"Pediatric AIDS in Romania -- A Country Faces Its Epidemic and Serves as a Model of Success"  
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1785216/#!po=5.55556>

UNICEF: "HIV and AIDS in Romania: Taking Stock"  
[http://www.unicef.org/romania/United\\_for\\_children\\_3.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/romania/United_for_children_3.pdf)

The Economist: "AIDS in Romania: When Ignorance is Lethal"  
<http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2012/04/aids-romania>

NY Times: Romanian 'Orphans': Prisoners of their Cribs"  
<http://www.nytimes.com/1996/03/25/world/romanian-orphans-prisoners-of-their-cribs.htm>

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