

An Introduction to the Quran

"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 RUNDUNK UND BAYERISCHER RUNDUNK  
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 DIRECTED BY THOMAS MOLT EDITED BY PETER POHL MUSIC BY OLIVER ZIEM-SCHWEDT COSTUME DESIGNER MARC MEUSINGER EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS 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 EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS ROMAN PAUL GERHARD MEIXNER WRITTEN BY 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.



# An Introduction to the Quran

## Enduring Understandings

- The Quran is a sacred text for Muslims (followers of Islam).
- Muslims believe that the words of the Quran were revealed by God through the Prophet Muhammad. Therefore, the Quran should be treated with great respect.
- Reciting the Quran requires study so that the words will be pronounced correctly and with full meaning.
- The Quran contains teachings about the nature of God, God's relationship to humans, and the proper way for humans to behave.
- Some copies of the Quran are remarkable artworks.

## Essential Questions

- What is the Quran?
- What are the origins of the Quran?
- How is the Quran to be handled?
- How does one recite the Quran?
- What is in the Quran?

## Notes to the Teacher

The film *Wadjda* has several scenes involving the sacred text of Islam, the Quran. This lesson will help students understand the significance of this text.

First, a note about terminology. The name of the text is variously spelled Qur'an, Quran, or the earlier version, Koran. Because Arabic uses a different letter system from other languages, Arabic words are transliterated into those other languages, often spelled as the listener hears them. (Another example is the alternate spellings of Muslim or Moslem.) This guide will spell the name of the text as the Quran; the subtitles for the film use the spelling "Koran," perhaps because the phonetic spelling seems simpler for the English-speaking reader to pronounce.

At the start of this lesson, students will view about 20 minutes of clips, with brief pauses between them, and develop a set of questions they have about what they have seen. Here are some unfamiliar vocabulary words used in the clips that you may want to clarify for them:

*Sura* or *surah* – a chapter of the Quran. There are 114 chapters, and each one contains a number of verses, from 3 to 286.

*Tajwid* or *tajweed*– the rules that explain how the words of the Quran should be pronounced

*Tarteel* – the clear pronunciation of each letter of the verse

After viewing the clips, students will discuss what they learned about the Quran from the clips and list any questions they still have. Then they will read **HANDOUT 1: FAQs ABOUT THE QURAN** to learn more information about the Quran and answer their remaining questions.

After reading the handout and discussing the new information, students will study images of prized Qurans with elegant calligraphy and intricate illustrations, using the website <https://www.freersackler.si.edu/exhibition/the-art-of-the-quran-treasures-from-the-museum-of-turkish-and-islamic-arts/>. You may wish to project the images from the website onto a screen or whiteboard and discuss them together, or you may prefer to have your students explore the website on their own. There are additional teacher resources for further study available on the website at <https://www.freersackler.si.edu/exhibition/the-art-of-the-quran-educator-resources/>. You might also consider team-teaching this section of the lesson with an art teacher who could share additional information and insights.

A concluding writing activity focuses on an incident in 1994 when the internationally-known designer Karl Lagerfeld made three dresses for Chanel that featured embroidered verses from the Quran. There was an uproar among Muslim leaders, and Lagerfeld apologized and burned the offending clothing. For additional information, see the *New York Times* article at <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/01/21/style/chronicle-933805.html> or the *Guardian* article at <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/chanel-apologises-to-muslims-for-satanic-breasts-dress-1409011.html>. Pictures of the dresses are still available online and it is clear why Muslims, who are supposed to dress modestly, would be outraged. It is probably not advisable to share these images with your class, however.

A more complete lesson plan on Islam in general may be found in Journeys in Film's guide to *Morgan Freeman's The Story of God* at <https://journeysinfilm.org/product/the-story-of-god/>.

Journeys in Film also has these additional materials available regarding Islam and/or the experiences of Muslim girls and women: <https://journeysinfilm.org/product/the-neighborhood-storyteller> and <https://journeysinfilm.org/articles/teach-about-islam-with-film/>.



