



## Teacher/Viewing Guide

### Arab American Stories – Episode 106

Ali El Sayed

Owner, Kabab Café

Grade Level 9-12

#### Episode Overview:

In this episode we meet Ali El Sayed, owner and chef of Kabab Café in Astoria, Queens, New York. He opened his restaurant in 1989 and it was the first Egyptian restaurant in the neighborhood. Since then, the block has transformed into a vibrant multi-ethnic community that includes many Arab-owned shisha lounges, restaurants, delis, halal meat grocery stores, pharmacies, clinics, and attorney offices between 28th Avenue and Astoria Boulevard. Ali is an important figure in the community and has become known to the locals as the “Mayor of Little Egypt.” Ali tells stories not only of how the neighborhood has changed and grown, but also shares how the table can be a place to share history and how food can feed both the body and the mind. We also meet Ali’s son Esmaeel, a typical American teenager who has come to appreciate his Egyptian heritage and his father’s unique stature in the community. Born in the US, Esmaeel has also been inspired to learn more about his Egyptian heritage since the start of the Arab Spring, when there was much discussion in the café about the political uprisings and he saw people his own age protesting in Tahrir Square in Cairo. Esmaeel feels pride in the Arab youth who led the revolution, and identifies with their spirit.

#### Previewing Questions:

1. What are the elements that make up a neighborhood?
2. Why would new immigrants to a country seek out areas familiar to them?
3. What contributions do ethnic neighborhoods provide to both new immigrants and all Americans?

#### Vocabulary:

1. Farm to Table: A term used by restaurants to denote that the ingredients being used came directly from a specific, and many times local, farm.
2. Community: an interacting population of various people in a common location, many times with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society.
3. Halal: Foods that are allowed under Islamic dietary guidelines.
4. Revolution: a forcible overthrow of a government or social order in favor of a new system.

**Lesson Overview/Review:** After viewing the segment on Ali El Sayed, students should be prepared to discuss the idea of neighborhood, community and identity. Students should also discuss the importance that a multi-ethnic communities and gathering places can play in discussion and action.

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

1. In the segment, Ali El Sayed states that “food is not only to fill your stomach” but is also for your mind. What does he mean by this statement?
2. Ali also states that the “table is a place of history.” Think about that statement. Do you ever discuss history, events or other important matters at the table?
3. Ali is considered the “mayor of Little Egypt.” Why do you think he is so revered in the community?
4. Why do you think Esmaeel became so interested in the Arab Spring and the revolution in Egypt?



## Teacher/Viewing Guide

**Journal option:** Have students take a moment to reflect on the following question and respond in their journal. Why is it important to know the history of your own neighborhood?

**Activity:** Who are the people in your neighborhood? Are you curious about the people and places that make up your neighborhood? Every neighborhood has a history; some very old and long, and others vibrant and new. For this activity you will research your neighborhood or a neighborhood in your city that interests you.

**Where to begin:** Sometimes the best information about a neighborhood comes from the residents themselves. Many people who have lived in a neighborhood for a long time enjoy talking about the history and past of the community. Is there a business, like the one presented in the episode, which is considered the center or hub of the neighborhood? Perhaps you could interview a business owner, like Ali El Sayed, who can share stories and information.

Some of the questions that may be asked in the interview could include the following: What significant changes has the neighborhood seen (redevelopment, socioeconomic changes, etc.)? How many different ethnic origins are represented in your neighborhood? Who were notable early residents? What businesses and churches used to be located here? What are the oldest homes in the area? What early history and stories do you remember about the neighborhood?

You may also find information about your neighborhood online at your city hall's website or at your local or school library. Once you have completed your research, you will write a short history (2-3 pages) of the neighborhood you selected. (This project can also be done as a presentation, video or blog.)

**Explore online:** Use the following resources to allow your students to further explore the topic:

1. <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/BUSINESS/04/12/little.egypt.new.york/index.html>
2. <http://nyunewsdoc.com/2011/10/05/kabab-cafe-the-little-restaurant-that-pioneered-little-egypt/>
3. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/31/nyregion/31astoria.html>
4. [www.ricediversity.org/.../African-Crops-and-Slave-Cuisine.doc](http://www.ricediversity.org/.../African-Crops-and-Slave-Cuisine.doc)

### 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.
- W6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology's capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.
- 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.