Class (all together)
Two times two is four. Four times four is sixteen…

Teacher
Good work, class. I will see you early tomorrow morning. Go out quietly.

Class (all together)
Thank you teacher. Good evening teacher.

[Sound of students getting up from their seats, talking and leaving school. This runs as background sound for a few seconds while the following dialogue is spoken]
Lucy
Hey, Mshai! Wait for me.

Mshai
Oh, hello, Lucy!

Lucy
[Lucy catches up with Mshai and walks alongside her]
Why the hurry? You didn’t even say good-bye.

Mshai
Oh, sorry [She slows down but carries on walking] I’m in a hurry because I want to go see Naomi before I go home to help with the cooking for the evening.

Lucy
[In a tone of surprise and disbelief] Naomi? You’re going to visit Naomi?

Mshai
Yes. Why not? She’s my friend. [Mshai stops walking and looks at Lucy, her hands on her hips in a challenging manner] In fact, she’s your friend too, isn’t she?

Lucy
[Hesitantly] Yes…, but you know she has the sickness.

Mshai
I know no such thing. I know that two years ago she lost her father to this sickness called AIDS, and now this year her mother died of the same disease. This is all I know. It doesn’t automatically mean that Naomi has the same disease. And, even if she does, I still want to see her. She is my friend. I miss her. She hasn’t been to school in three months.

Lucy
But, Mshai, aren’t you worried that you might catch AIDS from Naomi?

Mshai
[In a defiant tone] How?

Lucy
Well, what if she touches you or coughs on you or something?

Mshai
[Waves her hand dismissively] You can’t catch AIDS from touching Lucy. You
should have come to hear the health worker talk about AIDS yesterday. She explained all about it. And she said you can’t get it from just touching or hugging or even eating with someone.

**Lucy**

You went? My mother wouldn’t let me go. She said that type of talk encourages young people to have sex.

**Mshai**

Lucy, your mother is a wise woman, but she is wrong about this. In fact, I think many of us came away thinking it is much better not to rush into having sex. After the talk we understood what it could do to us if we had sex with someone who was infected and didn’t tell us or didn’t know and would not protect themselves. It’s the best way to protect yourself from this illness. In fact, it is the only way I think.

**Lucy**

Really?

**Mshai**

Really. There are many ways AIDS is spread. One way is when there is sexual contact between two people. So the best protection is not to have sex. But when it is the right time and much later when you have grown up and are married, you should stay with one partner only and always protect yourself. It is also spread through blood as well as breast milk to babies. But I will tell you more later.

**Lucy**

The health worker *talked* about that! Wow! Tell me more!

**Mshai**

[Mshai resumes walking] Alright, but hurry. We have to walk and talk because I want to visit Naomi and I have to go home to help my mother.
Scene 2

[Outside a small hut shaded by a tree. A young girl sits under the tree, her knees drawn up to her chest, her head down on her knees in an attitude of sadness and despair. She raises her head but does not see her friends. She looks around vacantly and then puts her head back on her knees.]

Lucy
Look! There’s Naomi, sitting under the tree over there.

Mshai
What she’s doing all by herself? She looks sad and alone. I wonder what she is thinking.

Lucy
Are you sure it’s safe to go near her?

Mshai
[Decisively] Absolutely. I understand and know that it is safe. Don’t you think I value my life? [Mshai pauses; Lucy is silent] Well, are you coming or not?
Lucy
Yes, yes… I’m coming. I’ve missed Naomi too.

Mshai
Let’s run to her.

Mshai
Hi Naomi. How are you? Are you okay? We haven’t seen you at school for a long time. We’ve missed you! *Mshai sits next to Naomi and gives her a hug. Lucy hangs back still a little uncertain.*

Naomi
*Surprised and trying to smile* Hello Mshai, Lucy, it’s good to see you. I’m alright. How are you?

Lucy
We’re fine. We wanted to see you.

Naomi
You did? I haven’t seen you for so long I thought that you had forgotten about me.

Mshai
No, Naomi. How could you think that! We’d never forget you!

Naomi
But I haven’t seen you since my mother’s funeral. And even then you did not come near me.

Mshai
We are so sorry Naomi. That was wrong of us.

Lucy
Yes, we are sorry. We should have come sooner. We never meant to hurt you. *Pause. Mshai is wondering whether she should say what she is thinking* I...we...I was afraid, Naomi. I didn’t want to get sick. I knew that your mother and father both died of the AIDS sickness and I didn’t want to catch it from you.