### COMMON CORE STANDARDS ADDRESSED BY THIS LESSON

#### **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1**

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.

#### **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2**

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

#### **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7**

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

#### **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2**

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

#### **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4**

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

#### **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9**

Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

#### **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.

### Duration of the Lesson

2–3 class periods

### Assessments

Class discussion

Two paragraphs about Chanel controversy

### Materials needed

Video of *Wadjda* and projector

Copies of **HANDOUT 1: FAQs ABOUT THE QURAN**

One copy of a news article about the Chanel dress controversy

A copy of the Quran (optional)

## Procedure

1. Tell students that today's lesson will focus on six clips from the film *Wadjda* that deal with the classes Wadjda is taking to learn to recite the Quran and the competition. Write the word on the board and then, using Notes from the Teacher, explain the alternate spelling used in the subtitles. Ask them to keep a list in their notebooks of all the questions they have as they view six clips from the film. Then play the following clips, pausing for a minute or two after each clip to give students time to write their questions down:

0:00:41 – 0:02:28 (The girls' class is reciting and Wadjda is sent from class for not knowing the verses.)

0:35:13 – 0:37:43 (Ms. Hussa, the principal, explains the rules for the Quran competition. There is enough money for Wadjda to buy her bicycle if she wins. Contestants must learn the first five *suras*. The competition has two parts: "The first involves vocabulary and God's revelation of the verses." The second is the recitation, where pronunciation must be perfect. Wadjda then tells Ms. Hussa that she wants to change and asks to join the religious club. She buys a computer program to help her learn about the Quran.)

0:48:42 – 0:51:06 (The girls wash their hands and feet before their Quran practice. The Quran teacher explains some rules for handling the books, and then calls on Wadjda to read. She has difficulty, but a classmate can read it easily.)

0:54:46 – 0:57:02 (Wadjda is winning over her Quran teacher by her efforts.)

1:05:22 – 1:07:31 (Wadjda has greatly improved. She can recite verses from memory, although her teacher says she still must work on her *tarteel* and *tajwid*. Her recently-married classmate Salma demonstrates the proper way to read the Quran.)

1:15:15 – 1:23:00 (The competition is under way. Gradually, all but three girls are eliminated. Wadjda survives the questions and recites really well; after a break, Ms. Hussa announces that Wadjda has won first prize.)

2. After the clips are finished, ask students to explain what they have learned about the Quran. Then have them share the questions they generated while watching the clips and discuss to see if students can answer each other's questions.
3. Distribute **HANDOUT 1: FAQs ABOUT THE QURAN**. Ask students to read it quietly and annotate it with their questions and comments.
4. Lead a discussion about the questions and comments students had on the reading. Here are a few additional questions to facilitate the discussion:
  - What surprised you when you read this handout?
  - Why do you think a smart girl like Wadjda had difficulty reading the Quran at first?
  - Are there any vocabulary words in this handout that were unfamiliar to you? How can we figure out their meaning?
  - What do the rules about handling and reading the Quran suggest about Muslim attitudes toward it? Do other religious groups have similar recommendations for handling their sacred texts?

# Lesson

(WORLD HISTORY, WORLD LITERATURE)



5. If you have a copy of the Quran to share with the class, show it at this time. Then remind the class about the end of Section 3 on the handout that discusses artists who copied the Quran. Show students images of the Quran from the Smithsonian exhibit at <https://www.freersackler.si.edu/exhibition/the-art-of-the-quran-treasures-from-the-museum-of-turkish-and-islamic-arts/>. Discuss the calligraphy and design of these artworks as you explore the site with your students, or have them explore the website on their own.
6. Tell students about the controversy over the Chanel dresses with Quranic verses, using the information from Notes to the Teacher and reading aloud one of the newspaper articles cited. For homework, have students write one paragraph about why Muslims were outraged by the dresses, based on what they have learned in this lesson, and a second paragraph about whether Chanel made the right decision in burning the dresses. The next class session, hold a discussion about their answers.



