

WILL THEY HEAR US?

[A man and a woman walk through the audience into the acting area. They are carrying imaginary bags and have been walking for a long time. They are both tired. The other actors make the noises of the forest.]

Alice: How far is it now?

David: We're getting close...

Alice: Why did we have to come all the way out here?

David: People here need to know as well. Not just in town.

Alice: It's going to be dark soon ... I don't want to be out at sea on the road in the dark!
[She stops and puts down the heavy bag she is carrying.] It's dangerous around here!

David: If we walk paddle quickly we'll get to the village before the sun goes down.

Alice: I'm tired!

David: If you want to get there keep paddling walking! **[He walks on and the woman hangs back and then seeing he is not going to stop she picks up the basket and follows him quickly. They trudge wearily on, following miming the actions that fit the words of the song as they go.]**

Song:

Feels like a thousand miles
 A thousand miles
 Up the hills and down Up the waves and down
 Across the rivers Across the water
 Up and up and down!

What will happen when we reach the village?
 Will they be glad we've come all this way?
 We are strangers to this place
 It's such a long, long way.
 The light is fading and the sun is going down
 Will they want to hear the news we've carried from the town?

Feels like a thousand miles
 A thousand miles
 Up the hills and down Up the waves and down
 Across the rivers Across the water
 Up and up and down!

[A man comes through the audience and Alice sees him. He tries to hide. Alice grabs David's hand, while the singers are still singing and pulls him to a stop. He pushes her away.]

David: We're almost there! Pull the canoe into the trees.

Alice: A man! Over there!

David: A man?

Alice: He's hiding in the bush!

[David takes a few steps forward. He stops and looks around. He walks a bit further towards the man. The man jumps up and tries to run away, but he moves slowly and David tries to grab him, but he pulls away.]

David: Who are you? What are you doing here?

Terry: Let me go!

Alice: David! Be careful!

David: I won't hurt you. Just tell me why you're hiding here.

Terry: Don't touch me! **[He runs off and David runs a little way after him.]**

Alice: Come back! Maybe he's got friends out there! David!

[David turns back and walks up to her.]

David: Why was he so frightened?

Alice: I don't know. Let's get to this village quickly. I don't like this place David.. **[She looks around fearfully.]** I don't like it! **[They both exit.]**

[The village wakes up. A cockerel sings and people start to come out. A man comes yawning from behind the backdrop and rushes off to go to the toilet. A woman comes through the audience with a bucket of water and a group of men go out on their way to the garden.]

John: Morning Mary!

Mary: Morning!

John: You've gone for water early...

Mary: I always get up early! You're going to the garden?

John: Yes...

Mary: Don't chew beetle nut all day! Do some work! **[She starts to exit.]**

Men: Ahh!

John: If you want beetle nut, come and see me! **[All the men laugh. Mary reaches one side of the acting area and the men reach the other, then they stop and sing. All the other cast members, except the health workers come inside. As they sing between each couple of lines they act as if they are working.]**

Song: Another day beginning in the village
The sun is up and so are we
Life is hard
So much work to do
We have to feed the family
Life in the village doesn't change
Go to the garden
Feed the pigs
Custom is strong we follow its laws
That's the way we live.
We have our custom and our religion
God will guide us through hard times
Protect us through the long nights darkness

