

TEEN ISSUES

The Latest About HIV and AIDS: What Every Student Still Needs to Know

★★★★1/2

(2012) 24 min. DVD or VHS: \$149.95 (teacher's guide included). Human Relations Media. PPR. Closed captioned. ISBN: 978-1-55548-915-1 (dvd).

Providing a concise but thorough up-to-date overview of information about HIV and AIDS, a pair of hosts address a wide variety of topics, including definitions (with accompanying cell animation), a description of the negative effects on the immune system, risky vs. cautious behaviors (regarding bodily fluids, limiting drinking for better cognizance, asking for and providing partner sex history, the female double standard, and casual contact), methods of getting tested, and treatments and medications. Interspersed throughout are clips of young people living with HIV, who talk about their experiences. Including a PDF teacher's resource guide, *The Latest About HIV and AIDS* also features segments on using male and female condoms. Highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

EDUCATION

The Learning ★★1/2

(2011) 98 min. In English & Filipino w/English subtitles. DVD: \$29.95; individuals; \$89; public libraries & high schools; \$295; colleges & universities. Women Make Movies. PPR.

Inspirational teachers have been a staple of tug-at-your-heartstrings dramas for decades, but Ramona S. Diaz's PBS-aired documentary *The Learning* provides a distinctively contemporary slice-of-life take on the subject, following four women from the Philippines who are recruited by Baltimore's public school system. The trans-Pacific outreach is explained by a supposed shortage of math, science, and special education instructors in the U.S.—although one might also easily assume that many qualified Americans would prefer not to work in a harsh and chronically underfunded urban public school setting. The Filipina women are happy for the opportunity (especially since equivalent work in their own country pays below-poverty wages), but clearly unhappy at having to leave behind their families. Not surprisingly, they face an immediate culture shock: the disciplined schools in the Philippines are a world removed from the decidedly non-regimented Baltimore classrooms, where students are not initially eager to show their respect. Still, the recruits struggle to push their pupils to excellence, often facing significant challenges to their own self-esteem along the way. Filmed over the course of a single school year, the

film delivers an uncommonly personal look at the teachers' lives, thoughts, and concerns while also providing valuable insights about bridging cultural differences through education. Intelligent and often moving, this is highly recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (P. Hall)

LAW & CRIME

Me Facing Life: Cyntoia's Story ★★

(2010) 52 min. DVD: \$99.95; public libraries; \$295; colleges & universities. The Cinema Guild. PPR. ISBN: 0-7815-1380-4.

Daniel Birman's *Me Facing Life*, which aired on PBS's *Independent Lens* series, moves beyond statistics about the juvenile justice system to bring one particular story to light. Birman spent six years with Cyntoia Brown, starting when she was a 16-year-old arrested for killing a man in self-defense. At the time, Brown was under the sway of a drug dealer, who coerced her into prostitution for money, which led her to 43-year-old John Allen, whom she shot in the back. In 2004, Brown begins a stay in a Nashville detention facility before her criminal trial begins—if the state tries her as an adult, she risks life in prison. Birman builds the central story via interviews with Cyntoia, family members, lawyers, and others involved in the case, including Dr. William Bernet, the court-appointed psychiatrist. Sexual abuse has plagued three generations of Brown women, including Cyntoia and her biological mother, Georgina, a woman with a history of alcoholism, crack addiction, mental illness, and imprisonment.

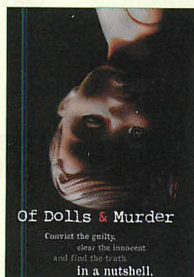
When Georgina could no longer care for Cyntoia, a neighbor took her in. Here, mother, grandmother, and granddaughter Cyntoia all express regret that they never had the chance to form their own identities, separate from the controlling men in their lives. Cyntoia's trial eventually takes place in 2006, with the camera recording the final chapter in this sad story (although the end credits provide further updates). Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

NATURE, MATH & SCIENCE

Animal Journeys ★★

(2011) 50 min. DVD: \$29.95. Worldwide Academic Media. PPR. ISBN: 978-1-59163-244-3.

Stock nature footage from the BBC is fashioned here into a two-part series of five-minute segments intended to portray wildlife that cover great distances during their lifecycles. These are not necessarily migrations (witness the lengthy meanderings of the rattlesnake in its quest for food), and, despite the title, not all the wanderers are animals. One segment focuses on plants whose seeds are designed to ride on the air or in the water, or hitchhike on the fur of passersby. Other chapters address the incredible odysseys of monarch butterflies, the movements of wildebeest herds, the long flights of snow geese, and the ocean/river treks made by eels and salmon (a most obvious omission is the emperor penguin, star of *March of the Penguins*). While the short, pithy chapters are suitable for basic classroom use, educators might want to note the possible titter-inducing inclusion of



Of Dolls & Murder ★★

(2012) 70 min. DVD: \$14.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors).

Susan Marks's documentary explores the science of crime and our fascination with violent death as she recalls the little-known work of Frances Glessner Lee (1878–1962), the Chicago-born heiress to the International Harvester fortune who became a highly unlikely pioneer in forensic pathology through her construction of 18 miniature dioramas used in police training related to crime scenes. While Lee's wealth enabled her to endow a department of legal medicine at Harvard University in 1931 (the first of its kind in the U.S.), it was her talent for creating highly intricate miniatures (featuring working locks on the tiny doors) that was truly amazing. Even more remarkable is the fact that, despite advances such as computer-generated training and DNA-based research, the replicas—complete with 1930s-style clues such as knocked-over rotary telephones and bloodstained iceboxes—are still being used. The collection of macabre dollhouses, each depicting a different murder, is housed at the Maryland Medical Examiner's Office in Baltimore, but not on public display, which makes this presentation all the more alluring. As the camera pans slowly over the elaborate models—known as the Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death (based on the idea that trainees could gather relevant facts in a proverbial nutshell)—assorted experts and commentators weigh in. Marks also includes visits to morgues and detective headquarters, as well as a discussion with *CSI* executive producer Naren Shankar. Underground filmmaker John Waters provides a slightly bemused narrative voice for this offbeat documentary that is sure to appeal to true crime aficionados. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (P. Hall)