

Wadja's Story: Understanding Wadja's World

"ONE OF THE BEST FILMS OF THE YEAR. SOMETHING CLOSE TO A MIRACLE."

-Oliver Lyttelton, THE PLAYLIST

"FUNNY AND TOUCHING. DISCOVER WHAT CAN MAKE US HAPPY,
BOTH AS MOVIEGOERS AND CITIZENS OF THE WORLD. 'WADJDA' DOES THE TRICK."

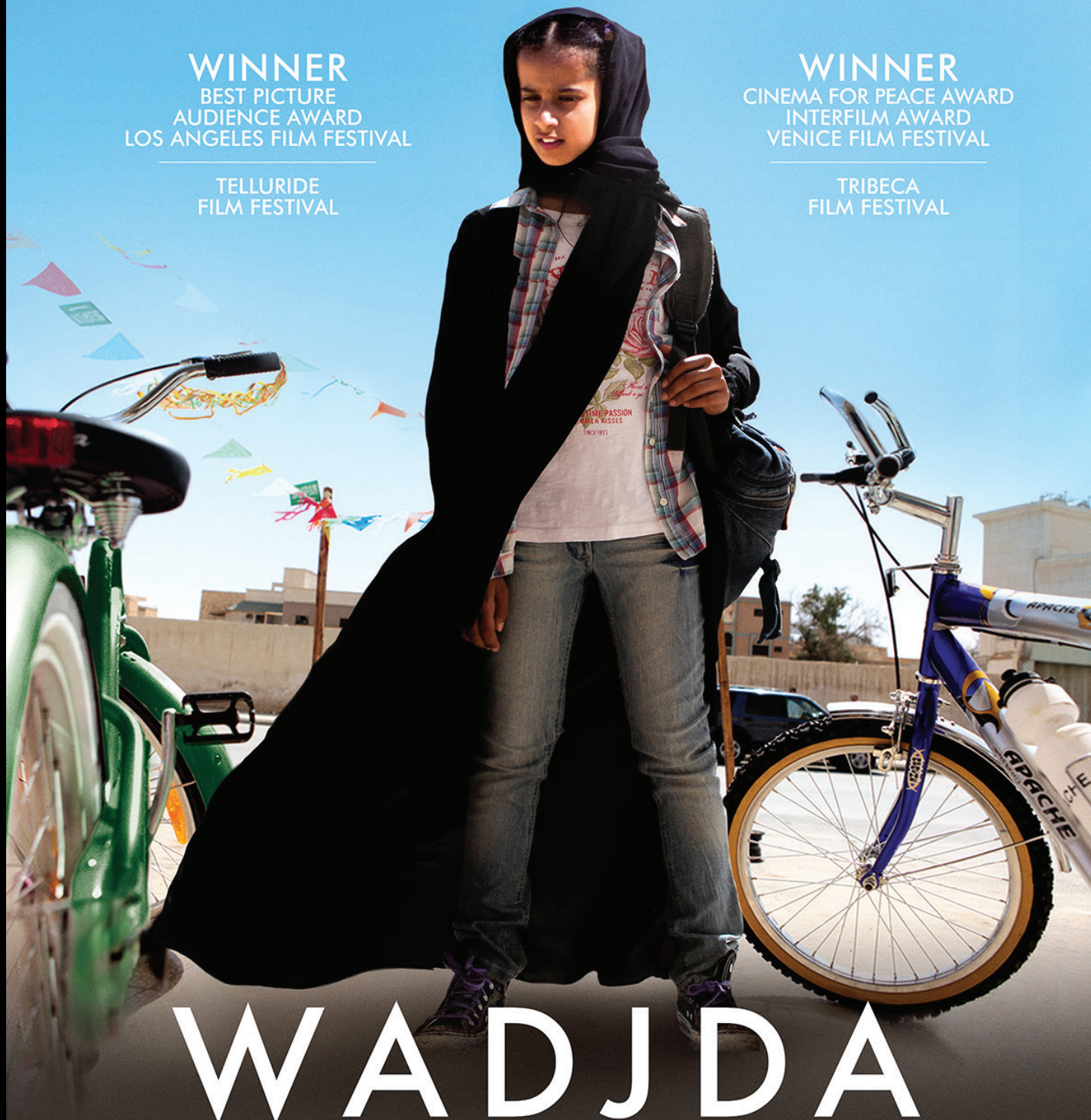
-Joe Morgenstern, WALL STREET JOURNAL

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WADJDA

A SONY PICTURES CLASSICS RELEASE RAZOR FILM IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH HIGH LOOK GROUP AND ROTANA STUDIOS IN COOPERATION WITH NORDDEUTSCHER RUNDFUNK UND BAYERISCHER RUNDFUNK
WITH THE SUPPORT OF FILMFÖRDERUNGSANSTALT MITTELDEUTSCHE MEDIENFÖRDERUNG MEDIENBOARD BERLIN-BRANDENBURG INVESTITIONSBANK DES LANDES BRANDENBURG SUNDANCE INSTITUTE FEATURE FILM PROGRAM DORIS DUKE FOUNDATION FOR ISLAMIC ART
PRODUCED IN COOPERATION WITH DUBAI ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA ORGANIZATION AND ENJAAZ A DUBAI FILM MARKET INITIATIVE DEVELOPED WITH THE SUPPORT OF RAWI SCREENWRITERS LAB ABU DHABI FILM COMMISSION HUBERT BALS FUND PRESENT "WADJDA" REEM ABDULLAH
ABDULLRAHMAN AL GOHANI AHD INTRODUCING WAAD MOHAMMED PRODUCED BY OLE NICOLAISEN EDITED BY THOMAS MOLT MUSIC BY PETER POHL COSTUME DESIGNER OLIVER ZIEM-SCHWEDT EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS MARC MEUSINGER SEBASTIAN SCHMIDT PRODUCED BY OLAF MEHL WRITTEN BY MAX RICHTER DIRECTED BY ANDREAS WODRASCHKE
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY LUTZ REITEMEIER EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS HALA SARHAN CHRISTIAN GRANDERATH BETTINA RICKLEFS RENA RONSON LOUISE NEMSCHOFF PRODUCED BY AMR ALKAHTANI PRODUCED BY ROMAN PAUL GERHARD MEIXNER EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS HAIFAA AL MANSOUR



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JOURNEYS IN FILM
educating for global understanding



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About *Journeys in Film*

