

Educator's Guide to a Documentary Film Between Allah & Me (and Everyone Else)



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About the Film

This 60 min. documentary explores the complex personal relationship that four Muslim women living in Toronto, Ontario, Canada have with their *hijab*. Through interviews with the women, their personal testimony and experiences of changing their dress codes, the documentary explores the social, cultural, political, and personal reasons surrounding each individual's choice to put on or take off the hijab. The film encourages discussion and reflection regarding the constant interplay between community, individual choice, self-discovery, and metamorphosis.

About the Guide

This educator's guide should be used in conjunction with a screening of the film. The guide is meant to provide parameters that may help in the development of lesson plans and classroom/group discussions. It roughly follows four steps.

1. Assessing and identifying students' prior knowledge, assumptions and perceptions about Islam, Muslims, and hijab.
2. Learning vocabulary associated with hijab and Islam.
3. Discussing what the film presents, perceptions and the influence of the media, governments and culture on hijab and Muslim women.
4. Suggestions for extended research and exploration on this topic by students.



Recommended Age Level:

Grades 9 – 12, post secondary students, all adults

Recommended Subject Areas:

<i>Media Studies</i>	<i>History</i>	<i>Assimilation</i>
<i>World Religion</i>	<i>Identity</i>	<i>Globalization</i>
<i>Gender Studies</i>	<i>Equity</i>	<i>Psychology</i>
<i>Women's Studies</i>	<i>Human Rights</i>	<i>Peer pressure</i>
<i>Social Sciences</i>	<i>Sociology</i>	<i>Family/Community/Individuality</i>
<i>Anthropology</i>	<i>Immigration</i>	<i>Consumerism/Materialism</i>
<i>Islamic Studies</i>	<i>Multiculturalism</i>	

Keywords in Discussion:

<i>Faith</i>	<i>Family Values</i>	<i>Peer Pressure</i>
<i>Culture</i>	<i>Community Values</i>	<i>Consumerism/Materialism</i>
<i>Security</i>	<i>Belonging</i>	<i>Spirituality</i>
<i>Self Esteem</i>	<i>Social Status</i>	<i>Colonization</i>
<i>Modesty</i>	<i>Sexuality</i>	<i>Religions in the Modern World</i>
<i>Internal peace</i>	<i>Individuality</i>	<i>Dominant Culture and Minority Culture</i>
<i>Self Expression</i>	<i>Submission to God</i>	
<i>Identity</i>	<i>Independence</i>	
<i>Respect for Tradition</i>	<i>Fashion and Trends</i>	



I. INTRODUCTION TO THE FILM ACTIVITIES

Prior to viewing the film, it may be helpful to conduct a short discussion about the typical associations students may have about women in Islam and women wearing hijab. This is also a good time to open up discussions about the meaning behind frequently used Islamic terms that learners will encounter in the film.

Explain how the film showcases the experiences of Muslim women choosing to put on and/or take off the hijab. Inform students that the film focuses on the experiences of four women from diverse backgrounds who have chosen to share their personal journeys.

The questions listed below can guide an opening discussion that uses free association as a technique to encourage students to express their understanding of the issues that will be raised in the film.

Discussion Questions Before Viewing

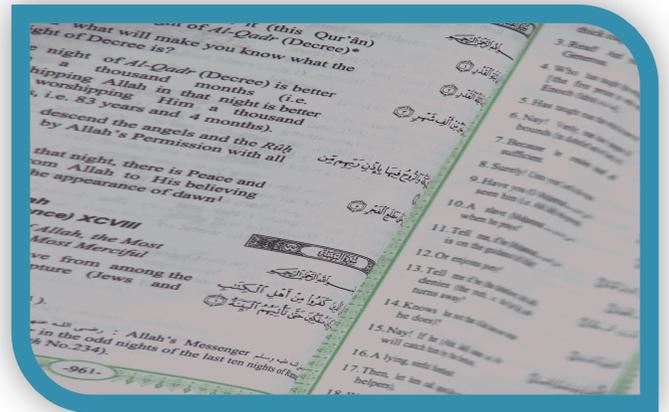
- What do you immediately think of when you hear the word hijab? What do you think it means?
- What role do you think hijab plays in the lives of women? How about in the lives of men?
- What are some reasons women may wear hijab? What are some reasons women may not wear hijab?
- What images come to mind when you picture women in hijab? Where have you seen these images? Where do you think these images originate?
- What role do you think women in hijab play in society? Do you think hijab helps or hinders a Muslim woman from participating in society? How?
- Who do you think has a say in whether a woman wears hijab?



II. PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Objectives:

1. Identifying students' prior knowledge and preconceived notions about *hijab* and/or Muslim women/Islam.
2. Learning the basics of the topic.



Activity 1

Identifying students' knowledge and questions

Prior to a class discussion, the teacher will distribute one index card to each student. Instruct the students to write on one side of the index card something that they know about Islam, Muslim women, or hijab. On the other side of the index card, students are to write a question that they have about Islam, Muslim women or hijab. The teacher will collect the cards and compile a list with the following two sections: “**what students know**” and “**what questions students have**”. This step (compiling the list) is done by the teacher so that he/she can gauge their students' prior knowledge and any preconceptions that the students might have regarding this topic.

The teacher can facilitate a discussion about what information students already have about the topic, and identify the students' prior knowledge and assumptions about the topic. The question list may be answered after viewing the film.

Activity 2

Clarifying vocabulary

Clarifying vocabulary commonly associated with the Islamic faith. Investigating sources of the students' understandings and possible misunderstandings related to this topic.

In groups, have students compile words and ideas that they typically associate with the terms in the glossary. Provide each group of students with a **Glossary** (page 9 of this guide) that lists the



terms at the end of this guide, but not their definitions. Ask each group to discuss and agree on a definition for each term and to record it on a blank **Glossary** sheet the teacher provides.

The **Glossary** should include a column titled “**How Do I Know This?**” where students can write where they think their ideas regarding each term are coming from. For example, did they come across their idea/association in a newspaper? A movie or television show? Word of mouth? Unsure? This technique can help students track how their thoughts are influenced to give them a better understanding of the malleable nature of how opinions and perceptions are developed and shaped.

Ask each group to share 1 – 2 definitions, which the teacher will record on the board. After all group definitions have been compiled, display or hand out a copy of the **Glossary** with the definitions included. Ask students to note and share how their ideas are similar or different from the definitions provided.

In small groups, have students discuss Previewing Discussion Questions listed in section I. Encourage students to think freely and to avoid censoring their own thoughts. At this stage, emphasize the importance of getting their thoughts out in the open.

Teachers can facilitate the discussion by urging students to consider where their initial response is coming from. Refer to the “**How Do I Know This?**” technique to encourage students to consider where their thoughts and assumptions originate and how this may influence any conclusions they have reached. Emphasize how the film they are going to view allows them to experience individual stories and ask them to note the similarities and differences in each of the women's journeys.



III. POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Objectives:

1. *Reviewing the content of the film.*
2. *Reflecting on previous knowledge, assumptions and conceptions related to this topic.*
3. *Investigating the reasons for the gap in reference to media literacy, politics and cultures.*
4. *Further research activities to expand students' understanding of this subject.*

Activity 3

Discussion about the Film

Post Viewing Discussion Questions - *Teachers may find it helpful to use a selection of the questions below to tie in with the particular focus of their class.*

From the Content of the Film:

- What motivates each woman to put on/take off the hijab?
- What is the value of modesty to you and in the environment you live in compared with the women in the film? What role does hijab play in this regard?
- What are some of the different opinions that the women in the film have about hijab?
- How does parental/familial opinion influence the choice to wear hijab/take off hijab for each of these women?
- Some of the women in the film express a need to assimilate so that they feel they are more part of the community and/or a larger society. How important is it to change yourself so you “fit in” with the “norms” of a community or society?
- What kinds of situations may pressure the women to change?
- What could be the risks and rewards of the changes?

