



Teacher/Viewing Guide

Arab American Stories – Episode 107

Dean Obeidallah

Comedian, Activist

Grade Level: 9-12

Episode Overview:

Dean Obeidallah’s mission is to dismantle negative stereotypes of Arab Americans and Muslim Americans through comedy. As a professional comedian and television commentator, his interactions with his audiences are full of humor while at the same time he is teaching the importance of tolerance. His message is that as Americans we all share the same values and concerns. He thinks we should be united by these mutual ideals, and not divided by preconceived, often erroneous, notions of who people are based on their color or religion. He says that “you should not feel self-conscious in your own country” for your name or who you are. Mr. Obeidallah, who currently lives in New York, was raised by an Italian Catholic mother and Palestinian Muslim father. He did not feel a strong connection to his Muslim heritage until after 9/11 when people started questioning his name. At the time he was working as a lawyer, and he felt his mission was to help counter the backlash against Arab Americans after 9/11. Instead of improving, polls have shown that Arab American (or anyone who could be perceived as being Muslim) have struggled to gain acceptance in mainstream American society over the past 11 years. He sees a path to success through creating alliances. He feels that the Arab American community needs to be more inclusive of other minority groups so that they can work together for political and social change. He started the “Brown Comedy Tour” to bring different minorities together in performance. In general, he sees Americans as open-minded, with more questions than judgments, and believes that with comedic education, true understanding can come. Mr. Obeidallah is a comic activist—his humor is disarming, he relaxes the audience, and it brings people together. He hopes that through comedy the audience will learn something about who Arab and Muslim Americans really are.

Previewing Questions:

1. How can humor bind us together? Can it also drive us apart?
2. What is an alliance and why would minority groups form them within America?
3. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt completely different than everyone else? How did you feel? Did you try to fit in? If yes, what did you do?

Vocabulary:

1. Activist: An especially active, vigorous advocate of a cause, especially a political cause.
2. Alliance: A union or association formed for mutual benefit, especially between countries or organizations.
3. Mainstream: The ideas, attitudes, or activities that are regarded as normal or conventional.
4. Accessible: Easy to communicate or deal with.
5. Satire: The use of irony, sarcasm, ridicule, or the like, in exposing, denouncing, or deriding vice or folly.

Lesson Overview/Review:

After viewing the segment on Dean Obeidallah, students should be prepared to brainstorm why humor is an effective tool to disarm critics and achieve change. This can be done as a group activity, having students or the teacher record ideas on a board, or in their own journals.

Journal Option: Have students take a moment to consider a characteristic they possess which might cause someone to make fun of or feel negatively towards them. How could they turn it around in a humorous way to disarm the other person? Remind students that these journals are private and will not be shared with the class.

Teacher/Viewing Guide

Post Viewing Class Discussion: Conduct a short discussion to synthesize the information they gained from viewing the video segment. Some possible topics:

1. Do you think humor works as a way to reach people and change opinions? Explain.
2. What does Obeidallah mean when he refers to the 'brown community' and how does he use this as an impetus to start social change?
3. What does Obeidallah mean when he says that no one should feel self-conscious in their own country? Do you agree with this? Explain.
4. Give some examples of when minority groups successfully collaborated to forge social change. How did they do this?

Activity: Political Cartoons and Political Change: Find a political cartoon to share with the class which targets a current or well-known problem within American society. Ask the students to point out the elements of the cartoon – what issue is represented; people or groups; message delivered; opinion of the author. Tell the students that they will now get a chance to analyze cartoons on their own.

Divide students into groups of no more than three students. Give each student a political cartoon and have them analyze it based on the following. They should record their answers on a group response sheet:

- 1) Title and Author of cartoon.
- 2) Issue that is represented.
- 3) People or groups in cartoon.
- 4) Message being delivered.
- 5) Opinion of the author.

Bring students back together and allow them to present their cartoons as groups. Then have the class as a whole comment/discuss: How does humor help us listen to and evaluate other people's points of view? Does it help us change our minds? How does humor affect political change?

Extension activity: Students create their own political cartoons centered on a local community issue.

Assessment Ideas: Students will be graded on:

1. Participation in class discussion and activity discussion.
2. Participation in group work.
3. Final group answers and presentation.
4. Personal cartoon – if option is implemented.

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

1. Arab Cultural Center: <http://arabculturalcenter.org/>
2. Arab American Museum: <http://arabamericanmuseum.org/>
3. Arab American Antidiscrimination Committee: <http://adc.org/>
4. Association of American Editorial Cartoonists: <http://nieonline.com/aec/cftc.cfm?cftcfeature=history>

Interdisciplinary Options: Psychology; Political Science; US Government, Art and Politics

In this episode students will learn how powerful connections can be made and change can happen through organized, well-presented humor.



Teacher/Viewing Guide

Common Core Alignment:

- RI1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- RI6: Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.
- W3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
- SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- SL2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- SL4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.