## Handout 1 ► P. 1

## Some FAQs about the Quran

**1. Where and how did the Quran originate?**

Like the sacred books of Judaism and Christianity, the Quran originated in the region we call the Middle East, in the country now called Saudi Arabia. According to Muslim tradition, in the beginning of the seventh century CE, the Angel Gabriel revealed the teachings of the Quran to Muhammad, a merchant from the city of Mecca. The revelations were made in a cave outside Mecca, and later in the city of Medina, where Muhammad fled when he was persecuted by the leaders of Mecca.

Although Muhammad received the revelation, he was not the one who wrote it down, since tradition holds he was illiterate and most scholars agree. Instead, shortly after his death, his revelations were collected and written down under the Caliphs who ruled the Muslim community.

**2. What language is the Quran written in?**

It was written in Arabic, the language spoken in Muhammad's city of Mecca. A translation of the Quran into another language is not considered to be a true Quran. Thus, although Muslims live in countries around the world, they consider it important to be able to read Arabic.

The Arabic alphabet is very different from the English alphabet. The alphabet has 28 letters, and most of the letters have four different forms, depending on where they come in a word. The language is written and read from right to left, and books begin at the place an English speaker would consider the back of the book. Vowels are usually not included in written Arabic.

**3. What is in the Quran?**

Muslims consider the Quran to be the direct word of Allah (God) speaking to humans. The book has 114 chapters *or suras*, with the longest chapter being 286 verses and the shortest 3.

The following main teachings of Islam are among those found in the Quran:

- Most important is the belief that God is one, eternal, omniscient (all-knowing), and all-powerful. This belief in monotheism was in stark contrast to the polytheism (belief in many gods) that was practiced in Mecca before Muhammad.
- There will be a Day of Judgment at the end of the world.
- God communicated with humankind, using angels to deliver the messages to prophets. Among the prophets were the Biblical figures Adam, Noah, Moses, David, and Jesus; Muhammad is the last and greatest of the prophets.
- Believers should behave in ethical ways and have certain responsibilities. For example, they should practice charity toward those in need. They should pray regularly, prostrating themselves in prayer. They should fast from dawn to dusk during the holy month of Ramadan. They should not gamble or lend money at high interest rates.

What you will not find in the Quran are pictures of Muhammad or other figures. Muslim tradition discourages the depiction of people in a religious context. Instead, artists who copied the Quran tried to make it visually beautiful by using elegant calligraphy, geometric designs, and images based on plants.





## Handout 1 ► P. 2

## Some FAQs about the Quran

**4. How should the Quran be handled?**

The Quran is treated by Muslims with the greatest respect. A person who is going to handle a Quran should perform ablutions to be sure he or she is clean. Some scholars believe that a menstruating woman should not handle a Quran. The Quran should never be placed on the floor, but should be placed on a rack or pillow.

**5. How does one read the Quran?**

Having ritually cleansed themselves, readers should sit respectfully and place the Quran on a pillow or rack. The Quran should be read with attention to *tajweed*, that is, with correct pronunciation of all words, including using the appropriate vowel sounds. For those for whom Arabic is not a first language, this may be challenging. In addition to pronunciation, a slow pace (*tarteel*) is important, so that the meaning of the words can be clearly understood. There are brief prayers to be recited at the beginning and end of the reading.

**6. Is the Quran sung?**

It is not quite singing, certainly not in the sense that Christians sing hymns during religious services. Rather, the reader is trying to make the voice sound beautiful as a way of honoring the text.

**7. When should the Quran be recited?**

Millions of Muslims recite verses from the Quran every day, and many recite the Quran in full at least twice a year. Ramadan, the month of fasting, is also known as the month of the Quran, and it is generally recommended that Muslims recite it more frequently during this month.



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