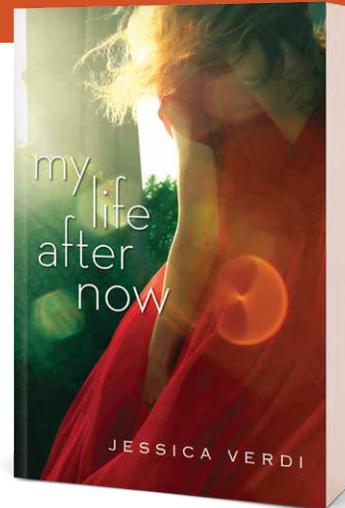


## *My Life After Now* by Jessica Verdi

### Discussion Guide

Lucy's life will never be the same. How will she be able to have a boyfriend? What will she tell her friends? How will she face her family?

Debut author Jessica Verdi tackles an issue that teens still face in today's world. Use the discussion questions below to create your own dialogue around an issue that is still relevant and help spread HIV/AIDS awareness.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Jessica Verdi is a young adult author who writes envelope-pushing stories about not-so-pretty real-life issues, but always with a positive spin.

Though she's always been a bookworm (her childhood was basically defined by the philosophy that working your way through giant stacks of library books is far superior to playing outside), she remained convinced throughout high school and college that the stage—rather than the page—was meant to be her creative outlet. After nearly ten years pounding the NYC pavement auditioning for musicals (and sometimes actually getting cast in them), she got an idea for a novel. That novel was an adult magical realism story, and while it will never see the light of day—nope, don't ask—it was the book that started her love affair with writing. Now she can't imagine doing anything else.

Jessica received her master's in writing for children from The New School and works as an editor at a romance novel publisher. She loves all animals, from the cute and cuddly to the large and freakish, has been a vegetarian for most of her life, is a little too obsessed with TV shows about vampires, and has an amazing group of writer friends who keep her sane. Jessica lives in Brooklyn, New York, with her husband and dog.

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### Praise for *My Life After Now*

*"Verdi forces her readers to face Lucy's dilemma with unflinching honesty and unfaltering compassion . . . A gem of a novel."*

—RT Book Reviews, 4½ STARS

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### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1.** What do you think of the way Lucy reacts to the problems she faces at the start of the book? Do you agree with June that Lucy's impulse to "run away" was learned from watching her absentee mother? Why or why not? How do you think you would react to experiencing a similar string of bad days?
- 2.** Discuss the role of theater in the book. How does Lucy's love of theater help or hurt her throughout her journey?
- 3.** When Marie, the lab technician, asks Lucy how she thinks she will react to a positive HIV result, Lucy doesn't know how to answer. What would your response be to the same question?
- 4.** Think about the settings of the book: high school drama club, a progressive suburb, New York City. Do you think Lucy's experience with HIV would have been different if she were from a different place or hung out in a different crowd? How so?
- 5.** How does Lucy's relationship with her fathers change throughout the book? What do you think of her fathers' differing reactions to the news that their daughter has contracted HIV?
- 6.** Even after taking health and sex education classes in school, Lucy and her friends are still pretty misinformed about the facts surrounding HIV/AIDS. Do you think you're more informed about the subject than they were? Or, like Lucy and Evan, would you also have to do a lot of research in order to educate yourself about the virus? What more can be done to educate teens about HIV/AIDS?
- 7.** Do you think Lucy should have done the "personal responsibility" assembly that her principal asked her to do? Why or why not?
- 8.** Discuss Lucy's relationship with Evan. Is Evan's reaction to the news that his girlfriend has HIV understandable? If not, what should he have done differently?
- 9.** How do you think Lucy will approach friendships and relationships in the future?
- 10.** What do you think Lucy's life will be like ten years after the book ends?

*Enrich your book discussion group with these discussion questions and delve deeper into the issues presented in My Life After Now. The guide is free and may be printed out or photocopied for use in the classroom, library, bookstore, or at home.*

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### HIV/AIDS AT A GLANCE

#### What is HIV?

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a condition that breaks down the immune system so that the body is unable to fight off harmful diseases and infections. The virus is contracted via the sharing of bodily fluids including semen, vaginal fluids, blood, and breast milk.

#### What is AIDS?

Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is the most advanced stage of HIV. Since HIV is the virus that initially infects the body, not everyone with HIV has AIDS, but everyone with AIDS has HIV.

#### Is there a cure?

There is currently no cure or vaccine for HIV or AIDS. However, early testing, care, and treatment (such as medication) can greatly slow the progression of the virus.

#### Where did HIV and AIDS come from?

Though no one knows the exact cause, genetic research indicates that HIV originated in Africa during the early 1900s. AIDS was first recognized in 1981 and has caused an estimated 30 million deaths (as of 2009). As of 2010, approximately 34 million people around the world are living with HIV.

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### FACTS AND FIGURES:

- Though teenagers make up only 25% of the sexually active population, they account for nearly half (50%) of new sexually transmitted infection (STI) cases.
- Over 61,000 young people (ages 13-29) were estimated to be living with HIV in the U.S. in 2007.
- Young people (ages 13-29) accounted for 39% of all new HIV cases in the U.S. in 2009 (an extremely high percentage, considering the 15-29 age group makes up only 21% of the general U.S. population).
- Most young people with HIV/AIDS were infected via sexual contact.
- Nearly half (46%) of all high school students report having had sex.
- 26% of female teens and 29% of male teens report having had more than one sexual partner.
- 22% of teenagers reported using alcohol or drugs during their most recent sexual encounter.
- 38.9% of teens reported not using a condom during their most recent sexual encounter.

*\*Information collected from GMHC, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Kaiser Family Foundation.*

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