

Abraham's Children

A Viewer's Guide



Developed by Ann Hawley and Nina Froriep

Contact

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Technical Specs:

Director's Cut: 77 min.
Widescreen format, color, stereo mix
Available on DVD (NTSC and Pal)

Where to find us:

Web	http://www.abrahamschildrendoc.com
Twitter	http://twitter.com/ninafroriep
FB	http://www.facebook.com/pages/Abrahams-Children/90609674023
IMDB	http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1533971/

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3. At the event
4. Who's Who
5. Principals of Islam
6. DVD Segments & Chapters
7. Group conversation
8. Assessing "identity" & taking action
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1. Introduction

In addition to providing an opportunity for individual reflection, *Abraham's Children* can serve as a springboard to increase and deepen communities' awareness of people of different religious and cultural backgrounds. By prompting dialogue, the film can also inspire action.

The questions offered here can help with preparation, act as sparks to get dialogue started, or to help people deepen their thinking. The questions are designed for varied audiences and situations. Skip over any that are inappropriate for your use. You can use the questions in any particular order. Let the interests and concerns of your group dictate the flow of the discussion.

2. Using a facilitator

The facilitator's primary job is to establish an encouraging tone that allows people to explore sensitive issues. The facilitator's responsibilities include remaining calm and neutral, keeping the discussion on track, helping the group move forward, and modeling appropriate interaction. Remember these guidelines if you are going to facilitate your discussion group.

3. At the event

These strategies can help create an atmosphere that encourages people to share their insights and experiences. If yours is a small group in your home, you may not need to make formal rules.

- Set ground rules by asking the group to come up with how they would feel most comfortable discussing the film.
- How will you take turns so that one or two people do not dominate the conversation? How should people express themselves (i.e. no yelling, no generalizing, give everyone the chance to speak before a person speaks for the second time).
- Remind participants about the difference between dialogue and debate. This conversation is a dialogue where we try to understand each other and expand our thinking by sharing viewpoints and actively listening. Remind participants to speak specifically to how they have understood the film (i.e. use phrases such as "in my opinion") instead of generalizing for the whole group.
- Set a time limit for the event.
- If there seems to be interest in taking action, ask what the next step might look like?
- Be sure and thank everyone for coming.

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4. Who's Who? Review of characters

Abraham's Children profiles 10 children within six families. All but one are first generation Muslim Americans. The exception is a so-called 'quarter generation' boy from Yemen who came to America four years ago. In addition to this boy, there are five children in three Pakistani families for whom cultural integration plays as much a role as Islam and fitting in with their American peers; two daughters of an American convert to Islam whose focus is a pure Islamic lifestyle for her daughters and herself and two daughters of an African American father who found order and a direction through Islam.

Yasmine (12) and **Dareen** (11) attend a private Muslim School in Yonkers called Andalusia, where their mother Susan is the principal. Susan was raised in a conservative Episcopal household in Connecticut and converted to Islam before meeting the girl's father, a Palestinian. The father left shortly after Dareen was born and the girls have not seen him since. Susan and the girls commute a 3.5 hour roundtrip to Andalusia from their upstate home so the kids have a chance to grow up in nature.

Kasem (17) immigrated to the States four years ago from Yemen as a US citizen with little knowledge of English and American culture to join two of his older brothers in the Bronx. He is graduating from an ESL High School the following spring and is hoping to attend Columbia University in the fall. He wants to become an engineer and tutors peers in math after hours to give back to the community and to help support his brothers and himself.

Saleem (16) & **Haleema** (12), **Imran** (17) and **Anam** (14) & **Ahmad** (10): these are the children in three Pakistani families in Long Island who are a part of a close-knit community of family and friends. They are first-generation Americans who thrive as young leaders and role models and hold dreams for the future like any other American teen with the sky being the limit. Their parents are all working doctors. Behind the scenes these young Pakistani-Muslim-Americans are very rooted in their religion and their parent's culture. All five kids, ages 10 to 17, are quite successful in maintaining a balance between the 'old and new' world while embodying a very "American" lifestyle.

