

# Movie Kit



American  
Spaces



## *Philadelphia*

**Director:** Jonathan Demme

**Year of release:** 1993

**Starring:** Tom Hanks, Denzel Washington, Roberta Maxwell

**Rating:** PG-13

**Length:** 2h 5min

**English level:** Easy/Medium

**Themes:** Public Health, AIDS Awareness, LGBT Rights, Tolerance

### Warning/General Advisory

Includes sensitive thematic content about AIDS and homosexuality, homophobic slurs, other profane language, and some alcohol consumption.

### Context

Set in Philadelphia in the 1990s, Andrew Beckett (Tom Hanks), a senior associate who has hidden his sexual orientation and his status as an AIDS patient, is fired by his large corporate law firm because of his medical condition. Beckett experiences discrimination based on society's homophobia, and is not able to find a lawyer willing to represent him initially.

Ultimately, Beckett hires Joe Miller (Denzel Washington), a homophobic personal injury lawyer who is the only willing advocate for the wrongful dismissal suit. Miller takes on the case after becoming more educated about AIDS, and after observing how Beckett was subjected to homophobic behavior at a library after the librarian announces he has found a book on AIDS discrimination for Beckett. This movie is one of the first mainstream Hollywood films that acknowledges HIV/AIDS, homosexuality and homophobia. While the movie characters are fictional, the events in the film are similar to the events in the lives of two attorneys who sued their employers in some of the earliest AIDS discrimination cases in the United States.

### Important Vocabulary/Places

- **AIDS – Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome** is a disease of the immune system due to infection with the **human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)**. HIV destroys important cells of the immune system, which leaves the body vulnerable to life-threatening infections and cancers. AIDS is the most advanced stage of HIV infection. (Definition adapted from <https://aidsinfo.nih.gov/>.)
- **homophobia** – dislike or prejudice against homosexual people
- **lesion** – a region of the body that has suffered injury or disease; a wound
- **LGBT**–Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender
- **Philadelphia** – major metropolitan city in Pennsylvania

## Discussion Questions

- Why is Andrew Beckett fired from his job? What reason did the firm give?
- Describe the tension between Andrew and Joe Miller. Why does Joe feel a certain way toward Andrew? How does Andrew respond?
- Why does Joe eventually agree to help Andrew after first refusing to do so? What changed?
- This movie was released almost 25 years ago (in 1993). Are people with AIDS still facing the same discrimination in society? Why or why not?
- What are the ways in which someone can become infected with HIV? What education programs exist in our communities to educate people about HIV and AIDS?
- Are there any laws that exist to protect people with HIV/AIDS in our communities?
- Throughout the movie, Andrew is ostracized because he has AIDS. What are some other characteristics about people that can lead to discrimination in our societies?
  - What actions are we taking to address the discrimination?
- Is your view of the LGBT community the same or different after watching this film?

## Fighting AIDS: Increasing Education and Awareness

When AIDS first started affecting people, it was a mysterious disease that killed a lot of people.

Within the last 25 years, knowledge about HIV/AIDS has increased. Researchers have made progress in developing life-changing **anti-retroviral therapy (ART)**, a treatment that slows or stops the HIV virus from growing in an infected person, which allows people with HIV to have longer and healthier lives. Global organizations and campaigns have also made great contributions in fighting the AIDS epidemic. Such organizations/campaigns include:

- **UNAIDS** – The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, launched in 1996.
- **PEPFAR** – The President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief – a United States government initiative, first proposed by President George W. Bush in 1993, to address the global HIV/AIDS epidemic, with a focus on Africa.
- **World AIDS Day** – Designated as December 1 every year since 1988. Each year’s campaign focuses on a specific theme, with input from UNAIDS, the World Health Organization and many organizations involved in the prevention and treatment of AIDS.
  - 2017 World AIDS Day Theme: Increasing Impact Through Transparency, Accountability and Partnerships

**The need for education and action continues. Statistics\* show:**

- At the end of 2015, approximately 36.7 million people worldwide were living with HIV/AIDS
  - Of these, 1.8 million were children under 15 years old
- In 2015, an estimated 2.1 million people became newly infected with HIV
  - This includes 150,000 children under 15 years old
- Currently, only 60 percent of people with HIV know the status of their disease
- As of June 2016, 18.2 million people living with HIV were accessing antiretroviral therapy (ART) globally.

\* Statistics from [www.hiv.gov](http://www.hiv.gov).

## **Anti-Discrimination Laws in the United States – Protections for People with HIV/AIDS**

- **Rehabilitation Act of 1973 – Section 504**
- **Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)**

Under these laws, individuals affected by HIV/AIDS are protected against discrimination by:

- Employers
- Places of public accommodation
- State and local government entities

The ADA also protects family and friends from discrimination because of their association with an HIV-positive individual.