Founded in 2003, *Journeys in Film* operates on the belief that teaching with film has the power to help our next generation gain a richer understanding of the diverse and complex world in which we live. Our goal is to help students recognize cultural biases and racism (including their own), cultivate human empathy and compassion, develop a deeper knowledge of universal issues and current challenges, and encourage civic engagement as competent world citizens.

Award-winning feature films and documentaries act as springboards for lesson plans in subjects ranging from math, science, language arts, and social studies to other topics that have become critical for students to learn about: human rights, environmental sustainability, poverty, hunger, global health, diversity, gender, and immigration. Prominent educators on our team consult with filmmakers and cultural specialists in the development of curriculum guides, each one dedicated to an in-depth exploration of the culture and issues depicted in a specific film. The guides complement teachers' existing lesson plans and meet mandated curricular requirements, providing teachers with an innovative way to fulfill their school districts' standards-based goals.

We prepare teachers to use film effectively in the classroom through customized professional development workshops and online webinars.

Journeys in Film is an organization with proven results. Individual teachers worldwide and entire school districts in the U.S. have employed our interdisciplinary film-based curricula.

- Millions of students have learned about our multicultural world through Journeys in Film's middle school series, based on films from Iran, South Africa, South Korea, the Maori of New Zealand, Tibet, India, China and Saudi Arabia.
- Students are becoming inspired by the courageous contemporary and historical figures portrayed in films such as *Hidden Figures*, *The Post*, and *He Named Me Malala*.
- Films like *Schindler's List*, *Defiant Requiem*, and *Big Sonia* not only teach about the Holocaust, but also demonstrate how one person can make a difference in the lives of others.
- Teachers are using our outstanding documentary series to teach about historical events, American prison systems, the critical role of photojournalists, and positive psychology.