Naeemah (17) and **Saeedah** (16) are sisters from the Bronx. Their father, Tariq, a Sheik, preaches Juma (Friday prayer) in mosques around the Tri-State area and in Philadelphia. Tariq works as a security guard at night and converted to Islam in SingSing Prison in upstate New York. He talks about his past and why he keeps the girls 'close'. Naeemah has been engaged to Mohammed since she was 14 and eagerly anticipates their marriage in the summer of 2010. Both girls are home schooled. Their younger brother Siraj goes to private school.

5. Principals of Islam

The Masjid is the Arabic word for Mosque, the house of prayer and center for Islamic learning.

Five Pillars of Islam

1. **Shahadah:** The confession of faith is the fundamental expression of Islamic faith: "There is no God but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God". In order to convert, one must say the *shahadah* three times to become a Muslim.

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2. **Salat:** prayer. Muslims pray five times a day, which must be performed in the direction of Mecca.
3. **Sawm Ramadan:** the fast of the month of Ramadan. During the month of Ramadan, all believers must refrain from food, drink, and sexual relationships from dawn until dusk. The month of Ramadan occurs at different times of the year (the Muslim calendar is a lunar rather than a solar calendar). The fast is intended to purify the believer as a renunciation of the world.
4. **Zakat:** alms-giving. Islam understands the material world as created for the enjoyment of humanity. However, one's duties to God involve distributing one's wealth to the less fortunate. *Zakat* purifies the believer by encouraging a charitable disposition and a lack of attachment to worldly belongings.
5. **Hajj:** the pilgrimage to Mecca that occurs annually. Every believer, if financially and physically able, must make a pilgrimage to the *Ka'bah*, the sacred shrine of Islam in Mecca, once during his or her lifetime.

Halal vs. Haram means right vs. wrong. *Halal* means lawful or legal, and is a term designating any object or action that is permissible to use or engage in, according to Islamic law. *Haram* is an Arabic term meaning "forbidden". In Islam it is used to refer to anything that is prohibited by the faith.

Hijab: the Arabic word holds a variety of similar meanings: cover, conceal, hide, screen, and shelter. Among Muslims, *hijab* commonly refers to a woman's headscarf. In broader terms, *hijab* refers to her full modest dress.

6. DVD Segments and Chapters

If possible, view the film in its entirety in one sitting. If your time does not permit this, the film may be split into three segments where you may even select individual chapters for viewing. Once the film is in progress, it will continue to play until the end unless stopped.

Segment 1 – approximately 27 minutes

- Chapter 1: "Why am I a Muslim"
- Chapter 2: Yasmine and Dareen
- Chapter 3: The Mosque & the 5 Pillars
- Chapter 4: Kasem

Segment 2 – approximately 25 minutes

- Chapter 5: Saleem & Haleema
- Chapter 6: Imran
- Chapter 7: Anam & Ahmad

Segment 3 – approximately 24 minutes

- Chapter 8: Naeemah & Saeedah
- Chapter 9: Hijab & Ramadan
- Chapter 10: Interfaith & US Teens
- Chapter 11: Credit Roll

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7. Suggestions for group conversations

General questions for immediately after viewing *Abraham's Children*:

1. Think of one or two words that describe what you feel. Did any particular scene, person, or bit of dialogue stand out in your mind or make a significant impression? Why that one?
2. Did you identify with any of the people in the film? Who? Discuss why or why not.
3. What differences do you see between your family and friends and the ones portrayed in the documentary?
4. What similarities do you see between your family and friends and the ones portrayed in the documentary?
5. After viewing the film, do you feel you have a better understanding of Muslims?
6. Has this film in any way altered your perception of Muslims? If so, how? If not, why?
7. How important is your upbringing in determining your religion? What significance, if any, does this bring to your perspective on religion and others?
8. Do you find more commonalities or differences among the youth shown in the film and youth who are non-Muslim? How so?
9. What are some of the outlets used by the characters? Do you feel these activities play an important or negligible role in their lives?
10. Do you believe that Muslims compose a part of the American mainstream or that they remain as outliers? How so and why?
11. What insights or new knowledge did you gain from this film? What messages or lessons would you hope that others learn?

