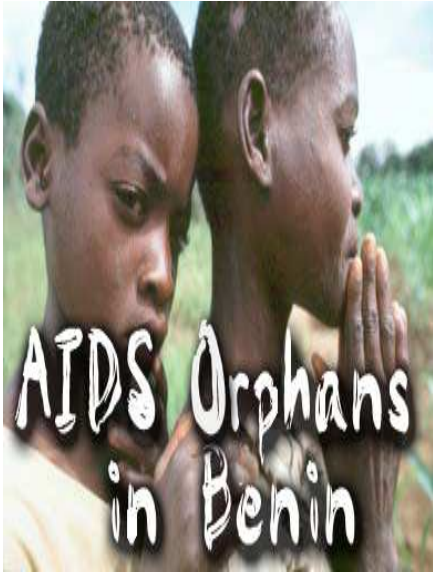
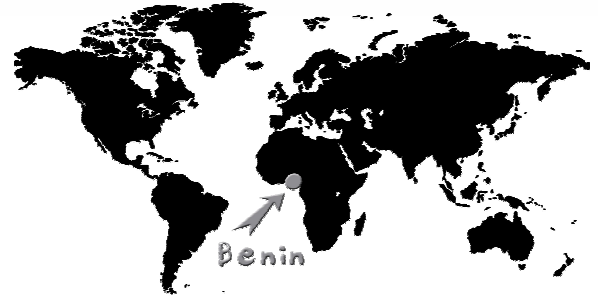


STUDENT'S HANDOUT



Background Information

More than 40 million people are currently suffering from AIDS throughout the world. Almost 75% of all cases are located in Africa, which makes it the most affected continent. The ever-increasing quantity of orphans in African countries is a direct consequence of the disease's high mortality rate.



Source: UNAIDS/WHO Report, December 2001.



Instructions

Read the following story, examine the provided table of information about AIDS, and answer the questions.

Sessi: An AIDS Orphan in Benin

1- "I'm in big trouble, someone help me, save me!", these desperate screams are coming from a nearby street. In Zongo, the most populated district of Cotonou, a young girl, apparently in a trance, desperately throws herself on the ground. Sessi, a 12 years old girl, just lost her mother. Rita, the 46 years old widow, had been fighting her illness for a long time but pain and exhaustion eventually overpowered her will. She died from AIDS, leaving behind her daughter Sessi, all alone. The little girl is now one of thousands of victims of AIDS that have become orphans in Benin.

2- Sessi is grieving her mother's death, but she is also grieving her future. A dark and dangerous future awaits young teenage girls like her, left with very little or no family support. Sessi has much to say about AIDS. Several members of her family have died from the terrible virus. She knows it is a pitiless and lethal disease that leaves many children vulnerable, in pain, and without parents. It happened to many of her friends, whose helplessness condemned them to prostitution. Not only did they lose their parents, they also found themselves in even harsher conditions of poverty, with no hope to ever get an education. These children are left at the mercy of men who recruit abandoned boys and girls in order to use them as prostitutes or slaves. So many factors contribute to increasing the vulnerability of AIDS orphans.

3- Two days of mourning and Sessi is already going back to work. For a short while now, she has been learning the basics of sewing at a nearby factory, where children receive no salary. In addition to their routine sewing assignments, the children can sometimes clean their supervisor's personal quarters in exchange for a small meal. Despite the hardships of her work, Sessi likes it because it brings her comfort and pride. In fact, everyone appreciates Sessi both for her personality and her good work ethics. Even her employer has only positive comments to give about the young girl's work.

4- One week after her mother's death, as she was on her way to the workshop, Sessi met a lady. The woman worked for an organization protecting children's rights in Benin that is supported by the Canadian International Development Agency. Touched by the sadness she could read in Sessi's eyes, the lady approached and began asking a few questions. Sessi answered shyly but honestly. The exchanged words and feelings rapidly grew into a bond between the two women.



5- Two days later, the same woman visited Sessi's workshop. After a half hour meeting with the supervisor, it was decided that a family would adopt Sessi. Among other things, the new situation would allow the young girl to get an academic education as well as financial support in order to start a new life. She would no longer need to go to the workshop. Sessi's life is about to change...hope rises in her heart, stronger every second, and a glowing smile brightens her face. How fortunate!

▶▶▶ What is AIDS and how does it spread?

The Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome, better known as AIDS, was identified as being of viral origins at the beginning of the eighties. The disease consists of several symptoms brought upon by a severe weakening of the immune system as a consequence of the destruction of one specific immune cell type: the CD4 lymphocyte. The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) attacks the CD4 cells whose function is to fight infections in the human body. The HIV literally invades these cells and uses them to reproduce and spread in the organism. Eventually, the virus destroys so many CD4 cells that the person's immune systems finds itself unable to cope with certain types of infections such as pneumonia, tuberculosis, and several others that a healthy human body can normally overcome. Several treatments contribute to slowing the virus's growth in the human body, but AIDS cannot be destroyed. It is hence possible to control it but not to cure it. To this day, the prices of treatments for AIDS remain very high.

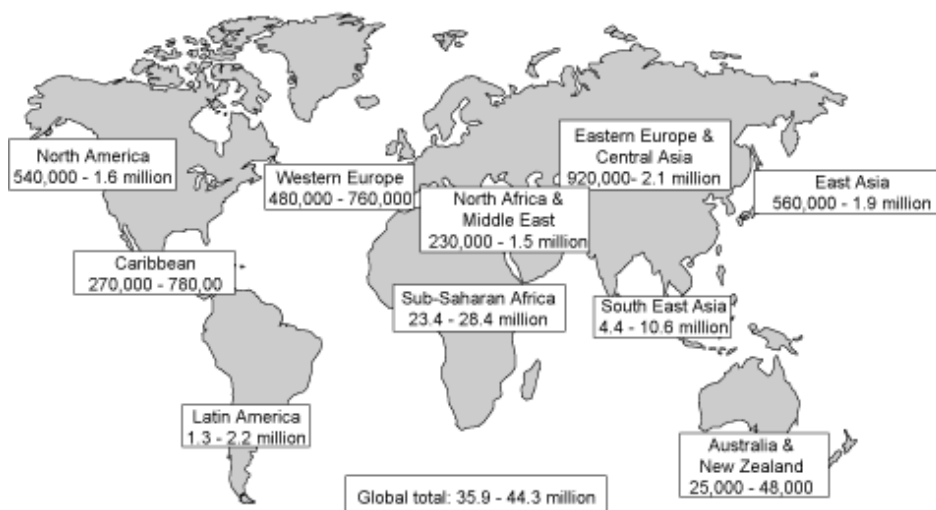
The virus spreads from one person to another by means of body fluids such as blood, sperm, seminal liquid, vaginal secretions and maternal milk. It can be passed on during un-protected sexual intercourse, or if several people are using the same syringes. A women can also pass it to her baby through breastfeeding or while giving birth.

Statistics about Benin



- **Capital:** Porto-Novo
- **Important economic city:** Cotonou
- **Population (2004):** 8 177 000
- **Life expectancy at birth (2004):** 54 years
- **Percentage of women knowing that condoms help prevent HIV infection (2000-2004):** 45 %
- **Women's literacy rate (2000-2004):** 23 %
- **Estimated number of children between 0 and 17 years of age orphaned by AIDS in 2003:** 34 000

AIDS in the world (in 2004)



(People with AIDS)

▶▶▶ To learn more about the subject, you may wish to consult the following sources:

In-Terre-Actif Network:

www.in-terre-actif.com/english

CIDA: www.acdi-cida.gc.ca

Allafrica: www.allafrica.com/aids

Student's name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Reading Comprehension Evaluation: AIDS Orphans in Benin

1- How does AIDS spread?

2- What were Sessi's feelings following her mother's death?

3- The story does not mention Sessi's father. Where could he be? Use your creative thinking abilities to imagine what has become of him.

4- Describe the possible consequences for Sessi of becoming an orphan.

5- Why is it impossible to be cured from AIDS at the moment?

6- What are Sessi's working conditions?

7- In your opinion, is it normal for a child to be required to work? Explain your answer.

8- Using the following table, compare Sessi to other children who did not benefit from an assistance program. Find three advantages of Sessi's new situation and three difficulties that orphaned children without assistance are faced with, and fill the appropriate spaces in the table.

<i>Avantages (Sessi)</i>	<i>Difficulties (other orphans)</i>
1-	1-
2-	2-
3-	3-

AN INITIATIVE OF THE
In-Terre-Actif Network of the Comité de Solidarité/Trois-Rivières



PRODUCED IN COLLABORATION WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA
THROUGH THE



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