

SCHOOL GUIDE:

POET AGAINST PREJUDICE



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

BYkids School Guides help educators expand student learning from passively watching a film to active, deeply personalized learning. Three Pathways provide questions for discussion, reflection or writing prompts, plus Problem/Project-Based Learning (PBL) activities to motivate and engage students, individually, in small groups or full class(es). Alignments to English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics, Science curriculum standards plus CASEL's five Social Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies are included. We encourage you to customize the activities for your students' journeys through each BYkids film's themes and content. And for more resources, see bykids.org/for-educators including our *Take Action, Talk with Your Kids* and new content that is added often.

BYkids believes that lived experience and story sharing are vital to educate the whole child, preparing and inspiring global citizens who see our shared humanity. As you adapt and use our BYkids activities, please share your discoveries and ideas with us at education@bykids.org.

ABOUT THE FILM

In 2006, at age 10, Faiza Almontaser emigrated from a small farming town in Yemen to Brooklyn, New York and enrolled in middle school. There she 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, now 17 years old and a senior at the Brooklyn International High School, was 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.

When Faiza enrolled in the sixth grade she was 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. In her writing, Faiza 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 "cinéma vérité." His films include *Salesman*, *Gimme Shelter*, *Grey Gardens* and Oscar-nominated *LaLee's Kin: The Legacy of Cotton*.

BACKGROUND

POET AGAINST PREJUDICE 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.

This film 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.

Through the eyes of Faiza Almontaser, a 17-year-old from Brooklyn, we learn what it means for a family to immigrate to America, to navigate living in two cultures and to deal with intense Islamophobia. Faiza, a devout young Yemeni woman whose family immigrated to America when she was in middle school, faced vicious bullying because of her Islamic identity and "otherness".

Faiza's film personally illuminates issues of religious tolerance, bias, fused identity, immigration, activism and social change.

ABOUT BYKIDS

BYkids produces real-world films for kids, by kids. Talented young storytellers from around the world are paired with seasoned filmmakers to create powerful documentaries about their lives. In partnership with public television and education innovators, we share the films and their educational resources to help make global issues feel personal, relevant and actionable for millions of students. Our work serves as a catalyst for change, igniting important conversations and inspiring a new generation of social activists.

SCHOOL GUIDE: POET AGAINST PREJUDICE

PATHWAY 1

HOW DO YOU HANDLE BIAS AND BULLYING?

Faiza decides to form a group to rally against bias, and to share her poetry on the topic.

FROM THE FILM

"I hear whispers behind my back saying, 'Isn't she Asian?' 'Well we're sure she's too white to be African,' the other would say. But I turn around and show them my bravery because I don't want them to think too hard, I want to stop their curiosity by saying 'I'm sorry you both are wrong; my race is humanity.'" —From one of Faiza's poems

DISCUSSION STARTERS

- Why would Faiza decide NOT to fight people who bully her? What else might you tell Faiza to do in response to how she is treated and perceived?
- Are there groups in your school or grade that do not agree – on style of dress, what is "cool"? How are their disagreements or differences hurtful to your school's culture?
- How can different groups show tolerance? How might more tolerance improve your school's culture?

SUGGESTED PROJECTS

- Many of us may have at some point been unkind or insensitive, if not a bully, to someone who is "different." What makes people act this way? Where does hate, bullying, prejudice come from?
- With a small group, create a skit, video or film to show ways that we are insensitive, perhaps without realizing it, and ways to apologize or tell others they are hurtful in a way that does not add to the hurt and separation.
- Faiza had as one goal to improve the culture of her school. How can you improve your school's culture? Create an exhibit of art, performance art, music or other creative expression to share with your entire school on the theme of improving the school's culture.

- With a small group, identify some topics on which there are different opinions in your school. Write a survey and give it to your class or school to better understand and analyze how people feel. Collect and analyze the data, presenting it in graphic form.