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8. Assessing your identity and taking action

One of the main themes in *Abraham's Children* is identity. Before discussing the questions below, take a few moments to define "identity".

Any definition the group finds appropriate will work. It can be multiple, inclusive or exclusive all at the same time (i.e. woman, mother, daughter, wife, student, Asian, pilot, Christian, smoker, gay, blonde, etc). The concept of identity is fluid and may be difficult for the group to define. Do not get bogged down in this, but rather come to a general consensus of how the group defines the term.

You don't need to tackle all the questions in this section, so select those that will stimulate discussion and relate to any current issues that your group faces.

1. When you know someone it's harder to stereotype them. How do we get to know people who are different from us? Are there ways you can help people from different groups meet and spend time with one another?
2. If you had it in your power to require *Abraham's Children* to be viewing for some people, who would be on your list? How might you arrange a screening for the people on your list?
3. Did you see the children in the film as different or similar to other children you know who are non-Muslim?
4. Overall what reactions did you experience upon viewing the film? Did your reaction surprise you at all?
5. Do you think Americans misunderstand Muslims in America? Is this a problem? If so, what could you do to remedy this or alleviate the situation?

9. Topic List for *Abraham's Children*

Adolescence	Family dynamics	Muslim youth
Aspirations	Gender differences	Peer pressure
Community	Homeschooling	Prejudice
Conversion	Identity	Private schools
Dating	Immigrants	Public schools
Desi	Interfaith dialogue	Religion
Diversity	Marriage	9/11
Education	Minorities in the US	
Extracurricular activities	Muslim Americans	

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10. Resources:

[Assignment: American and Muslim](#)

BBC iPlayer http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p009sjsv/Assignment_American_and_Muslim/

[Controversies Over Mosques and Islamic Centers Across the U.S.](#)

Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life

<http://features.pewforum.org/muslim/assets/mosque-map-all-text-9-24.pdf>

[Islam: Not in My Backyard?](#)

By Laurie Goodstein. New York Times Upfront

http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/indepth/upfront/features/index.asp?article=f092010_mosques

[Muslim American: A new identity](#)

By Ruhi Hamid. BBC

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/this_world/4347061.stm

[Muslims part of US social fabric](#)

By John Esposito. Aljazeera

<http://english.aljazeera.net/focus/2009/12/2009121784234277996.html>

[Muslim Students Association](#)

<http://www.msanational.org/>

[Muslim West Facts Project](http://www.muslimwestfacts.com/MWFHOMEPAGE/home.aspx) <http://www.muslimwestfacts.com/MWFHOMEPAGE/home.aspx>

[New College Teaches Young American Muslims](#)

By Barbara Bradley Hagerty. NPR

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=129607436>

[Religiosity, Education and Civic Belonging: Muslim Youth in New York City Public Schools](#)

Preliminary findings of a citywide opinion survey of Muslim high school students

By Dr. Louis Cristillo

http://www.tc.columbia.edu/i/media/6581_MUSNYCReport.pdf

[Stopping US Muslim backlash](#)

By John Terrett. Aljazeera

<http://blogs.aljazeera.net/americas/2010/09/08/stopping-us-muslim-backlash>

[Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding. Religion and Diversity Education](#)

<https://www.tanenbaum.org/programs/education>

[TE'A Project](#)

<http://www.teaproject.com/>

[Teaching Fear, Teaching Faith](#)

By Rev. Meg Riley. Huffington Post

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rev-meg-riley/teaching-fear-teaching-fa_1_b_711526.html

[This is Where I Need to Be Oral history book written by and about Muslim teenage youth in NY City](#)

<http://www.thisiswhereineedto.be.com/>