

## FROM ALEPPO TO L.A.



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# FROM ALEPPO TO L.A.

Directed by Julia Meltzer

2017 | USA | 13 min

## TEACHER'S GUIDE

This guide has been designed to help teachers and students enrich their experience of *From Aleppo to L.A.* by providing support in the form of questions and activities. There are a range of questions that will help teachers frame discussions with their class, activities for before, during and after viewing the film, and some weblinks that provide starting points for further research or discussion.

### The Film

Drawn from the feature-length documentary *Dalya's Other Country*, the short *From Aleppo to L.A.* chronicles the story of Dalya, a teenager who moves to the United States of America with her mother, Rudayna, in the midst the Syrian conflict. As the only Muslim student in an all-girls Catholic school, Dalya negotiates the challenges of adolescence at the same time that she is shaped by the experience of living between two worlds, a particularly challenging experience in the evolving political landscape of her new home.

### The Filmmaker

Julia Meltzer is an award-winning filmmaker and the founder and director of Clockshop, an arts organization. She previously directed *The Light in Her Eyes*, a feature film about a Qur'an school for girls in Damascus, Syria. *The Light in Her Eyes* was broadcast on *POV* in 2012 and toured with the Sundance Film Forward program. Meltzer's work has been shown at the Whitney Biennial, IDFA, the Toronto International Film Festival and International Film Festival Rotterdam. She is a recipient of grants from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation and was a senior Fulbright fellow in Damascus, Syria from 2005 to 2006. She returned to Syria every year thereafter until 2010 to work and film and produced two short films and one feature from that footage.

Source: <http://www.pbs.org/pov/dalyasothercountry/bio/>

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## VIEWING THE FILM WITH STUDENTS

The following three subsections are intended to provide you with a range of Pre-Viewing, Viewing and Post-Viewing activities. They are followed by a set of questions based upon the film's larger thematic domains, some follow-up questions and quotations, sample curricular outcomes and a page of weblinks for further investigation.

### Pre-Viewing Activities

Before watching the film, familiarize all students with the terms "hijab," "niqab," "chador" and "burqa," as well as how these forms of dress relate to the practice of Islam. The website Facing History and Ourselves has a useful resource on this topic, called "A Brief History of the Veil in Islam" (<https://www.facinghistory.org/> Type the title of the resource into the search function of the website).

Have students create a list of some of their preconceived ideas about hijabi women. If there are students who wear a hijab, niqab or burqa, or have family members who do, they may want to discuss the beliefs they feel others project onto them or their family members in relation to this practice. Why is there so much debate currently over women's Islamic dress? Does a country, state or province have the right to legislate how women dress, whether for religious purposes or otherwise?

Have students create a list of some of their preconceived ideas about refugees. Why do people become refugees? What kinds of conditions or events contribute to the creation of refugees? How do refugees impact their host countries? Are refugees generally welcomed into the new countries where they end up? Are some countries more open to accepting refugees than others?

Have students form small groups to discuss what it means to be a teenager. Some guiding questions for this discussion might be: What concerns do teenagers have as a specific demographic? Are the concerns of teenagers different from those of children and older people? Do these concerns vary among different groups of teenagers? Which groups? And if so, why?

Help students understand the context of displacement and refugee settlement worldwide by having them explore the statistics provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (<http://www.unhcr.org/> Visit the Statistics section of the website).

### Viewing Activities

Have students complete the PBS viewing guide on documentaries (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/docs/Copies%20of%20Viewing%20Guide.pdf>). Students can revisit their completed documents as a Post-Viewing Activity.

Have students jot down three to five ideas for discussion or questions that the film raises in their minds. As an Extension and/or Post-Viewing Activity, students can enter their questions into an online response or polling system, and can vote on the questions or issues they would like to explore in further detail. Encourage students to use multiple levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.

While viewing the film, have students compile a list of the ways that Darya's life is similar to and/or different from their own. As a group, students can share what they noted after the film.