Journeys in Film guides help teachers integrate these films into their classrooms, examining complex issues, encouraging students to be active rather than passive viewers, and maximizing the power of film to enhance critical thinking skills and to meet the Common Core Standards.

Why teach with film?

Today's students are the most visually literate generation in history. According to the Social Science Research Network, 65% of people are primarily visual learners. Today's students are more affected by media than ever before. They seldom need to be coaxed into watching films; after all, everyone loves a good movie. Through their own desire to be entertained, students become captivated learners.

Films have long been overlooked as an educational tool. We teach our students literature that originates from many places around the world, but we tend to forget that what often spurs the imagination is both visual and auditory. Film, which in minutes can be screened and beamed to every country in the world, is this extraordinary educational tool that goes right into the heart of different cultures. One of its strengths lies in its ability to present information rapidly and convey atmosphere, making that world come to life. It allows viewers to "feel" and thereby develop empathy skills, thus potentially increasing the likelihood of students connecting personally to the content, which in turn helps with understanding and analyzing concepts.

In teaching with films, we encourage our students to be critical consumers of what they see and teach them to consider the perspective of the filmmaker and challenge generalizations. Analyzing film and media is an empowering skill and one that is increasingly important for young people. To this end, it is imperative to integrate the film into a larger lesson, using it as a launching pad for historical and cultural exploration, as well as an examination of narrative perspective, character development, and media literacy.

In one 7th grade student's words, "I like Journeys in Film because it just doesn't teach you like a book. It's better when you can actually see it happening. Films give a first-hand view of places and stories."

A Letter from Haifaa Al Mansour



I truly hope you enjoyed watching my film *Wadjda*. It is not only the first feature film I directed, but was also the first film ever shot in my home country of Saudi Arabia. It is also the first film directed by a Saudi woman. So it is the first of many things, but

certainly not the last, as Saudi Arabia has now lifted the ban on both the production and exhibition of films within the Kingdom. I know we will now see many more films coming from my country and am so excited about all of the amazing stories there that are waiting to be told.

Wadjda is a very personal story for me but it is not autobiographical. I was never as tough or rebellious as Wadjda when I was a kid! But I learned to go after the things I want in life just like her. The story was influenced a lot by all the girls that I knew growing up, that were so full of life and creativity but never found an outlet for all of their potential. I know they could have done so much more if they had just taken a chance and pushed the boundaries of their lives a little. So I wanted to make a film that celebrates the very difficult choice of stepping outside of ascribed social limitations to pursue a dream. It is never easy, but just like my dream of making films in a country where cinema was forbidden, I wanted to show how important it is to try. I believe we all have to work hard to create the change we want to see in the world.

My goal with *Wadjda*, and with every film I direct, was to make an entertaining film that people enjoy. If a film is not entertaining, the message will never get through. I also wanted to make a film that could be special to Saudis, and make the medium itself seem more accessible, while still

presenting a window to our world to international audiences. As the script developed, I constantly tried to look at it from the outside, to the universal themes that it spoke to. I didn't want to give foreign audiences the false impression that it would be an easy or acceptable thing for a girl to ride a bike around Riyadh, so it was hard not to want to put in a bleaker end to her journey. But I think the positive aspects of the film help audiences relate to the story more.

I knew that Western audiences had ideas and concepts about women in Saudi but didn't know much about the day-to-day life of women in the Kingdom. It is hard to be a woman in Saudi Arabia and I wanted the world to know how strong the women are in my country. They are tough and sassy and the new generation has a whole new outlook and window to the world. They are empowered and motivated to improve their status within the society in ways my generation could never have imagined. They are survivors.

