



POET AGAINST PREJUDICE

2014

25 minutes 53 seconds



17-year-old Faiza Almontaser immigrated to the US from Yemen and faced vicious bullying because of her Islamic identity. Mentored by the legendary Albert Maysles, Faiza shows us her courageous and inspiring journey from victim to activist.

Faiza Almontaser is a senior attending the Brooklyn International High School. In 2006, Faiza immigrated with her family to Brooklyn, NY from a small farming town in Yemen. Raised as a religious Muslim, she often struggles to reconcile her cultural background with the realities she meets as a student in one of New York City's most ethnically diverse neighborhoods.

At age 10, Faiza enrolled in the sixth grade as the only Muslim in her school. She had high hopes for her new education, but was soon discouraged by her minimal understanding of English and the anti-Islamic fervor she encountered among her classmates. Faiza's hijab, a visible sign of her Muslim identity, elicited cruel taunts and physical harassment at school, on the subway, on the city streets. Without the knowledge of language to defend herself, Faiza spent her first few months suffering in silence.

Faiza harnesses the power of the written word through original poetry and essays where she challenges the discrimination faced by Muslims in her community. Now in high school she works as a peer trainer with the Anti-Defamation League, teaching her classmates the dangers and repercussions of racism. Faiza also works to combat her struggle with the written word; through poems and essays she challenges common misconceptions of Islamic culture, and expresses her visions for change and equality.

Guided by award-winning documentarian, Albert Maysles, Faiza shares her story on film and gives spirited voice to the bias, hardships, anxieties and often painful process of identity negotiation experienced by immigrant children across the United States. As the first American **BYkids** youth filmmaker, her personal narrative takes this film to the heart of issues that are cleaving social integration and international understanding in a post 9/11 world.

Among the world's pre-eminent documentary filmmakers and the dean of American documentary filmmaking, Albert is recognized as the pioneer of "direct cinema," the distinctly American version of French "cinema vérité." His films include *Salesman*, *Gimme Shelter*, *Grey Gardens* and Oscar-nominated *LaLee's Kin: The Legacy of Cotton*.

POET AGAINST PREJUDICE can change the dialogue about bullying in the United States. Bullying is increasingly making headlines, yet positive stories of success and change are missing. Far too often, we hear tragic stories of bullying when it's already too late. **BYkids** aims to fill that gap in narrative while acknowledging the universality of such issues of confidence, immigration and dealing with adversity.

This film will engage a conversation about Islamophobia, bullying, and immigration in an increasingly polarized, post-9/11 world. Faiza's story has the power to change and transform the national discourse on bullying with understanding and empathy. Faiza's film personally illuminates issues of religious tolerance, bias, fused identity, immigration, activism and social change.

By giving kids from diverse backgrounds around the world tools, skills and guidance to make documentary films, this great organization provides an outlet for sharing personal stories, which in turn brings us closer together as an international community rooted in compassion and understanding.

Former NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg

ABOUT BYKIDS

BYkids is a global educational movement that uses storytelling through film to inform, engage and inspire action. **BYkids** provides kids around the world with the training and the video cameras to make short documentaries about their lives, and then enables these fresh, new perspectives to be seen and shared by a global community. Millions of people are joining our movement by seeing our films, developing educational programming and supporting our work. Join us at BYkids.org.