### Post-Viewing Activities

Discuss with students their initial reactions to the film, Darya, opinions expressed in the film, her living situation, her family's decision to leave Syria and the reception they encounter in the United States.

Return to the list of preconceived notions about refugees that the class compiled before viewing the film (see Pre-Viewing Activities). How did the film increase or change their understanding of refugees and the refugee experience? Were some of their initial perceptions correct, incorrect or misinformed?

Return to the list of preconceived notions about hijabi women that the class compiled before viewing the film (see Pre-Viewing Activities). How did the film increase or change their understanding of girls and women who wear the hijab, niqab or burqa? Were some of their initial perceptions correct, incorrect or misinformed? If there are students in the class who wear the hijab,

niqab or burqa, or have family members who do, how does Dalya's expression of what the hijab means to her align with or deviate from their own feelings and experiences?

In the film, President Donald Trump's proposal to ban Muslims indefinitely from entering the United States forms the backdrop for some of Dalya's experiences. Have a class discussion about the ways a ban like this would affect a person like Dalya. Considering a proposal like this from Dalya's point of view, ask students how they would feel about this kind of policy decision.

In the film, Dalya mentions that her father did not want her to come to the United States because he thought it would turn her into a "bad girl." Have the students conduct a debate on the resolution, "Our societies shape the people we become." You may opt to have students use examples from the film as some of their evidence for or against this resolution.

Have students participate in a Socratic discussion on the film. Guidelines for Socratic discussions can be found here: <http://www.authenticeducation.org/documents/WhatSeminar04.pdf>

Dalya speaks about having a hard time with her parents' divorce and worrying about how it will be accepted by the Arab community. Have students write a journal entry about something in their lives they fear might be judged by others. "Others" may mean their family, their friends, their community, their school or strangers.

Have students complete an exit note. The exit note should contain one idea that demonstrates what they learned from the film, as well as one question that they still have about the topic.

As a class, research information on the Canadian program to accept Syrian refugees. Was this plan supported or criticized? What can they find out about the lives of Syrian refugees currently living in Canada? How many refugees are being and/or have been accepted by Canada? Do they know of any Syrian refugees who have come to their communities or school? Brainstorm ideas about what could be done to help Syrian refugees feel welcome and successfully adapt to life in Canada. Based on their research and viewing of the documentary, does Canada seem to be more, less, or equally accepting to Syrian refugees?

Have students write a review of the documentary, touching on questions like: What was done well? What could have been improved? What will viewers learn from this story?

## WEBSITES AND ONLINE RESOURCES

### About the Film

<https://www.dalyasothercountry.com>

Twitter: @dalyasoc

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/DalyasOtherCountry>

### Additional Resources

*Facing History and Ourselves:* This website has resources (both informational and opinion-based) on the topic of the veil in Islam. These include "A Brief History of the Veil in Islam" and "The Veil and a New Muslim Identity."

<https://www.facinghistory.org/> Type the title of the article into the search function of the website.

*PBS:* The website, dedicated to the full-length documentary on PBS's *POV*, offers useful resources for educators, including lesson plans relating to the experiences of Syrian refugees and a comprehensive discussion guide to accompany Dalya's story.

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/dalyasothercountry>

*TED:* TED offers a series of talks under the umbrella "Misconceptions of Islam and Muslim Life." Two talks, Yassmin Abdel-Magied's "What Does my Headscarf Mean to You?" and Dalia Mogahed's "What It's Like to Be Muslim in America," offer perspectives that complement the documentary.

<https://www.ted.com/> Type the series name or the title of each talk into the search function of the website.

*Teen Vogue:* Students can read the related article "Syrian-American Teen Dalya Zeno Shares What Wearing a Hijab Means to Her" to gain a more in-depth understanding of Dalya's perspective.

<https://www.teenvogue.com/> Type the title of the article into the search function of the website.