So I hope this film gave you a little insight into the place that I am from. Most of all, I hope it encourages you to tell your own story, to think about what is special and unique about your journey, and how you can share your perspective with the world. We need to hear about every person that takes a risk, no matter how small, and pushes for something they believe in. Those are the stories that will move the world forward.

I am so honored to be included in your studies and sincerely look forward to someday hearing all of your stories.

Respectfully,
Haifaa Al Mansour

Introducing *Wadjda*

A young girl who desperately wants a bicycle of her own and tries to earn the money to buy it. A wife and mother who worries about losing her husband to another woman. These two story lines intertwine in the film *Wadjda* against the backdrop of conservative society in contemporary Saudi Arabia and the cultural pressures that this society exerts on women.

Ten-year-old Wadjda's friend Abdullah has a bicycle and to Wadjda his bike represents the speed and freedom that only boys seem to have in this gender-conscious society. Having found the bike of her dreams in a local shop, Wadjda makes and sells bracelets and runs errands to earn enough money to buy it, which sometimes gets her in trouble with her school principal. When she hears about prize money for the winner of a contest that tests knowledge about the Quran and the ability to recite the sacred text, she decides that, in spite of her previously lackluster effort in learning the verses, she is going to win this prize.

Meanwhile, her mother is coping with a long commute with a cranky and overbearing driver, the restricted job opportunities she faces as a Saudi woman, and her loneliness. Her husband wants a son and she is unable to give her one; his family is pressuring him to take a second wife. She is also trying to bring up Wadjda as an almost-single mother, and Wadjda is a handful.

Students will identify with Wadjda's longing for what seems to be an unattainable goal and with the difficulty that she has fitting into her strict and conservative girls' school; her worn sneakers, visible often in the film from the opening credits on, symbolize her independence and desire to go her own way in a world that wants to force her to hide her individuality and ambition. It will be more difficult for Western students to understand the totality of restrictions facing women in this society, restrictions that are challenged most effectively by this film. This curriculum guide will help students to enter this world and understand its nuances.

This award-winning film is the work of writer and director Haifaa Al Mansour, who learned about film from her father's videos, since movie theaters were not allowed in Saudi Arabia from 1974 to 2018. She is the first female Saudi director and the first director to make a feature-length movie filmed entirely in that country.

DIRECTOR: Haifaa Al Mansour

WRITTEN BY: Haifaa Al Mansour

PRODUCER: Gerhard Meixner

CO-PRODUCER: Amr Alkahtani

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS:

Christine Granderath, Louise Nemschoff, Bettina Ricklefs,
Rena Ronson, Hala Sarhan

MUSIC: Max Richter

CINEMATOGRAPHY: Lutz Reitmeier

Artwork from *Wadjda* appears courtesy of Sony Pictures Classics Inc.

Wadjda's Story: Understanding Wadjda's World

Enduring Understandings

- Wadjda's life in Saudi Arabia has numerous restrictions because she is a girl.
- Wadjda's school reinforces unequal expectations for boys and girls as well as different rules and regulations.
- The bicycle that Wadjda wants has symbolic meaning beyond just being enjoyable to ride.
- A viewer response journal allows the viewer to understand a film better and experience it more fully.
- Role-playing helps students to fully reflect upon not just the plot and imagery of *Wadjda*, but also a meaningful interpretation of what it means to live in Wadjda's world.

Essential Questions

- What is it like for Wadjda to grow up in Saudi Arabia?
- How does Wadjda's parents' complicated marriage affect her outlook?
- Why is Wadjda's principal so strict with her (and the other girls in school)?
- Why does Wadjda want a bicycle so badly?

Notes to the Teacher

Wadjda is a ten-year-old girl who lives with her mother in Saudi Arabia. Her father is only partly present in her life and is planning a second marriage so that he can have a son. Wadjda is desperate to have a bicycle like her friend Abdullah, and she does whatever work she can to earn the money for it. But in Saudi Arabia, girls simply do not ride bikes.

After a brief introduction to the film, students will view it in class or, preferably, in the auditorium on a larger screen. You should prepare your students for subtitles and reassure them that they will soon forget that they are even reading them as they get involved in the story.

