ABOUT THE FILM

The world's preeminent Koran-recitation competition takes place each year in Cairo, drawing Muslim children from as far as Tajikistan and the Maldives to perform in front of a panel of prominent judges. Following these talented youngsters from their intense preparation regimes through the rigorous rounds of the tournament, Koran by Heart is both an inspirational competition film and an engaging survey of the unique experiences of Muslim children throughout the world.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

GREG BARKER, DIRECTOR

Barker is a former war correspondent who has worked in more than 50 countries. His films include the award-winning Ghosts of Rwanda and several other investigative films for PBS' Frontline. He directed and produced the award-winning documentary Sergio, which was shortlisted for the 2010 Oscar® and nominated for an Emmy.

THINKING AHEAD

Q: Competitions are very important to both individuals and the society they live in. They allow people to showcase their skills and learn new information through rigorous training and practice along with sharing those skills and talents with their peers and community. Are there any competitions you have ever competed in or any you would like to compete in? Spelling Bees? Talent Shows? American Idol?

Q: The contestants seen in the Koran Recitation Competition documented in Koran by Heart are all Muslims practicing the religion of Islam. What does this mean to you? Where do your impressions of Muslims and/or Islam come from? Do you think these impressions are accurate? Are you a Muslim or do you know anyone that practices the religion of Islam?

Q: The Koran is the religious text of the Muslim religion and in many ways is very similar to the Christian Bible or the Jewish Torah. There may be differences, but the messages are fundamentally the same. What do you think these messages are? What are the main ideas and principles that connect them all?
MUSLIMS AND THE ISLAM RELIGION

There are often many misperceived ideas about Muslim culture and the religion of Islam. Let us demystify it a little and examine the comparisons between it and other religions. You might be surprised at some of the similarities:

- All three religions have a common origin in Abraham, a religious leader from around 2000 BCE who is believed to be the father of Islam, Judaism and Christianity.
- All three religions share many of the same prophets. For example, both Jesus and Moses are considered prophets in Islam.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Islam</th>
<th>Judaism</th>
<th>Christianity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population</strong></td>
<td>1.3 Billion</td>
<td>14 Million</td>
<td>2 Billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sacred Text</strong></td>
<td>Koran</td>
<td>Torah</td>
<td>Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clergy</strong></td>
<td>Imams</td>
<td>Rabbis</td>
<td>Priests, Ministers, Pastors, Bishops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>House of Worship</strong></td>
<td>Mosque</td>
<td>Synagogue</td>
<td>Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Day of Worship</strong></td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>Sunday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Original Language</strong></td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary Prophet</strong></td>
<td>Muhammad</td>
<td>Moses or Abraham</td>
<td>Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unifying Belief</strong></td>
<td>One God</td>
<td>One God</td>
<td>One God</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: http://www.religionfacts.com/islam/comparison_charts/islam_judaism_christianity.htm

A GREAT DISTANCE

The contestants in the Koran Recitation Competition documented in Koran by Heart have traveled from all over the world, some of them making the journey at a very young age without their families. This map illustrates that distance to give you an idea of the commitment these contestants and their families have for the competition and their religion, and also show you the largest Muslim populations in the world. New York City is added as a reference point.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tajikistan</th>
<th>Maldives</th>
<th>New York City (reference)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distance from Cairo, Egypt</strong></td>
<td>2,148 Miles</td>
<td>3,155 Miles</td>
<td>5,606 Miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Official/Dominant Language</strong></td>
<td>Tajik</td>
<td>Dhivehi</td>
<td>Over 800—most diverse in the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dominant Religion</strong></td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>Diverse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HOW TO BE A CRITICAL VIEWER

Being a critical viewer is different than simply watching a movie. Critical viewing is about being able to examine the information that a movie, commercial, music video or TV show is giving you and ask meaningful questions about the information that you receive. Media makers create work for many reasons: to inform, persuade, entertain, shock, sell, etc. A critical viewer asks, “What goal is the media maker trying to achieve, and what impact do they want to have on me?”

A critical viewer is someone who:

• Listens carefully to what is being said in the movie
• Pays attention to the details used by the filmmaker to convey the message of the film
• Asks meaningful questions

Being a critical viewer will help you understand:

• The themes and issues that the filmmaker is addressing
• The reasons why the filmmaker chose to make the movie
• The message of the movie

In this study guide you will find background information, activities, and questions that will help you practice being a critical viewer.
CRITICAL VIEWING REFLECTION

Now that you've watched the film and worked through the Study Guide, take some time to reflect on the following questions. These worksheets are an important step in practicing your critical viewing skills. Write down your answers and compare with your friends and classmates.