Til the light of morning shines!
Another day beginning in the village [**They exit singing over the next lines.**]
The sun is up and so are we
Life is hard
So much work to do
We have to feed the family!
[**An old man comes into the acting area. He is buttoning up his shirt.**]
Chief: Morning! Morning Auntie! [**He is waving to the woman with the bucket of water.**]
Mary: Morning chief! [**She exits. The two health workers meet her on her way. They are entering, some way from the chief. They stop and ask her where the chief is and she points them on their way. David gets to the chief first.**]
David: Morning chief!
Chief: Morning?! And who are you?
David: I'm David...
Alice: My name's Alice... [**They both shake hands with the chief.**] We've come to ask if we can do some work in your village...
Chief: Work?
David: We're going to all the villages round here, to talk to the villagers about AIDS.
Chief: AID? You've got money? We need a good water supply and...
Alice: No chief... AIDS. The sickness.
Chief: Ohh AIDS. That's a bad sickness. But we don't have it here! All those people in town.. they're the ones who get it!
Alice: It's all over the country now chief, not just in town. If we don't tell people about it they'll get it and...
Chief: [**He is not interested.**] Yes.. yes.. what do you want to do?
David: We want to tell the people all about AIDS.
Chief: They've all gone to the garden now..
David: Maybe tonight then. Could you call everyone together?
Chief: Hmm... I'll see what we can do... I'll talk to the others.. You go and sit down under the tree there... I'll come and see you when I've talked to the pastor and the elders... [**He walks a little way away.**]
Alice: Can we go and see the teacher at the school and the nurse while we're waiting chief?
Chief: Yes! But come back and see me later! [**He walks out.**]
Alice: He thought we were going to give the village money! He was so disappointed we wanted to talk to people about AIDS! There's no money for the village.
David: If people don't know about AIDS and they get it, their family has to look after them. They can't work anymore. Losing working people is like losing money. We're helping them to keep their people alive.
Alice: I hope they see it like that! Come on... let's go and see the nurse and the teacher. [**They go out. The chief comes back in on the other side. The pastor and the elders come in and kneel down in the church. The chief goes and joins them.**]
Pastor: Amen... now let us sing hymn number 10 to the glory of god...
Song: Oh Jesus help us!
Oh Jesus save us!

Give us your hand
And lead us on!
You are our rock
Our loving saviour
Take us poor sinners
And lead us on!
[They finish kneeling with their hands in the air. The chief stands up.]
Chief: Pastor... Some people have come. They want to talk to all the villagers about AIDS.
Pastor: AIDS?
Elder 1: They give condoms to all the young people!
Elder 2: Condoms?
Elder 1: Those.... Karamap....
All: Ahh!
Elder 3: Dirty things!
Elder 4: Encouraging young people to be prostitutes!
All: We don't want them here!
Chief: Hmm....
Pastor: These people destroy our customs chief!
Elder 2: And our religion!
Pastor: They talk to the young people about sex.. And when the young people learn about sex.. they want to go out and do it!
All: Yes! Yes! It's true chief!
Chief: Well.. They have come a long way to see us.. Let's go and find them. Then you can tell them what you think. **[They go out talking. The health workers, David and Alice, walk in with the nurse.]**
David: You don't give young people condoms?
Nurse: No I don't!
Alice: But why?
Nurse: They shouldn't be having sex! They aren't married!
David: How many girls have babies before they get married?
Nurse: So many! It's terrible... The mothers all get so angry... They don't want to have to look after all the children.
David: And how many have sicknesses you get through sex?
Nurse: Ohh... most of them don't come and see me.. they go to the pouri pouri man.. But lots of the pregnant women have those sicknesses. **[She shakes her head sadly.]**
David: They're all having sex anyway. Condoms will protect them from the sicknesses, from pregnancy and from AIDS!
Nurse: I can't give them condoms! I've sent them all back to the health department! **[The nurse walks out angrily. David goes to walk after the nurse, but Alice grabs his shoulder and pulls him back.]**
Alice: Let's go and see the teacher.... **[They walk out. The teacher walks in. He or she starts to teach the audience. The sing is sung by the actors behind.]**
Teacher: You know what we are here to do children? You know what school is for?
Song: We're here to learn
To learn about life

Our ABC will see us through
The information that we need to lead healthy lives
Is what we learn in school!
We are the future!
We are the future of our country
We will go forward
To make a better world
And we will learn all we need to know
Right here in the village
In our school! **[They all shout and clap at the end of the song. The health workers come in and knock on the door.]**

Teacher: Yes?

David: Sorry .. we wondered if we could see you for a minute..

Teacher: I'll just send the children outside.. Children! **[The teacher speaks to the audience again.]** You can go outside and play for ten minutes now! Okay! **[The actors behind all shout Yes!]** You want to see me?

Alice: We've come to talk to people in the village about HIV/AIDS.

Teacher: That's very good! People in this village need to understand about AIDS. They don't know anything...

David: Nothing?!

Teacher: They know the name, but they don't really understand how it spreads. You know what it's like.. the men go to town to sell food and beetle nut,, and then they go with other women.. the women do it too.. And they don't see the dangers! Some of these men have two or three wives! AIDS will spread like wild fire here.