The ideas discussed using the **Glossary** and the **Pre-Viewing Discussion Questions** can also be revisited after viewing the film to engage students in an analysis of how their perceptions may or may not have changed.



Expanding to Students' own Lives:

- Have you (or someone you know) ever felt the need to change something about yourself to fit in? Describe this situation in more detail.
- Who decides on what the “norms” of society are? Can you identify some societal “norms” that impact women? Are there any societal “norms” that impact you? What are they?
- Whose story do you relate with the most and what specifically makes you connect with this woman's story?
- Can you think of a similar experience in your own life where you had to examine your own beliefs, or stand up for what you believe in despite the opinions of others?
- How should we consider other people's opinions (including your parents, other relatives and friends) when making an important decision?

Activity 4**Media Literacy and Research Exercise Hijab in the Media and Politics**

Students will research the topic of hijab in the media and identify how the hijab is often politicized in different cultural contexts including the following:

- Turkey, a Muslim-majority country, had banned the wearing of headscarves by all women working in the public sector and female university students until recently.
- Quebec's proposed Charter of Values forbids government employees to wear conspicuous religious symbols, including the hijab.
- France's decision to ban all teachers and students in French state schools from wearing the hijab.
- Denmark does not allow female judges to wear headscarves.
- Four states in Germany do not allow female teachers to wear hijab.
- FIFA's (soccer's international body) ruling that hijab is allowed on the soccer field.
- Iran and Saudi Arabia require all women to wear the hijab in public spaces.



- Taliban ruled Afghanistan required every Afghani woman to wear a burka.

Questions to consider:

- How is hijab treated in the news media?
- Why is hijab considered an option in some countries, required in others, and then forbidden in some?

Advanced grades may also research following topics:

- How the meaning of hijab has changed, and how it has been viewed by Muslims and non-Muslims since the time of the Prophet Muhammad (6th and 7th Century).
- The history of women's clothing and its meanings in other faith groups.

Activity 5

Hijab in Personal Narratives

Students will learn about other Muslim women whose portraits can be found in: newspaper articles, documentaries, blog posts, YouTube videos, interviews etc. By exploring individual biographies of these women – some who wear hijab and some who do not – students can begin to deconstruct the narrative of hijab and learn about the ways in which Muslim women may or may not be influenced by their choice to wear or not wear the hijab.

Instructors may wish to familiarize themselves with each of the suggested figures by visiting the research links below. Encourage students to pick a woman who seems interesting to them – the women come from diverse fields – film, fashion, sport, space travel, journalism etc. The seven women listed in this guide have a strong online presence and have been covered by various media outlets offering students a wide selection of research opportunities.

- Individually, or in groups, have students select a research subject. Students may select a Muslim woman from the list below or outside this list.



- Students will write a mini biography of their chosen figure using the guiding chart/questions below. Students will be responsible for responding to one analytical question that showcases their understanding of any of the themes listed below.

Examples of Research Subjects and Relevant Links:

- **Ibtihaj Muhammad**, Team USA Fencer
- **Noor Tagouri**, Aspiring young journalist
- **Sharmin ObaidChinoy**, Documentary filmmaker
- **Nzinga Knight**, Fashion designer
- **Anousheh Ansari**, Space Explorer
- **Ausma Khan**, Founder and Editor in Chief of *Muslim Girl* Magazine
- **Lena Khan**, Filmmaker

Biography Guide:

- List the basic biographical details of your subject: name, education, occupation, location, hobbies, area of expertise
- Describe your prominent figure in three sentences or less. Who is she? Why is she special?
- Does the personal or religious beliefs of the woman you selected affect the choices she makes in her chosen career? If so, how? Can you relate to how she may balance her personal beliefs with her passions?
- How does modesty or clothing influence her performance in her field? Does it? Have you ever felt the need to adjust your physical appearance to suit a path you wanted to pursue? Do you think the way you dress influences the things you're interested in?
- Describe two interesting facts you learned about the woman you selected that you think people would find fascinating.
- Compose a sample set of interview questions you would ask your prominent figure if you were given a chance to interview her.