Every film has a **MESSAGE** that the filmmaker wants to communicate. There are a few key questions you can ask yourself to help figure out a film's message.

What do you think the film is about?

What is the filmmaker trying to say about the subject? What evidence is used?

Why do you think the filmmaker made this film?

**PRODUCTION** describes the process of making a film and includes writing the script, choosing different types of shots while filming, editing the final footage, and choosing music. The choices made during production affect how we experience the movie.

How is the story of the film told? Does it remind you of other films you have seen? If so, which ones and how? If not, how was it unique?

How does the way the film is made change the way you understand the topic? (Think about the structure of the film, the music, etc.)
When you CRITIQUE a film as a critical viewer you are doing more than saying whether you like it or not, you are forming your own opinions about the quality of the film, clearly explaining your thoughts, and using evidence from the film to support these opinions.

What did you find interesting about the film? Why?

Why is the film interesting to other viewers (even if it wasn’t interesting to you)?

Why do you think the filmmaker took the time to make this film?

What would you have done differently if you were the director?

What kind of audience is the film targeting? (Remember, one film can target many different kinds of audiences!)
RESOURCES GUIDE

FURTHER READING  IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT SOME OF THE ISSUES PRESENTED IN THE FILM, CHECK OUT THESE BOOKS.

**Persepolis**
*By Marjane Satrapi*
Series of autobiographical graphic novels depicting author Marjane Satrapi’s life in Iran during the Islamic revolution.

**The Kite Runner**
*By Khaled Hosseini*
The story of an unlikely friendship set during the fall of Afghanistan’s monarchy during the Soviet invasion, the mass exodus of refugees to Pakistan, and the rise of the Taliban.

**The Koran: A Very Short Introduction**
*By Michael Cook*
Only 150 pages, Michael Cook does his best to explain the origin of the Koran and the content within its pages, and examines how it is studied and recited today.

**Women, the Recited Qur'an, and Islamic Music in Indonesia**
*By Anne Rasmussen*
Indonesia is home to the largest population of Muslims in the world. This book examines the Koran recitation culture there, and the unique influence it has had on the music of the region.

FURTHER WATCHING  IF YOU LIKED THIS FILM, YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE SOME OF THESE OTHER FILMS.

**Persepolis**
The animated adaptation of the autobiographical graphic novels by Marjane Satrapi further examines the history of the Islamic revolution in Iran.

**30 Days**
In episode three of the first season of this FX Network original series created by *Super Size Me* director Morgan Spurlock, a devoted Christian must spend 30 days living as a Muslim in order to breakdown misconceptions about the religion.

**Spellbound**
This documentary made in 2002 follows eight competitors in the 1999 Scripps National Spelling Bee. Very similar in some ways to *Koran by Heart*, but without the religious influence.

**East is East**
The story of a British Pakistani Muslim family and the generation gap between the father and his children that examines the difficulties strict religious parents can have when the next generation has different beliefs.

ONLINE RESOURCES  DISCOVER MORE INFORMATION ON THE WEB ABOUT THIS FILM AND RELATED TOPICS.

**Quran Explorer**
[quranexplorer.com](http://quranexplorer.com)
Extensive research tool allowing people to digitally interact with the Koran and hear recitations from all over the world.

**National Spelling Bee**
[spellingbee.com](http://spellingbee.com)
While not that similar to the Koran recitation competition, this US National Spelling Bee official website can give you some information on one of the most intense competitions in the US.

**Religious Tolerance**
[religious_tolerance.org](http://religious_tolerance.org)
A helpful website for anyone curious about the religion of Islam (or any religion) that promotes the continued tolerance of different beliefs.

**Central Virginia Quran Competition**
[cvqc.org](http://cvqc.org)
The Central Virginia Quran Competition is held every March here in the US—a much smaller scale version of the recitation competition in Cairo with variants in the competing categories.
ABOUT TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES
This program provides NYC public school students and teachers with access to free, educationally-relevant and challenging films. Each screening is followed by a Q&A, study guides and supplemental educator materials are provided, and teachers are strongly encouraged to utilize films as part of their curriculum. This monthly-series strives to expose New York City students to independent films and help educators and students incorporate film-viewing into their classroom work. For more information about TFI’s youth programs, please visit www.tribecafilminstitute.org/youth or email youth@tribecafilminstitute.org

“Good Audience” music by: Teddy Blanks
Tribeca Youth trailer music by: The Budos Band

Curriculum writer: Philip B. Swift

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