Alice: Do you teach about HIV/ AIDS in school?

Teacher: Umm... no.. the children are very young. Too young.

Alice: How old are they?

Teacher: Thirteen, fourteen...

Alice: When will they learn about AIDS then?

Teacher: Well.. many of them leave school. They never go on to secondary... Maybe they should learn about AIDS...

David: Would you like us to teach them?

Teacher: You won't tell them bad things? Will you?

David: No! We'll tell them about AIDS and how it spreads and then we'll divide them into groups. Alice will answer any questions the girls have and I'll sit with the boys.

Teacher: Okay.. they should know. Class! Come back in now hurry up! **[The actors behind the backdrop make noises of children coming back into class. They all talk to the audience as if the audience is the class.]**

Teacher: Sit down quickly now! We're very lucky today. Two friends have come to talk to us.. so listen carefully!

David: Thank you for letting us come and talk to you today everyone. I want to ask you a question. Have you ever heard of AIDS? Do you know what it is? Yes? **[An imaginary child answers.]** Yes! It's a sickness. A terrible sickness. It has killed millions of people in the world. 22 million! That's more than all the people in the

Pacific. In Africa, whole villages have disappeared and there are orphanages... do you know what orphanages are?

Alice: Yes? That's right! Places where children go if they have no parents to look after them.

[The chief and the pastor come into the acting area. They stand listening.]

David: There are orphanages, full of children who have lost both their parents to AIDS. Do you want that to happen here? No? Then we have to understand AIDS. Now children, do you know how you get AIDS?

Chief: David!

David: Chief!

Chief: I asked you to come back and see me! I didn't say you could come and teach in the school!

Pastor: This is what I meant chief! These people..

Chief: Come with us now!

[They all leave the stage.]

Teacher: Let's get on with our lesson please! Yes? **[The teacher listens to an imaginary child.]** No Maturina! I can't tell you how AIDS spreads! Open your books! Exercise 41! Numbers 1 to 10! I said open your books! **[The teacher walks out through the audience and the chief pastor and health workers walk back in. The chief sits them all down.]**

Chief: What did you think you were doing?

David: I was asking them if they know how AIDS spread!

Chief: They're little children! You can't come into our village and tell children these things!

Alice: We're sorry chief. We should have waited.. but the teacher said it was all right.

Pastor: The teacher has no right to say that! They are our children!

David: I'm sorry chief...

Pastor: We don't want people like you coming here, spoiling our customs! We are all Christians in this village!

Chief: I think you had better go back!

David: We came a long way to get here chief. And people need to know about AIDS.. if they don't it can kill them! Thousands of people in PNG have AIDS already.. we want to stop any more people getting it!

Pastor: If they live a Christian life .. abstain til you are married and only have one partner, that will stop them getting AIDS!

David: But most people can't do that..

Chief: I said it's best you leave! **[They all freeze. The chief and the pastor go out. David and Alice start to walk again. They are carrying imaginary bags.]**

Alice: I told you it was a waste of time going to that village! All for nothing... **[David doesn't speak.]** What will we tell them when we go back?

David: The chief stopped us.. it's not our fault! **[A sound of a man in pain is heard.]**

Alice: Ohh no! What's that David? I saw that man here.. last time.. Ohh David!

David: Listen!

Terry: Help me.. please help me.

[David goes to walk forward.]

Alice: No David!

David: He's hurt ...in pain..

Alice: It could be a trick... Maybe there are more of them!

David: You wait here. I'll see... [**He puts down his imaginary bag and walks towards the sound. He finds Terry lying on the ground.**] What is it? Who are you?
[**Terry says nothing.**] Alice! [**He shouts as if she's a long way.**] Come on! We'll take him back to the village!

Terry: No! No!

David: You're sick! You can't stay here...

Terry: I can't go back! They'll kill me! [**Alice runs up to them.**]

Alice: Kill you? Why?

Terry: Please.. leave me..

David: But you'll die if you stay here. Look at the sores on his leg Alice... If we take you to the village they have a clinic.. a nurse! The nurse can treat you.

Terry: She won't treat me! I'm dying anyway. I've got AIDS!

David: AIDS?

Terry: Don't hurt me.. I won't come near you.