After viewing the film, students work with viewer response journal handouts (**HANDOUTS 1–4**) to understand each facet of Wadjda's life, including her family, her school, and her friendship with Abdullah, and to connect these facets of her life with their own experiences. Since the purpose of these handouts is to allow for a student's personal connection with the character, the answers will all vary. Emphasis should be placed on individual interpretation and the explanations for those interpretations with the class in inclusive class discussions. Prepare for this part of the lesson by printing copies of each handout. If your students have access to computers, you may prefer to share them electronically instead.

An extension activity on the symbolism of the film is optional, but a discussion of the importance symbolic value of the bicycle would be a good way to conclude this lesson.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS ADDRESSED BY THIS LESSON

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.1

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.9

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.5

Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1

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.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.4

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.

Duration of Lesson

At least three 50–60-minute lessons, plus one optional writing lesson.

Assessments

Completion of viewer response journal handouts
Participation in class discussions
Participation in role playing activities

Materials needed

Classroom map that includes Saudi Arabia.
DVD or streaming capability for Wadjda
Copies of **HANDOUTS 1–5**
Writing utensils and/or computer access for those with computer accommodations

Procedure

Part 1: Introduction

1. Tell students that they are about to see a film about a ten-year-old girl named Wadjda who lives in Saudi Arabia. Point out Saudi Arabia on a classroom map and ask students what they know about the country. Tell them that they are going to see a film made by a Saudi director who wanted to show what life was really like there.
2. Explain to students that after the film you will ask them to reflect upon Wadjda, her family, her school, and her friendship with Abdullah. Tell them that, as they watch the film, you want them to think about how Wadjda's life is different from their own, but also how it is similar.
3. Explain that they will need to read subtitles for the film but reassure them that they will adapt to this very quickly. Then show the film.

Part 2: Reviewing and interpreting the film

1. Distribute **HANDOUT 1: GETTING TO KNOW WADJDA: A VIEWER RESPONSE JOURNAL**. Read the directions aloud to the class as the students read them silently to themselves. Ask students if there are any questions and clarify as needed. Ask students to work independently to complete the chart; don't assign the reflection question at the end yet.
2. When students have had time to complete the chart, ask them to share their answers, reviewing one idea from the film at a time and giving students time to discuss any insights their own experiences have provided. (Answers will vary.)

3. Now prompt students to answer the reflection question at the end of the worksheet. Allow a few minutes, and then ask students to share their answers. (Answers will vary.)

4. Arrange students in pairs. Distribute **HANDOUT 2: WADJDA'S FAMILY: A CHARACTER DIAGRAM**. Read the directions aloud to the class as the students read them silently to themselves. Remind students that an adjective is a word or phrase naming an attribute of a noun or noun phrase. Ask students if there are any questions and clarify as needed. Allow time for students to discuss what they have learned about the family and fill in the diagram; then give students an opportunity to share their answers with the whole class.

Suggested answers (allow for variation):

1. Possible answers for Wadjda's father include descriptive words/phrases like *absent/not around, polygamist/ marries another woman, kind, plays video games, does not have a son, and allowed to show his face in public*. Possible answers for her mother include *loving, strict, uncertain, reserved, unable to drive, required to cover head and face in public, submissive, and kind*.
2. Possible answers include descriptive words/phrases like *kind, enjoys video games, must cover her head*.
3. Possible answers include descriptive words/phrases like *quiet, observant, entrepreneur, stealthy, smart, moderately respectful, determined, efficient, good negotiator, and loyal*.
4. Students may choose *determined* because Wadjda works very hard to win the recitation competition and the prize money (even though she does not receive the money after sharing her intentions with Ms. Hussa and the school.)

5. Join pairs together to form groups of four. Pass out **HANDOUT 3: WADJDA'S SCHOOL: A LETTER FROM THE PRINCIPAL**. Read the directions aloud as the students read them silently to themselves. Allow about ten minutes for discussion within the small groups, and then have each student write the letter individually.

