

A Brief History of HIV/AIDS in Japan

1. Vocabulary Building

hemophilac	血友病	intimate	肉体関係
donor	献血者	disability	身体障害者
Ministry of Health	厚生省	pharmaceutical	薬剤
homosexual	同性愛者	innocent	無罪
heterosexual	異性愛者	guilty	有罪



2. Reading

The history of HIV/AIDS in Japan began 1983. It is not clear exactly who the first AIDS patient was. Some research shows that the first patient was a hemophilac. Other sources say it was a gay man living in New York. However, it is true that the first large numbers of HIV cases occurred from blood. Since 1978, blood products used to treat hemophilia were imported to Japan. The products were cheaper than products produced in Japan, but doctors could sell the new products at the more expensive, market price. The new blood products were made from the blood of thousands of blood donors. Some of the donors had HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. In 1985 the Ministry of Health allowed heat-treated blood products (heat treating kills the virus), but did not stop the sale of unheated products. The price of unheated products went down and doctors continued to give them to patients until 1987. In this way, 60% of the hemophilacs in Japan became infected with HIV.

In 1986 and 1987, three female heterosexual patients were found to have AIDS. It was very difficult for people with HIV to “come out,” or to say publicly, that they had the virus. In 1988, Akase Noriyasu, an HIV-positive activist, agreed to be interviewed on NHK. In the interview he said,

“I’ll just be pleased if you show me as an ordinary old man with hemophilia, an old timer who contracted HIV and is having fun despite his disability. I’d like my friends to have courage and spend their time in a meaningful way. It’s okay to worry and it’s okay to think about all sorts of things, but time marches on, no matter how much you worry.”

Some of these patients went to court against the government and the pharmaceutical companies, such as Green Cross, that sold infected blood products. The court battle began in 1989 and ended in 1996. The court decided that Dr. Abe Takeshi, the leading advisor on blood products, was innocent. However, three Green Cross officials were found guilty.

Because the early cases of HIV infection were found in hemophiliacs, and because the mass media focused on HIV-positive homosexuals in the U.S., there were myths that Japanese people could not get the disease. Many people thought it was a foreign disease or one that only certain people could catch, for example gay men or prostitutes, or that you can only catch it in another country. These myths continue to today. However, the Japanese population is equally at risk of infection here at home. Between 1985 and 1999, 70% of Japanese men and women with HIV had caught the virus within Japan.

Today there is no completely accurate way to know how many people have HIV in Japan, but the numbers are growing. Many people who have the virus do not get tested because they believe they are not at risk. They might give the virus to other people during intimate contact. If everyone understands more about the disease and makes a change in her or his behavior, we can begin to stop the spread of HIV in Japan.

Source: Cullinane, Joanne. “Tainted Blood and Vengeful Spirits: The Legacy of Japan’s Yakugai Eizu (AIDS) Trial.” Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry, Volume 29, Number 1, March 2005, pp. 5-31(27).

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Sept. 7-13, 1992

Japan: A symposium called 'Society Living With AIDS' takes place at the Toshi Center Hotel, in Tokyo. The hotel, however, refuses accommodation to Sean Duque, an AIDS activist from Honolulu and one of the speakers, because he is infected with HIV.

3. Song: A Time to Remember and Recall by Sean Duque

They've gone before us
What can we do in their footsteps?
They were playful like children
Folks like you and me

They were friends, they were lovers
People we've known in this lifetime
And we've shared special moments
That's how it used to be

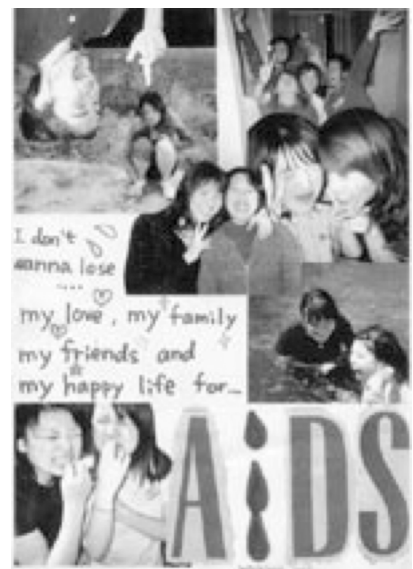
Chorus

Give a little bit of love, give a little bit of love to God's children
Give a little bit of love, give a little bit of love from your heart, oh
Give a little bit of time, give a little bit of time to remember
Give a little bit of time, give a little bit of time to recall
The greatness in them all

They were all special people
Who paved out a path for survival
To leap further hardships
And make other people see

That they were all children
Children of their mothers and fathers
They were sisters and brothers
They were friends and family

(Chorus)



Questions for Discussion

1. What is your impression of the song?
2. What is the main message of the song?
3. How do you think Sean felt about not being allowed to stay at the hotel in Tokyo?
4. Many years ago, there was a lot of discrimination against people who had HIV/AIDS. Do you think there was good reason at the time to be afraid? Explain.
5. Do you think there is good reason *today* to be afraid? Explain.
6. YOUR QUESTION:



4. Looking at YOU

In our relationships with other people, we sometimes makes assumptions. An **assumption** is an idea or belief that we think is true, but we don't have proof. Riddles (なぞなぞ) often make you assume information that is not given. Here's one you might like to try. Work with a partner and see if you can find the answer.

