Precious Little

Not to spoil the ending, but...

January 1, 2010 By Kate Ferguson

By the time HIV is mentioned in the new movie *Precious: Based on the Novel* Push *by Sapphire*, the main character has experienced the empowering growth that literacy confers on an unlettered, unloved teenager. During a painful-to-watch confrontation with her mother, Precious learns that her father, who raped her, has died of AIDS-related illness. She also learns that she, too, is HIV positive.

When Precious asks whether her mother is also positive, her mother says she and her father never had anal sex. Her response is a stirring reminder that in 1996 (when the book was published), it was the way most people believed the virus was transmitted. All too often, that misperception still crops up today.

Given that HIV/AIDS is disproportionately affecting the black community, we wonder why the filmmakers didn't use that precious moment to debunk a lingering myth. The film's executive producer Lisa Cortés responded:

"First, there was a sensitivity toward how HIV is depicted in the book, as [simply] one of the things that this young woman has to deal with. Just as she's dealing with incest and illiteracy, she's dealing with AIDS. Second, because of the high incidence of the virus's occurrence, particularly as it affects women of color, we never wanted this movie to be an after-school special that beat people over the head."

Considering the staggering HIV rates among black Americans, that headache may have been a welcome one.

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