Then, with your group, form hypotheses about why some of the attitudes and opinions exist, and identify ones that should be changed to have a positive school culture. Present a written report or powerpoint-style presentation to the school administration. Be sure to include any recommendations your group has for change.

- Faiza has had some remarkable teachers who supported her, guided her and shared their own experiences of bias with her. How well do you know the backgrounds of your teachers? Interview, film or record the personal histories of the teachers in your school.

SCHOOL GUIDE: POET AGAINST PREJUDICE

PATHWAY 2

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE AN IMMIGRANT?

Faiza and her family are immigrants in a country very different from where she was born, with beliefs, a culture, and customs that are different.

FROM THE FILM

"We're not wearing head scarves because we are forced to wear them. No. My dad didn't force me, My husband didn't force me. Nobody forced me. I did it because of my religion. It's dressing modest." —Faiza's sister

DISCUSSION STARTERS

- Several people in the film talk about seeing each person as an individual, and finding common ground. Why might this help? What are some things that all people share?
- How do education and writing help to open up common ground for very different people to become friends?
- What does it mean to have respect for beliefs and customs with which you do not agree, or which clash with your own beliefs and customs? What is your personal definition of respect?
- How can you navigate belonging to two cultures?

SUGGESTED PROJECTS

- Faiza wrote rap poems about respect and differences. With a group or alone, write your own rap, poems, dances, film etc to show your definition and interpretation of "respect." Read or perform your creative expressions for your class or school.
- Faiza and her family are immigrants. They came to the United States without knowing the language, customs or even what happened in this country on 9/11. Write or develop a short story or film, realistic or fantastical, that shows how foreign the U.S. might seem if you came from a different place.

- Research the different immigrant groups, their numbers, and where they live in the U.S. during the past 5-10 years. With your group, prepare a presentation using posters, video, slides, etc. on immigrant groups in the U.S. Be sure to include facts on cultural differences, as well as your own conclusions about what the groups contribute to the U.S. as a country and U.S. culture.
- This country is made up mostly of people from other countries. Interview other kids or community members about their cultural differences—even if they're third, fourth, fifth generation. Try different food, learn another language, interview about each other's history.

SCHOOL GUIDE: POET AGAINST PREJUDICE

PATHWAY 3

HOW DOES RELIGION INFLUENCE PEOPLE AND CULTURES?

When Faiza comes to the U.S., she does not know what Americans mean by “9/11” or why some associate her religion with terrorism. She is not prepared for the bias against her religion.

FROM THE FILM

“We had this picture of the Twin Towers in our house in Yemen and we thought it was beautiful and then when I came here I was blamed for actually bombing them!” –Faiza

DISCUSSION STARTERS

- If you have factual information about a “different” religion, custom, or group of people, will that information help with combating bias?
- What are the different aspects of that you would need to research to get information and facts about a “different” group?
- If we get information about a number of topics for several “different” groups of people, will the differences seem greater or less? Why?

SUGGESTED PROJECTS

- Individually or in a small group, research and retell stories from several different religions, identifying the similarities and differences. You may want to pick creation stories, stories of destruction and war, or love stories, for example.

As your group writes and organizes your retelling performance, discuss how the stories are similar and different, especially in their themes. Be sure to pick some religions that you do not know much about but would like to learn.

- Individually or in a small group, research cultural differences in the view of girls and women between the U.S. and a country about which you know little—Yemen, perhaps—or between two religions such as Islam and Catholicism. Make a chart or graphic to show some factual similarities and differences, withholding all bias and opinion.

Then facilitate a class discussion on the conclusions that can be drawn about the similarities and differences. Make it a rule of your discussion that conclusions drawn must be supported by the facts your group has presented. As the conclusion of the discussion, list all fact-based conclusions in one column, and all biases or opinions not supported by fact in another. Compare.

- Given the bias, lack of respect, and lower standard of living Faiza's family had in the U.S. compared with Yemen, why did they want to stay and why did they love the U.S. so? Examine by researching and making graphics to invent a mathematical formula that predicts why a family would still like the U.S.

