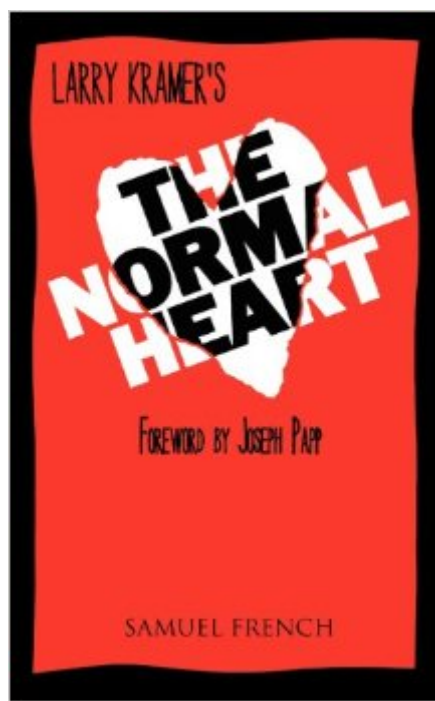


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# The Normal Heart



## Synopsis

Full Length, Drama Characters: 8 male, 1 female Unit set. A searing drama about public and private indifference to the AIDS plague and one man's lonely fight to awaken the world to the crisis.

Produced to acclaim in New York, London and Los Angeles, *The Normal Heart* follows Ned Weeks, a gay activist enraged at the indifference of public officials and the gay community. While trying to save the world from itself, he confronts the personal toll of AIDS when his lover dies of the disease.

"An angry, unremitting and gripping piece of political theatre."-New York Daily News "Like the best social playwrights, Kramer produces a cross fire of life and death energies that illuminate the many issues and create a fierce and moving human drama."-Newsweek

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (20 customer reviews)

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## Customer Reviews

The play shows a true-to-life picture of AIDS from the political-public point of view and from the personal aspect. It portrays the political history of dealing with AIDS. How the disease was neglected when it first appeared and for many years after just because it seemed to be killing "only" gay men. In addition to this, the play tells us of a tragic personal story - two lovers trying to cope with the disease. This play is valuable not only for a better understanding of gay life, but more importantly as a condensed reminder of how we reacted to AIDS at its earlier stages, thousands were dying but ways of prevention were not discussed because it was politically incorrect. The author also compares the reaction to AIDS to the reaction to the Holocaust, which I found interesting and sadly true. I must add that this play seemed like a short version to Randy Shilts book, "And the Band Played On", a long but fascinating detailed coverage of AIDS from 1980 to 1988 (written after

"The Normal Heart").

This play, easily read in one sitting, was pretty powerful, and I imagine it must have been even more powerful on stage. A lot of people, including me, have their criticisms of Larry Kramer, and one reason for leaving off a star in the rating system here is that the main character, Ned Weeks, is clearly Kramer himself. The play, powerful as it is, seems like a swipe at his critics, and having the doctor character siding with him is clearly a way of Kramer saying "I am right and you are wrong." What is fascinating about the play is how much has changed. It takes place over the course of 1981 to 1984. Many basic facts were not in place yet. Indeed, the name AIDS never shows up in the text of the play. It is just called either "the plague" or "it." Even the "condom code" had not become ubiquitous yet. What is also fascinating is the look at the Closet, how many gay enjoyed the benefits of gay sexual liberation, but were still closeted at the office and with their parents and friends. In the age of AIDS, coming out often took on the shadow of death with it, as men made double revelations to their parents, often associating gayness with death and disease. Also interesting is the arguments the gay men are having about sex and politics, denial and reality. Like I said, it's easily read in one sitting. A lot has happened since 1984, but it's important to bear in mind that in 1984, the President, Mayor Koch, and the New York Times barely admitted there was an AIDS crisis happening at all. There are a variety of things I don't like about Larry Kramer, but I do like it that someone out there is angry, and willing to keep shouting.

Ben Weeks is witness to the opening years of the epidemic soon to be known as AIDS. As his friends start dying, he is amazed at the small amount of knowledge about this new disease. What's more, he's outraged at lack of responsiveness by the media and by the government. (The New York Times wrote 54 articles about the Tylenol poisoning scare of 1982 within a 3-month period, with 4 articles on the front page. During the first 19 months of the AIDS epidemic, the same paper wrote 7 articles, with only 1 appearing on the front page.) His anger leads him into becoming an activist and creating a Gay Men's health center to spread the word about the epidemic. But, Ben runs into obstacles from unlikely places: his friends and the gay community who are scared and don't want to have their freedom of promiscuity taken away from them. And, he also must deal with his partner who contracts the disease. This incredibly angry and powerful play sweeps you up with its emotions, alternately feeling angry and wanting to cry for desperation. I've read many plays, and this is one of the few that actually makes you feel as though you are the main character. I wanted to scream along with Ben as his frustration grew about the lack of anyone taking notice about the

disease. It's also semi-autobiographical. Mr. Kramer, at the onset of the epidemic in the early '80's, became very vocal about getting involved against AIDS and started the Gay Men's Health Crisis in New York, from which he was eventually asked to leave because of his outspokenness. A masterful play full of energy and emotion that should definitely be read by everyone.

I'm giving it four stars instead of five because it's so dated, but I'm giving it that many because it's historical. I was there, and I remember all this stuff happening at the time. It's real and it belongs out and about as reference.

it's sad that some of us think we must include every last soul in order to show true compassion. kramer's play was one of the most inspiring, enraging, heartwarming, heartwrenching pieces i have ever read- i would read it again and again and again if i had the time. kramer takes the life of an ignorant, blindly angry white gay male and documents a truly remarkable character transition while at the same time conveying rage and sadness about the state of the world (in his time). to unrealistically include a token out of the ordinary character for the sake of pc-ness would in this case be a tragedy (this play's got enough as it is).

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