6. Ask students to share the basic themes of their letters from Ms. Hussa with the class as a whole. Encourage discussion of various viewpoints. (Answers will vary. Students might focus on Ms. Hussa's own experiences as a woman in Saudi Arabian society, in addition to her own admission that Wadjda reminds her of herself when she was Wadjda's age. Others will portray her as a mean and authoritarian personality.)

7. Pass out **HANDOUT 4: WADJDA'S FRIENDSHIP WITH ABDULLAH: A DIARY ENTRY**. Read the directions aloud as the students read them silently to themselves. Assign the diary entry for homework.

8. The next day, give students a chance to share the ideas they expressed in their diary entries. (Answers will vary. Some students might think Wadjda only befriended or helped people because she wants a bicycle, or because she and her mother are on their own due to Wadjda's father's second marriage. Some students may state that Wadjda wishes she had the freedom that the boys have, which is why she befriends Abdullah and desires to get a bicycle of her own. Unless society changes, it will be very difficult to continue the friendship once they are adolescents or adults, unless they marry as Abdullah suggests.)

Extension Activity

If you haven't already defined the term *symbol* for the class, do so now. (A symbol is an object or action that represents an idea.) Lead a discussion on the bicycle as a symbol in the film. You may wish to read the article on the symbolism of the bike at <http://www.theessential.com.au/features/objet-dart/riding-uphill-the-shifting-symbolism-of-wadjdas-bicycle>. Other symbols to consider in your discussion are Wadjda's sneakers, the veils that adult women wear, the use of training wheels for Wadjda's bike-riding lessons, the names on her family tree, and Wadjda's choice to remain at the hopscotch game when the other students go inside. Have students write a summary of their ideas on the symbolism in this film.

Handout 1 ► P. 1

Getting to Know Wadjda: A Viewer Response Journal

Directions:

Complete the chart below, drawing on the film and your own personal experiences to answer each question.

Film content	Your Reaction/Connection
Wadjda gets in trouble at school.	
Wadjda wants a bicycle.	
Wadjda is an entrepreneur who sells things and runs errands to earn money.	
Wadjda has an unlikely friendship with a boy, Abdullah.	