Lucy
Me too. I missed you, but I was afraid too.
Naomi

[Sighs] I know. Hardly anyone comes to see us anymore. Everyone thinks they can catch the disease from us. But that’s not true. The medical doctor, he explained about this disease. I know how it is passed on. All those stories about being able to catch it if you touch someone or use the same plates are all myths, but people believe them. And yet they do all the things that can make them catch HIV/AIDS and never worry about it. [Pause] But anyway, if you are so afraid why are you here now?

Mshai

Because we know now that those are myths, Naomi. Yesterday, somebody came to the school to talk about HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. We know how it can be spread and how it cannot be spread. We know better now.

Lucy

My mother wouldn’t let me go and listen, but Mshai told me all about it.

Mshai

Well, I haven’t told you everything yet Lucy. There is a lot more that you should know. I want to learn more, too, so I can help other people learn about this illness. [Turns to Naomi and takes her hand] But at least now we know that it is safe to visit you. That’s why I wanted to come to see you straight away.

Naomi

I am amazed that they talked about this at school. Before, they would never have done that. People don’t talk about these things and then that is how the myths start. There are so many things people can do to protect themselves from this disease. I only wish my father knew this. My mother got the infection from him, you know. We kept it a secret for a long time.

Mshai

Now I know why you were quiet sometimes and you had that sad look in your eyes.

Lucy

But Naomi, why aren’t you at school if you are not sick?

Naomi

[Laughs sadly] Do you really think that I want to come and be stared at? To have the other students make fun of me? And to avoid me too? What good would that do? How can I study like that if no one will come near me or be friends with me? What if the teacher also avoids me?

Lucy

Oh!, Naomi that wouldn’t have happened.
Naomi
Wouldn’t it? You are my friends. Where have you been for the past three months?

Mshai
But Naomi, you could have explained to us and we would have believed you and supported you. How did you give up so easily? That is not like you at all.

Naomi
The truth is, it isn’t only my fears that kept me back. It’s my family. They need me now. Ever since my parents died, my grandmother has been trying to take care of all of us children, but it is too much for her to manage alone. So I have to help. That means there is no time for school. Someone should be taking care of my grandmother instead of her having to carry a child on her back. I am the eldest. She did not have to ask. I knew what I needed to do. I know my responsibilities.

Lucy
So you are helping to care for your brothers and sisters?

Naomi
Yes. My baby brother misses my mother. And we need money for food and clothes. I work in the fields. Sometimes I go into town to sell produce at the market. And then there is the washing to do, and fetching water and collecting wood.

Lucy
Can’t your brothers and sisters help?

Naomi
They do what they can, but they are so young, Lucy. Besides they are still so sad about losing our parents. We are all sad. We are all alone.

Mshai
[Puts her arm around Naomi] No, you are not, not anymore. You have me.

Lucy
And me.

Mshai
You know we are busy with school and our own chores at home, but we can make time to come and visit you and help with fetching water or wood or taking care of the children.

Naomi
[Hides her face in her hands and suddenly shakes with sobs] Oh Mshai, Lucy… [crying]
Lucy
Don’t cry Naomi. What’s wrong? Why are you crying? We just want to help.

Naomi
You don’t understand. It has been so hard these last few years. Carrying the secret. Watching my father die. Caring for my mother and watching her pass away. Seeing the burden of my grandmother. Not seeing my friends or being able to go to school. Some days I feel like I am fifty with all the burdens of the world on my shoulders. I have forgotten what it is to have fun, to laugh.

(The three friends are silent, sitting close with their arms around each other. All are lost in their own thoughts.)

Naomi
(Breaks the silence) It is so good to know that you care. I am so glad you came today. You don’t know what that means to me.

Mshai
We are too, Naomi. We are too.
(The two friends, Mshai and Lucy, get up to go and start walking back together.)

Lucy
I am really glad we went to see Naomi, but Mshai, how am I going to convince my mother to let me go visit her? She wouldn’t even let me go to the talk.

Mshai
Hmm that is difficult. [Mshai thinks and then has an idea] I know! Your mother and mine are friends. Should I ask my mother to talk to her? Perhaps she can give her that leaflet on myths and facts about HIV and AIDS that we got from school, so that she knows even the teachers think that there are a lot of myths and that people don’t know all the facts. Will that help?

Lucy
I think it’s a great idea Mshai! Let’s get to work!

Acknowledgement
‘Friendship’ Drama Script

This explores how a young girl is stigmatised and isolated as a result of her parents dying of HIV and AIDS, and the misinformation surrounding the disease. Two friends, one a bit stronger than the other, finally overcome their fears to go to see the young girl, and they end up giving her moral as well as material support.

The intention of the stories/scripts is to show young people that they can change things and that they can act so that they are not portrayed as passive victims with no hope. Action is not confined to school, but moves into the community as well. The scripts are designed such that they can be put on the radio as a broadcast as well as acted out as a play.