



Teacher/Viewing Guide

Arab American Stories - Episode 102

Aliya Suayah

Libyan American Youth

Grade Level 9-12

Episode Overview:

In this episode students will learn what it means to be bicultural. This episode focuses on a young girl with a Muslim Arab American father who grew up in a poor family on the coast of Libya and an American-born mother who had a “typical” middle class childhood in California. Aliya Suayah and her family speak about the differences in the two cultures, including ideals of beauty and sense of community. Her mother and father talk about how they appreciate how their two cultures have come together in their children, and how they work to maintain both cultures importance in their lives.

In addition, both Aliya and her father talk about their pride in their Libyan heritage, and about the struggles of the Libyan revolution. Aliya and her friends are working to raise money to aid children orphaned in the conflict through her school project, “Crafts for Libya.” Students should consider the concepts of cultural identity as well as the following questions:

Previewing Questions:

1. What is a hijab? Why do some Arab woman wear it?
2. What is the ideal beauty standard and how is it different from culture to culture or person to person?
3. Is it difficult to be bicultural in the United States? What are the rewards of being bicultural?

Vocabulary:

1. Bicultural: Having or combining the cultural attitudes and customs of two nations, peoples, or ethnic groups.
2. Hijab: A head covering worn in public by some Muslim women.
3. Western: Typically referring to the people and attitudes of North America and Europe.
4. Modest: Unassuming, moderate, humble and unpretentious.

Lesson Overview/Review:

After viewing the segment on Aliya Suayah students should be prepared to discuss the concepts of cultural identity, biculturalism and Western standards of beauty.

Post-viewing Class discussion:

After viewing the segment, consider the following questions:

1. What does it mean to be bicultural? Is your heritage made up of more than one culture?
2. Aliya speaks about how she has embraced both cultures and is at ease wearing her hijab (headscarf). Many Muslim women in the United States choose to wear the hijab, and many countries in the Middle East require it. What is your opinion of the choice versus the requirement to wear the hijab? Why might a woman choose to wear the hijab?
3. Aliya speaks about the Western idea of beauty. Is there a Western standard for beauty? If so, what do you believe is the standard? If there is a standard, how did it come to be and how is it perpetuated?

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4. How does the Western idea of beauty differ from other parts of the world?
5. Aliya's mother speaks about the "boundless freedom of the United States." What do you believe she is referring to? What freedoms do we enjoy that other countries may not?

Journal option: Ask students to complete the following statement in a one page response:

I am...

Students should think about all of the things that make up who they are: their cultural identity or identities, their concept of themselves, all of the things that make up their own unique personhood. Have students reflect on Aliya's story as they write about themselves.

Activity: Aliya Suayah has made a decision, at a young age, to wear the hijab at some times and not at other times. Many Muslim girls and women in the United States choose to wear the hijab but many do not. Students will complete this activity in order to understand and overcome stereotypes associated with woman who wear the hijab. First, ask students to research the history of the hijab and why some woman do and some do not wear the headscarf. Students should then print pictures of Muslim woman in various roles (at work, sport, school, home, etc.) both wearing and not wearing the hijab. They should also print a variety of pictures of non-Muslim women in these same roles. After printing the pictures they should find a group of at least ten participants (students in other classrooms, people in the community, people at their homes) to ask the question, "which of these women are Muslim?" Students should create a graph that charts responses. Students will then return to class to discuss their findings as well as reactions once they revealed to participants which women were Muslim. Students should be prepared to discuss attitudes and stereotypes they uncovered as well as their own feelings about this aspect of the Muslim Arab culture.

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

1. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/13/fashion/13veil.html?pagewanted=all>
2. <http://www.oprah.com/spirit/Choosing-to-Wear-the-Muslim-Headscarf>
3. <http://www.ywca.org/atf/cf/%7B711d5519-9e3c-4362-b753-ad138b5d352c%7D/BEAUTY-AT-ANY-COST.PDF>

Interdisciplinary Options: World Cultures, Sociology

Common Core Alignment

- RI7 Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue.
- W6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of three pages in a single sitting.
- W7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.