You might give a weight to each factor in Faiza's family's decision, and explain how it influences the formula for overall feelings. Write up your final formula with your explanation, and present it to the class or display it.

SCHOOL GUIDE: POET AGAINST PREJUDICE

COLLEGE & CAREER READINESS ANCHOR STANDARDS

Dear Educator,

You and your students, in defining the creative and collaborative details of each Pathway and Project, will implement many different standards not limited to any one content area but focused on critical and rigorous, evidence-based thinking. Below are provided some College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards that appear in the majority of state PK-12 curriculum standards in ELA and Math, and in the Next Gen Science Standards, but you and your students will go beyond those limited standards. Also identified are Social Emotional Competency areas identified by CASEL, a charitable organization that has helped to lead the way in defining and evaluating social emotional learning. We hope you will share your experiences and ideas at BYkids.org.

PATHWAY 1

ELA COLLEGE & CAREER READINESS ANCHOR STANDARDS

CCRA.R.6 Assessing how point of view or purpose shapes content and style.

CCRA.R.7 Integrating and evaluating the use of diverse media.

CCRA.W.1 Writing arguments to support analysis.

CCRA.W.6 Using technology to produce writing and to collaborate.

CCRA.W.7 Conducting research projects.

CCRA.W.8 Researching and using relevant information.

CCRA.SL.1 Preparing for and conducting successful collaborations.

CCRA.SL.2: Integrating information in and from diverse media.

CCRA.SL.4 Presenting ideas and knowledge clearly, and audience-appropriately.

CCRA.L.3 & 5 Using nuanced language in context for meaning and style.

STANDARDS OF MATHEMATICAL PRACTICE

MP1 Making sense of problems

MP2 Reason abstractly and quantitatively

MP3 Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of other

PATHWAY 2

ELA COLLEGE & CAREER READINESS ANCHOR STANDARDS

CCRA.R.4 Interpreting words and phrases as they shape meaning and tone.

CCRA.R.6 Assessing how purpose shapes content and style.

CCRA.R.7 Integrating and evaluating the use of diverse media.

CCRA.W.4 Producing clear, organized writing to persuade.

CCRA.W.6 Using technology to produce writing and to collaborate.

CCRA.W.7 Conducting research based on focused questions.

CCRA.W.8 Researching and using relevant information.

CCRA.SL.1 Preparing for and conducting successful collaborations.

CCRA.SL.2 Integrating & evaluating information in varied formats.

CCRA.SL.4 Presenting ideas and knowledge clearly, and audience-appropriately.

CCRA.SL.5 Using digital media and data effectively in a presentation.

CCRA.L.3 & 5 Using nuanced language in context for meaning and style.

PATHWAY 3

ELA COLLEGE & CAREER READINESS ANCHOR STANDARDS

CCRA.R.2 & 3 Determining themes & analyzing how ideas develop.

CCRA.R.6 Assessing how purpose shapes content and style.

CCRA.R.7 Integrating & evaluating content in different media.

CCRA.R.9 Analyzing how different texts address the similar themes.

CCRA.W.1 Constructing arguments to support analysis of topics.

CCRA.W.6 Using technology to produce writing and to collaborate.

CCRA.R.7 & 8 & 9 Conducting research projects, gathering relevant information & obtaining evidence to support analysis.

CCRA.SL.1 Preparing for and conducting successful collaborations.

CCRA.SL.2 Integrating information in and from diverse media.

CCRA.SL.4 & 5 & 6 Presenting information & evidence, using visual graphics strategically and adapting speech appropriately to the task.

CCRA.L.3 & 5 Using nuanced language in context for meaning and style.

STANDARDS OF MATHEMATICAL PRACTICE

MP 1 Making sense of problems

MP2 Reason abstractly and quantitatively

MP3 Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others

MP4 Modeling with mathematics

MP5 Use appropriate tools strategically