*The Atlantic:* Student can read "How Much Discrimination Do Muslims Face in America?" or "American Muslims Are Young, Politically Liberal and Scared" to contextualize Dalya's experience in relation to the experiences of other American Muslims.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/> Type the title of the article into the search function of the website.

*The Globe and Mail:* Joe Friesen's "Syrian Exodus to Canada: One Year Later, A Look at Who the Refugees Are and Where They Went," offers some Canadian context that can be compared with the experiences shared in the documentary.

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/> Type the title of the article into the search function of the website.

*The Guardian:* Students can use "Immigrants in Their Own Words" to explore a variety of stories of immigration from different perspectives to look for shared themes or significant difference in what factors define various experiences of immigration. One hundred different stories are featured.

<https://www.theguardian.com/> Type the title of the feature into the search function of the website.

*United Nations:* The United Nations offers a brief but thoughtful overview of some of the concerns and challenges specific to youth experiences of migration in "Youth and Migration."

<https://www.google.ca/> Search "Youth and Migration United Nations" in Google.

*United Nations University:* The detailed article "Confronting Prejudice Against Muslim Women in the West" by Anoosh Soltani is an in-depth look that may offer help to educators if they want to become better versed in the topic to help students discuss issues raised in the film.

<https://unu.edu/> Type the article's title into the search function of the website.

*USA Today:* Alan Gomez's reflection in "Voices: Different Migrants Treated Differently" can inspire conversation about how one's ethnic, racial, class or religious background affects which groups of people have historically been perceived as desirable or undesirable immigrants.

<https://www.usatoday.com/> Type the title of the article into the search function of the website.



## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

### Questions for Pre-Viewing or Post-Viewing Activities

Before viewing the film: Muslim people have been featured a lot in the news in the post-9/11 era. Similarly, with the conflict in Syria ongoing, Syrian refugees have also received quite a bit of attention. According to what you have seen and heard, how are these two groups of people (Muslims and Syrian refugees) represented in the media?

Before viewing the film: Imagine today that you go home and you are told that your family needs to immediately move to a different country for safety reasons. This new country is far away from your current country and has a very different culture, language and landscape. Maybe you have had this experience already. How would you feel, or how did you feel? What are some of the fears you would have, or did you have, about moving to this new place and leaving your home?

What did the film teach you about the experience of being an immigrant or refugee?

Dalya's experience of immigration is not typical of all Syrian refugees. What factors might make a refugee's experience different from Dalya's?

Often when we read about or watch stories of refugees or immigration, we focus on ways that newcomers are different. What kinds of similarities do you see in Dalya to yourself, your friends or other people in your school?

Dalya notes that Syria is a country made up of mostly Syrians, while the United States is made up of people from many different backgrounds, including those who have lived in that country for generations and those who are newcomers. What are the challenges and the benefits of living in a multicultural society?

Did you have an idea of what it would be like to be a refugee before viewing the film? If so, in what ways is Dalya's experience similar or different from your expectations?

At one point in the film, Dalya says "If I was born and raised [in the United States], I would have been a completely different person." What does she mean by this? In what ways might she have been different? Do you think she views this imagined difference as good or bad?

In the film, the audience sees Dalya reacting to the political developments in the United States. How does the political life of the country shape who she is and how she sees herself?

Dalya comes from an affluent family which has pre-existing ties to the United States. This offers certain advantages. Considering these particular factors, why might the filmmaker have chosen Dalya as the subject to focus on for her documentary?

Would it be useful for more students to see the film *From Aleppo to L.A.*? Why or why not?