Anthony and Cleopatra are found dead on the floor.
 The window is open but it is not broken.
 The door is locked.
 There is water and pieces of glass where they lie dead.

How did Anthony and Cleopatra die?

Did you figure it out? What were your assumptions? Did you assume that Anthony and Cleopatra were human beings? Did you assume that something like the window, a drinking glass, someone's glasses, or a glass vase had been broken? Did you assume someone or something had come in through the window? Did you assume that someone had wanted to kill them? (The answer is on the last page.)

Some of these assumptions may be right, but others are wrong. We make assumptions like these every day. In our relationships, they could cause problems.

What is a good way to handle your assumptions about other people? Look at the situations below¹. What *other* ways could you react? Work alone or with a partner and write down another way you could look at the situation. Number 1 is given as an example.

1. Your friend hung up on you (you were talking on the phone and your friend suddenly ended the conversation without saying goodbye).	
One reaction: <i>"I can't believe he hung up on me! He doesn't care about anybody but herself!"</i>	Give the benefit of the doubt: <i>"He hung up on me. Maybe I was treating him poorly. Or maybe he's in a bad mood today and my comments were too much for him to handle."</i>
2. You and your partner went on a picnic with Ken and Aki. At the end, they took home all the leftover food.	
One reaction: <i>"They are so selfish!"</i>	Give the benefit of the doubt:
3. You pass your teacher in the hall. She recognizes you and asks you for your name – again.	
One reaction: <i>"I don't think that teacher likes me. She can't even remember my name!"</i>	Give the benefit of the doubt:

Learning to give people the benefit of the doubt will help you to think differently. If you look for ways to see the best in people, it will make you a much happier person and your level of stress will go down.

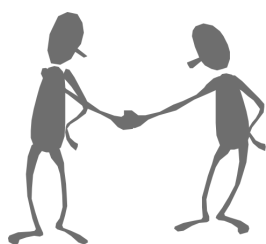
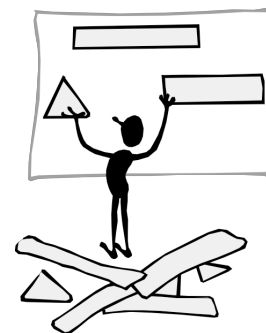
¹ This activity adapted from Words Can Heal Handbook available from www.wordscanheal.org

5. Putting it Together

What have you learned in this unit?

Review the reading passage on page 1. Check whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F).

1. ___ Imported blood products were first introduced to Japan in 1983.
2. ___ Akase Noriyase worked for the Ministry of Health.
3. ___ The belief that only gay people or hemophilacs can catch HIV is not true.
4. ___ In just four years' time, seventy percent of Japanese people were catching the virus in Japan, not abroad.
5. ___ The passage suggests that it may be possible to prevent more cases of HIV/AIDS in Japan if we learn about the disease and change our behavior.



Questions for discussion

Discuss the following questions with a partner or in small groups.

1. What was your reaction to the early history of HIV/AIDS in Japan?
2. Have you studied this information before? If so, where?
3. Have you heard the topic of AIDS discussed in the mass media? If so, where?
4. What role does the media play in teaching the public about AIDS and other diseases?
5. Do you think the media should do more to educate the public?
6. How do stereotypes start?
7. Do you ever see stereotypes in the media? If so, give some examples.
8. Which of these two statements do you agree with:
 - a. I think media should do something to stop stereotyping in their reporting the news.
 - b. I think stereotypes can't be helped. People will stereotype anyway.
9. Give some reasons WHY you chose your answer in question 8 above.
10. Explain how stereotypes might be related to the spread of HIV in Japan.
11. Read the statement by Akase Noriyasu on page 1. What do you think of his advice?
12. Do you think his advice can apply to anyone or just to HIV-positive people?
13. If you could talk with Mr. Akase, what questions would you ask him? Write your questions here, if you like:

14. What are some ways to fight the myths that only certain groups of people can catch HIV?
15. YOUR QUESTION:

? ? Do you know about HIV? ? ?

Answer to the riddle on p. 3: Anthony and Cleopatra were goldfish. They were in a glass bowl on the counter. A cat came in through the window, saw the fish and tried to get them out of the bowl. The bowl tipped over and crashed on the floor. The cat was scared and ran back out of the window.