**Handout 1 ► P. 2**

Getting to Know Wadjda: A Viewer Response Journal

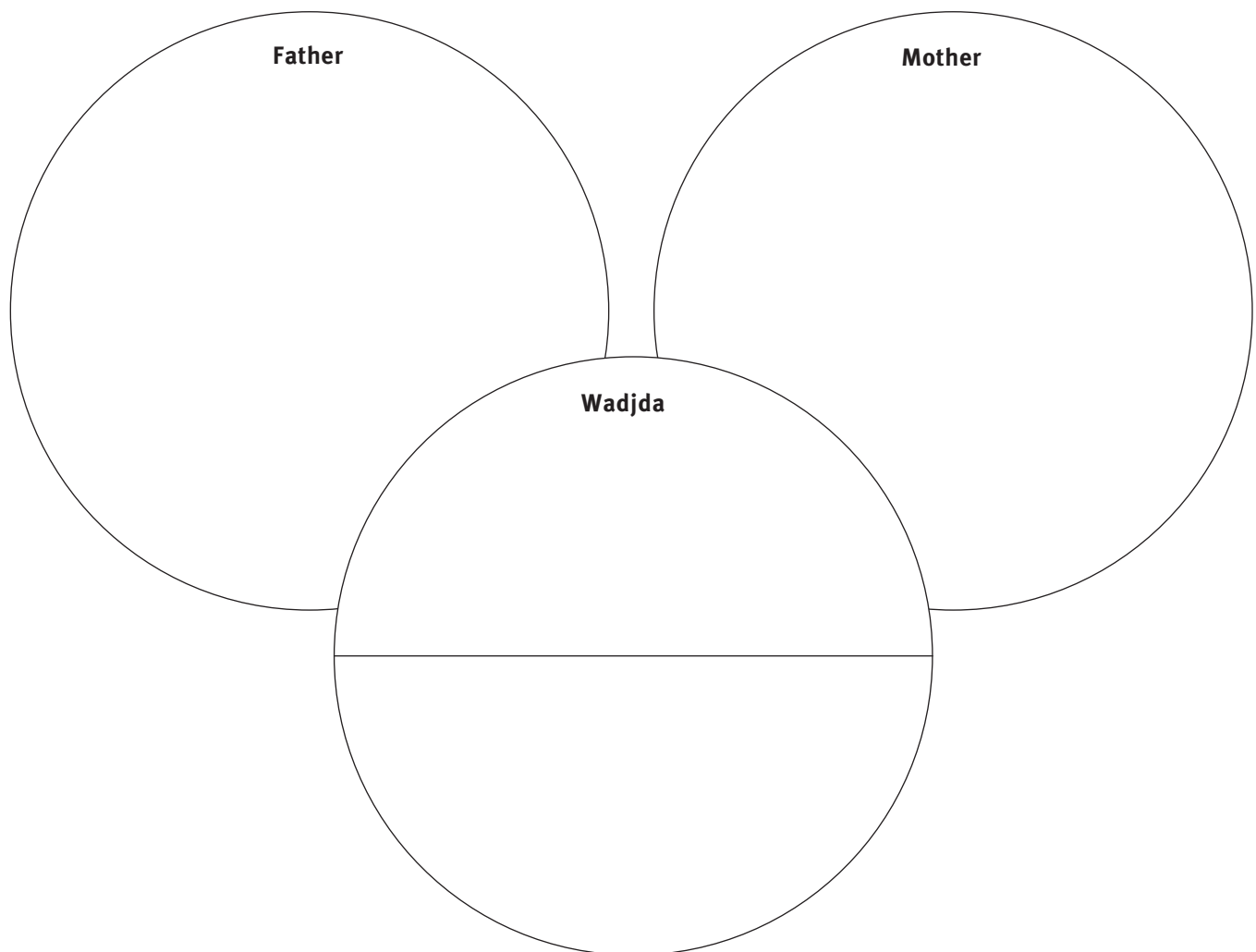
Wadjda saves money to get something she wants.	
Wadjda goes outside of her comfort zone to compete in the Quran recitation competition.	
Wadjda is disappointed when she is not given the prize money that she won.	
Final reflection: How are you similar and different from Wadjda? Explain.	

Handout 2 ▶ P. 1

Wadjda's Family: A Character Diagram

Directions:

1. Reflect on Wadjda's family by writing down a minimum of five adjectives or descriptive phrases to describe her father and her mother in the appropriate circles below.
2. Decide whether Wadjda possesses any of the characteristics of her parents and write those adjectives/descriptive phrases in the top portion of Wadjda's circle.



**Handout 2 ▶ P. 2**

Wadjda's Family: A Character Diagram

3. Does Wadjda possess any traits that her parents do not? Write them down in the bottom portion of her circle.
4. Do you relate to any aspects of Wadjda's relationship with her parents/caregivers?

Handout 3

Wadjda's School: A Letter from the Principal

Directions:

Put yourself in the position of Ms. Hussa and compose a letter to Wadjda explaining your reasons for the way you act. Think about Ms. Hussa's experiences as a woman in Saudi Arabian society. Think back to the film: What does Ms. Hussa think of Wadjda? What does she think of her other students?

Dear Wadjda,

Sincerely,

Ms. Hussa

Handout 4

Wadjda's Friendship with Abdullah: A Diary Entry

Wadjda is a good friend of a boy who lives nearby, Abdullah. Although he sometimes teases her, he also helps her, particularly with learning to ride a bike. Compose a diary entry in Wadjda's voice reflecting upon her friendship with Abdullah. What about this friendship makes her happy? Why does she continue to spend time with him if it is not considered appropriate to do so in Saudi Arabian society? What will happen with her friendship with Abdullah in the future?

Date _____

Dear Diary,



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