## QUOTATIONS FROM THE FILM TO EXPLORE

1. *"In Syria, everyone's the same. But here, one's Mexican, one's Pilipino, one is Korean, one is Middle Eastern. Like, each one is different. Each one is raised in different families, in different cultures."* Dalya
2. *"Before I left Syria, things got worse and worse. There were bombs and shootings in front of my house and stuff, and it was really scary. If the pain has gone, the pain hasn't gone; I just learn how to live with it."* Dalya
3. *"Before, I was scared of doing everything. I wouldn't do sports. I didn't join basketball. I was too scared. I didn't want to play that. I can't learn."* Dalya
4. *"It doesn't matter if I'm a hijabi. I can do whatever."* Dalya
5. *"[Dalya] was 13 when we came here, on the dangerous age. She look around her and she try to do things like other girls. She can go to her friend's birthday, but not in a boys and girls birthday. It's not common with us. It's not in our culture. Some strict rules on her; it'll be helpful, in a nice way."* Dalya's mother, Rudayna
6. *"My parents' divorce was one of the hardest things for me, especially that I had to come here to the United States and leave my dad. Also, one of the harder things for me was society and what society thought of me and my divorced parents, especially the Arab community."* Dalya
7. *"I want to study. I want to excel. I want to get my master's."* Dalya
8. *"I actually love being the only Muslim at my school. I currently do not wear the hijab because I want to cover myself or protect myself from men, men's eyes. What made me love my hijab is my life experiences. It was a constant reminder for me of who I am, where I am from. It was a constant reminder to me that you don't need to let your hair down or show your skin to be able to be beautiful."* Dalya

## CULMINATING ACTIVITY: MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN WHO WEAR ISLAMIC DRESS

In the documentary *From Aleppo to L.A.*, you encountered one young woman who wears the hijab as an expression of her religion and culture. However, not all images in the media of women who choose to wear various forms of Islamic dress (hijab, niqab, burqa) are positive or diverse.

Conduct online research to explore the ways in which this group of women is represented. Look for a variety of representations, both positive and negative. Think critically about the messages these representations convey. If you have hijabi women in your life, or are one yourself, you may have a unique perspective on the topic that you may also want to share.

Based on your research and/or your experiences, create a presentation to share your findings. The presentation may address some or all the following questions, as applicable:

- Where and in what ways are women in this group represented?
- Are there more positive or more negative representations?
- When you find examples of women representing themselves, does this change the message/image conveyed? In what ways?
- Are women in this group represented differently for different audiences?
- How does the representation change according to country or context?
- Do you feel changes are needed in how this group of women is represented? If so, what might these be?

Presentation format: Students can use PowerPoint, Prezi (<http://prezi.com>) or another teacher-approved presentation tool to present their findings.



## ACTIVITY RUBRIC: MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN WHO WEAR ISLAMIC DRESS

### Knowledge/Understanding

|  | 2.5 2.9   | 3.0 3.4  | 3.5 3.9  | 4.0 5.0   |    |
|--|---|--|--|---|----|
| Understanding media representations of Muslim women who wear Islamic dress | Student demonstrates limited understanding of the topic | Student demonstrates some understanding of the topic | Student demonstrates a good understanding of the topic | Student demonstrates exceptional understanding of the topic | /5 |

### Thinking/Inquiry

|  | 2.5 2.9  | 3.0 3.4  | 3.5 3.9  | 4.0 5.0  |    |
|--|--|--|--|--|----|
| Ability to research, synthesize and make connections | Student demonstrates a moderate ability to research, synthesize and make connections between different resources on a shared topic | Student demonstrates a moderate ability to research, synthesize and make connections between different resources on a shared topic | Student demonstrates a considerable ability to research, synthesize and make connections between different resources on a shared topic | Student demonstrates an outstanding ability to research, synthesize and make connections between different resources on a shared topic | /5 |

### Application

|                               | 2.5 2.9  | 3.0 3.4  | 3.5 3.9  | 4.0 5.0   |    |
|-------------------------------|--|--|--|---|----|
| Applying the research process | Student shows a novice ability to apply research skills to find information on a given topic | Student shows a satisfactory ability to apply research skills to find information on a given topic | Student shows a considerable ability to apply research skills to find information on a given topic | Student shows an advanced ability to apply research skills to find information on a given topic | /5 |

