

Teacher/Viewing Guide

Arab American Stories – Episode 102

Omar Offendum

Hip-Hop Artist

Grade Level 9-12

Episode Overview:

Omar Offendum is a Syrian-American hip hop artist, activist and architect. He was born in Saudi Arabia to Syrian parents, and raised in Washington, DC. He got his architecture degree at University of Virginia, where he also began performing as a spoken word artist. In this episode, Omar speaks about how his music gives him a platform to educate young people about Arab-American culture, Middle East politics and the ways in which we are all connected. He visits university classes in North Carolina and talks to students about the Arab Spring and the role that many activist musicians played in the uprisings, as well as his own work and how he hopes to form a bridge between American and Arab youth culture. His lyrics and music are inspired by a rich mixture of Arab and American poetry, the language and activist spirit of American hip-hop artists, and contemporary events. He also talks to us from a recording studio in Irvine, CA, where he is finishing his latest single and is a guest on his producer's weekly online radio show.

Previewing Questions:

1. What is your awareness of Arab Spring and continued conflicts in the Middle East? How are those conflicts portrayed in the media?
2. Do you believe that conflicts in the Middle East affect your life?
3. Do you think that life for Arab Americans was altered after 9/11?

Vocabulary :

1. Identity Politics: Political positions determined by shared gender or race or other group marker. .
2. Politicize: To become engaged in or aware of civic issues.
3. Community Ideals: The collective standard or principles to be aimed at by a community.
4. Domino Effect: The theory that a political event in one country will cause similar events in neighboring countries, as a falling domino causes an entire row of stacked dominoes to fall.
5. Medium: The form used to create or present art.

Lesson Overview

Review: After viewing the segment on Omar Offendum students should be prepared to discuss the concept of a “shrinking globe” and the ways in which international conflict affects life in the US, as well as how US involvement in international relations can shape the outcome of a conflict. Students should also be prepared to discuss the following:

Post-viewing Class discussion: After viewing the segment, consider the following questions:

1. Omar Offendum speaks about “the notion of humanity” and letting people see the humanity in one another. What could be the consequences of not seeing the humanity in others?
2. How do you feel about the statement that after 9/11 Arab Americans “spent too much time telling people who we weren’t rather than who we are”?
3. Omar talks about the domino effect of Middle East uprisings. What might be the consequence of this? What other points in history were described as a “domino effect”?

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4. What do you think Omar Offendum means when he says that in a way “the medium is the message”?
5. What is the role of hip-hop in social protest, both in the US and abroad? What do the lyrics say to you? Is it a voice for the youth? What are the negative voices? What are the positive?

Journal option: Ask students to respond to the following statement from the episode: We live on a “shrinking globe and whether or not we realize it, what happens in the Middle East affects our lives in the United States.”

Activity: Omar Offendum speaks about the “notion of humanity” and the importance of seeing how we are all connected in an increasingly global society. In his song “Father’s Day” Omar raps, “Human Lives Become Numbers.” Ask students to think about places they have seen “Human Lives Become Numbers” (such as on T.V., in textbooks, newspapers, the Internet, etc.) Then ask students to complete the following writing assignment:

1. Create a bullet list that contains the following: The top 10 deadliest wars or conflicts in the last 100 years, including total number of casualties, years/dates of conflict and countries that participated in the conflict.
2. Select one nation where a conflict or war has occurred in the last ten years. After selecting the nation, do an Internet search to find the story of a single person or family who died or lost a family member in that conflict. Write a one-page story, poem, rap, or letter describing who that person was (how old, what they did, what their family was like, where they lived) and how they died. Encourage students to present their work in a medium that reflects who they are and adds to the message.
3. Ask students to then present both their list and their story, report or poem in class and then as a group reflect on the lyric “Human Lives Become Numbers.”

Explore online: Use the following resources to allow your students to further explore the topic and the Arab American community.

1. http://www.justice.gov/crt/publications/post911/post911summit_report_2012-04.pdf
2. <http://www.adc.org/>
3. <http://www.arabculturalcenter.org/>

Interdisciplinary Options Music/Poetry: Further explore the genre of hip-hop and rap and how it is making an impact on culture and politics. Explore the history of hip-hop and rap as artistic and social expression in America, and its influence abroad as a voice for the youth.

Common Core Alignment

- RI 7 Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person’s life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.
- SL2 Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.
- SL5 Include multimedia components (e.g., graphics, images, music, sound) and visual displays in presentations to clarify information.