As part of their biography submission, ask students to select one of the following themes and to compose a critical, well-balanced response about the theme. These questions ask students to make connections between their own experience, the women in the documentary, and the biographies they have constructed. Encourage students to draw upon their own experience to compose answers.



Activity 6

Other Related Topics for Extended Research, Essay or Presentation

Students may choose to use one or more of the keywords provided at the beginning of this guide to help construct a critical response of their choosing. The following themes may serve as a guide to help focus the areas a student would like to explore.

Theme 1: Modesty

What is modesty? Does modesty play an important role in society today? How might you describe modesty? How important is modesty and why? If it is, how does it relate to the importance of appearance?

Theme 2: Perceptions of Women Who Wear Hijab

How much of the way an individual presents herself is driven by what others think of that look? Do you or anyone you know dress as a way to be accepted by a larger group? Explain.

Theme 3: Self Expression

Who am I? How do you express who you are to others? Do you use clothing to express who you are to others? Does culture or religion play a role in the way you express yourself? How? How have you changed as a person over the years? How has your expression of yourself changed?

Theme 4: Identity and Belonging

Do you identify yourself as part of a particular group? Cultural? Religious? Familial? Societal? How does this group influence your worldview? Does it influence your sense of self? How does it help you find belonging and a sense of self? How does it hinder you finding belonging or a sense of self? Explain.



GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN THE FILM

Allah: Arabic word for God

Hijab: A literal translation of the word (from Arabic to English) is “curtain” or “veil.” In everyday use, it refers to the modest, or non-revealing clothing worn by Muslim women.

Most popularly, it refers to the headscarf. The style of headscarf and clothing differs in communities, cultures, and from individual to individual. Hijab and other styles of non-revealing clothing are normally worn in front of unrelated males. Modesty mandated by the term “hijab” is applicable to both men and women, though in different ways.

Islam: A literal translation of the word (from Arabic to English) is “submission to the will of God.” It originates in the Arabic word *salam*, which means “peace”

Mosque: This is a place of worship for Muslims. Like a church or synagogue, it is where Muslims gather to pray as a community. Mosques contain a main prayer hall, but they also commonly function as a hub that offers community services. For this reason, mosques often contain classrooms, funereal service rooms, kitchens, bookstores and recreational facilities.

Muslim: An adherent to the religion of Islam; someone who follows the religion of Islam. In literal terms, it means someone “who submits to the will of God.”

Qur'an: The holy book of Islam that Muslims believe was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel in the 7th century. The period of revelation lasted 23 years. The Qur'an is believed to be a source of guidance for mankind and confirms many of the same prophets, teachings, and commandments mentioned in previous revelations, the Torah and the Bible. The Qur'an confirms these revelations, but is believed by Muslims to be the final revelation.

Hadith: The reported sayings and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad that serve as guiding principles for Muslims. Hadith sciences refer to a strict method of authentication used to differentiate between authentic and inauthentic narrations of Prophet Muhammad's actions.



References Used in the Creation of this Guide:

The Van Doos in Afghanistan: Educator's Guide. (2011). *National Film Board of Canada*. Retrieved from <http://www3.nfb.ca/sg/100717.pdf>.

Muslims: Teacher's Guide. (2002). *PBS*.

Retrieved from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/muslims/activities.html>

For more information about the film and visual materials such as photographs, flyers and posters, visit the film's website at www.hijabdocumentary.com.

Or write to info@hijabdocumentary.com