David: You don't get AIDS from touching people. Come... I won't hurt you. Come.. we've got water.. come and drink.... [**They sit him down and Alice mimes opening a bottle and giving him water. He drinks thirstily.**]

Alice: Why did you leave the village.. you need help.

Terry: They wanted to kill me...

Alice: What happened?

Terry: My wife got sick first.. so we went to the hospital in town. They told us she had AIDS. They gave her some medicine and she got a bit better. Then we came back to the village. Everybody knew.... And I got sick too. I was too sick to help her.
[**Terry gets up and then gets up to start acting out the story. David and Alice remain frozen throughout. Terry runs and bangs on an imaginary door.**]

Terry: Nurse! Nurse! My wife! She's very sick!
[**The nurse comes to the door.**]

Nurse: She's got AIDS! I can't help her!

Terry: Please nurse.. she's in pain.

Nurse: I've got work to do! [**She walks away. Terry stands still not knowing what to do. One or two villagers appear. They look at him with fear. Terry stands frozen listening to the words in terror.**]

Chorus: He's dangerous!

He'll kill us!

He's brought his filthy disease back here!

We don't want them in the village

Let's kill him!

Let's throw them out!

We should burn them!

Throw them in the river and let them drown!

Get your bush knife

Get ropes and matches!

We must kill them

Before they kill us!

Now!

[The chorus freezes, in shapes that show what they are going to do. Terry runs now on the spot. The chorus go out. He gets to the edge of the stage and speaks to an imaginary woman. He sits down on the stage to speak to her.]

Terry: We have to run Christine! We have to run or they'll kill us! Please.. get up.. I can try to carry you.. Christine!

[He turns and looks behind him. Behind are the sounds of people shouting. Terry gets up and walks away in slow motion. The men come in and beat the imaginary woman Terry runs.]

Terry: Christine! Christine!

[He goes and sits back with Alice and David, who now come alive again.]

Terry: I should have stayed.. why did I leave her?

Alice: How do you live?

Terry: My Auntie comes and brings me food. They don't know I'm here.

David: We're going back Alice.

Alice: No!

David: Stay here with him. I'm going back! **[He exits. Alice stays holding Terry. They also exit after David has left the acting area. The chief comes in. He sits down reading his bible. David walks in and stands watching him. The chief looks up and then stands angrily.]**

Chief: You! We told you to go away!

David: I went. But I found something on the way. Something of yours.

Chief: What are you talking about?

David: One of your people chief. He's sick and alone. Out there in the bush with no one to help him.

Chief: **[He looks down.]** No.. that's impossible.

David: Yes it's impossible! In our culture we don't leave people to die! We're all Christians! **[The chief doesn't respond.]** You know why he's there? You know what happened to him?

Chief: I didn't want it to happen like that. I couldn't stop them. They were so frightened...They did a terrible thing...

David: You know why they were frightened? Because they don't understand anything about AIDS. They don't know how you get it! They think if they kill people with AIDS they'll be all right. But that's not true chief! **[The chief says nothing for a moment.]**

Chief: How do you get it David?

David: You sleep with someone who has it and you don't use a condom and they pass it to you. They aren't sick but they have the virus in their blood. Or you share needles. You can pass it from one person to another through tattooing. A mother can pass it to her a baby if she has the virus in her blood. You can get it from unscreened blood too, but most blood today is screened. But mainly you get it through unprotected sex.

Chief: But if someone with AIDS is living in the village..

David: They won't give it to you, if you don't have sex with them.

Chief: Ahhhhh....

David: Chief.. you can't hide this anymore. It's here now. Right here in the village.

People have to understand. You've got to let us talk about it. [**The chief looks at David for a moment. Then chief stands up and walks towards the audience.**]

Chief: My people.. I have to ask you this now... Is it time to talk about AIDS?

Song: Will you hear us?

Will you listen?

Do you want to live in fear?

The choice is yours

You can close your eyes and ears

Because of culture and religion

You can keep the children ignorant

Of how to save their lives

Or you can open up your eyes and ears

That's how to save their lives

Open up your eyes and ears and work together to stop AIDS!

We'll do it now!

We'll talk about it

Let them know

What they need to know

Stop pretending

There is no way around it

We have to speak out now

To stop AIDS!

Give them condoms now

To stop AIDS!