### Communication

|  | 2.5 2.9   | 3.0 3.4  | 3.5 3.9   | 4.0 5.0   |    |
|--|---|--|---|---|----|
| Use of effective presentation strategies | The student has considerable difficulty presenting information orally and engaging his/her audience; the student makes limited use of visual aids | The student has some challenges presenting information orally and engaging his/her audience; the student makes satisfactory use of visual aids | The student presents information orally in a clear and engaging manner; the student makes good use of visual aids | The student presents information orally in an exceptionally clear and engaging manner; the student makes expert use of a visual aid | /5 |

Comments:

Total: \_\_\_\_\_/20

## EXAMPLES OF CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS

| COURSE  | OVERALL EXPECTATIONS   |
|---|--|
| Grade 7 & 8 Languages                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• listen in order to understand and respond appropriately in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes.</li> <li>• use speaking skills and strategies appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts.</li> </ul>  |
| Grade 9-12 English  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use speaking skills and strategies appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts.</li> <li>• identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning.</li> </ul>  |
| Grade 11 Gender Studies                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• explore topics related to gender studies, and formulate questions to guide their research.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of how attitudes, behaviours, roles and norms relating to gender are socially constructed, and of the complexity of gender as a concept and as a lived experience.</li> <li>• analyze sexism and the dynamics of power relations with respect to sex and gender in a variety of contexts.</li> <li>• analyze representations of women and men in media, popular culture and the arts, and assess the effects of these representations.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of homophobic and gender-based violence in both Canadian and global contexts, and of violence-prevention strategies.</li> </ul> |
| Grade 11 Equity, Diversity and Social Justice               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• explore topics related to equity, diversity and/or social justice, and formulate questions to guide their research.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of how identity is socially constructed and internalized, and of the impact of social norms and stereotypes.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of the impact individual action can have on equity, social justice and environmental issues, and of how the media can create awareness of these issues.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of how social activism can be used to support equity and social justice objectives.</li> </ul>   |
| Grade 12 Equity and Social Justice: From Theory to Practice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of a range of perspectives on, and approaches to, equity and social justice issues, and of factors that affect inequity and social injustice.</li> <li>• analyze, in historical and contemporary contexts, the dynamics of power relations and privilege as well as various factors that contribute to power or marginalization.</li> <li>• assess the impact of media and popular culture on equity and social justice issues.</li> <li>• evaluate the contributions of individuals and groups and/or movements identified with specific aspects of the struggle for equity and social justice.</li> </ul>  |
| Grade 12 World Cultures                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• analyze how cultural identities are socially constructed, preserved, transmitted and transformed.</li> <li>• analyze specific cultural expressions and a range of factors that can affect them.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of the dynamics of power relations within specific cultural groups and between minority and majority cultures.</li> </ul>   |
| Grade 11 Dynamics of Human Relationships                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• explain how self-concept and self-esteem influence personal well-being.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of how self-concept influences an individual's interactions with others.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of various social and cultural influences on relationships.</li> </ul>   |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Grade 12 Canadian and World Issues       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• explain the influence of social, political, cultural, economic and environmental factors on human environments and activities.</li> <li>• explain the causes and effects of human migrations.</li> </ul>  |
| Grade 12 Challenge and Change in Society | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• explore topics related to the analysis of social change, and formulate questions to guide their research.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of the causes and effects of social change.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of how forces influence and shape social patterns and trends.</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding of how various social structures and conditions support or limit global inequalities.</li> </ul>  |
| Grade 12 Canadian and International Law  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• explain the principles underpinning human rights law and the legal significance of those laws, in Canada and internationally.</li> <li>• analyze issues associated with the development of human rights law, in Canada and internationally.</li> <li>• compare the roles of the legislative and judicial branches of government in protecting human rights and freedoms, with a particular emphasis on Canada.</li> <li>• analyze various contemporary issues in relation to their impact or potential impact on human rights law.</li> </ul> |

The Overall Expectations listed above are from the *Ontario Curriculum*. Complete course descriptions, including all Overall and Specific Expectations, can be found at: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/curriculum.html>