ABOUT THE FILM

Lonely flight attendant Montine McLeod (Academy Award® nominee Melissa Leo) becomes responsible for a 10-year-old Pakistani-American boy traveling solo when news of the 9/11 attacks grounds their flight in Texas. After learning the boy’s father works in the World Trade Center, McLeod musters the compassion she could never afford her own family, and the two embark on a heartrending road trip to meet an uncertain future in New York City.
Travis Fine left a successful acting, writing, and directing career after being deeply affected by 9/11. He enrolled in flight school and forged a new path as a screenwriting airline pilot. The concept for *The Space Between* took shape while Travis was in the flight deck of a commercial airliner on autopilot at 36,000 feet.

**DIRECTOR’S NOTES**

“Eight years ago, my daughter told me that we all have invisible wires that connect us to the people that we love... wires that cannot be broken by time, by space or even by death. As an airline pilot, I often thought about those wires as I flew passengers back and forth across the country. Hurting along in a metal tube six miles above the Earth’s surface at just below the speed of sound, a bunch of strangers had entrusted me with their lives. Did we have invisible wires that connected us as well? And then, one night on a flight from St. Louis to Newark, I randomly asked my captain what it was like to be in the air on the morning of September 11th. As he recounted his story and I reflected on my own memories of 9/11, I remembered that for a brief moment in time, the entire world was connected in a shared grief that knew no ethnic, religious or national boundaries. Drifting off to sleep that night, I saw the image in my mind of a young boy with scared eyes asking a flight attendant in an empty plane “Are we in Los Angeles?” As I flew another planeload of strangers from Newark back to St. Louis the next morning, I pulled out a piece of paper and began to scribble notes about two strangers in an airplane forced together by tragedy...and about the invisible wires that connect us all.”

—Travis Fine

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

How did Travis Fine’s experience as an airline pilot influence his work as a filmmaker?

Travis Fine talks about “the invisible wires” he wants to depict in *The Space Between*. Can you think of examples from the film that represent this idea?

Do you see any connections between what Travis Fine describes and your (or your families’ and friends’) experience of 9/11?
The Space Between uses the story of Montine and Omar as a way to explore much larger issues. This section contains some background information on two key topics: the racial tensions that existed due to 9/11 and coping with the loss of a loved one.

GRIEF

In the film, Omar loses his father to the 9/11 tragedy. The death of a parent is one of the most difficult things to experience, it can be a time of great sadness, anger, and confusion. Montine describes this time to Omar as “the space between,” but did you know there are actual specific steps in the grieving process? Understanding these steps can help us understand what someone like Omar is thinking and feeling.

- **Shock:** feeling frozen or paralyzed when you first hear bad news
- **Denial:** Avoiding or not acknowledging the situation
- **Anger:** Frustration or release of pent-up emotions
- **Bargaining:** Looking for a “way out” of the situation
- **Depression:** Finally accepting the situation
- **Testing:** Looking for realistic solutions to help deal with the situation, such as finding a new hobby to occupy yourself
- **Acceptance:** Moving forward in your life

DISCRIMINATION & BULLYING

We see Omar repeatedly being treated differently because of his race, such as the scene when he is kicked off the bus or when he is bullied. This same racial discrimination and unfair treatment was experienced by many people of Middle Eastern origin or Muslim faith after September 11th. Bullying may seem relatively harmless, but it can easily become much more violent and fosters a climate of intolerance.

A great resource to learn more about why people bully and how to stop it can be found at [www.kidshealth.org/teen](http://www.kidshealth.org/teen). The site explains, “Two of the main reasons people are bullied are because of appearance and social status. Bullies pick on the people they think don’t fit in, maybe because of how they look, how they act (for example, kids who are shy and withdrawn), their race or religion, or because the bullies think their target may be gay or lesbian.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Have you ever witnessed bullying? What do you think caused it?

Omar’s bully calls him an Arab, even though Omar’s family is from Pakistan, which is not an Arab country. Why does the bully call him this? What does this show about how many Americans think of Middle Eastern people? What are some of the dangers of generalizing or stereotyping?

What are some ways that you can help end discrimination and bullying? Do you think that films (like The Space Between) can help? How?

Which stages of the grieving cycle do we see Omar experience? How do we see him experience these stages?

Which stage or stages do you think Montine’s idea of “the space between” describes?

Does understanding these stages of grief make you think differently about Omar in any way? How?

Why do you think the film is titled The Space Between? How does Omar’s loss tie into the larger story the filmmaker is trying to tell?
THE FILM IN CONTEXT

Omar is Pakistani-American, which other characters confuse with being an Arab or being a Muslim. What exactly do all these different labels mean?

**MUSLIM** DESCRIBES A PERSON WHO FOLLOWS THE RELIGION OF ISLAM, which is the second largest religion in the world. Muslims believe making ritual prayers five times a day is a religious duty. The holy book of Islam is Quran. Muslim style of dress varies by country. The hat that Omar wears is called a “topi,” and is common in India and Pakistan. A country whose population is over 50% Muslim can be considered part of the “Muslim World.” There are 47 countries in the Muslim World, the top 10 are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indonesia</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Iran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>Sudan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>Algeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PAKISTAN IS A COUNTRY IN SOUTH ASIA.** Over sixty languages are spoken in Pakistan, although English is the official language. 95% of Pakistani people are Muslim, making it the second largest (after Indonesia) Muslim country. It is an Islamic State, which means that the Quran determines legal rules and regulations. You’ll see that the Pakistani flag has the crescent-moon and five-point star design, which is a traditional Muslim symbol.

**ARAB IS AN UMBRELLA TERM THAT THAT DEFINES PEOPLE FROM DIVERSE CULTURAL, ETHNIC AND POLITICAL BACKGROUNDS.** The key similarity is the Arabic language. About 300 million people in the world speak Arabic as their first language. While the majority of Arab people are Muslim, not all Muslims are Arab. For example, Omar is Muslim but not Arab. While there are Arab populations in countries throughout the world, including France, Brazil and the United States, the term “Arab World” describes countries with large populations of Arab speakers. The top ten are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Egypt</th>
<th>Yemen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>Syria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>Sudan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>Tunisia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to remember to distinguish between ethnic, religious, and cultural identities rather than make assumptions. Most importantly, a person’s background should never be used against them in a mean or hurtful way.
CRITICAL VIEWING REFLECTION

Now that you've watched *The Space Between* 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 Space Between* is about?

What is Travis Fine trying to say about her subject? What evidence does he use?

Why do you think Travis Fine 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 Space Between* 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 Space Between* is made change the way you understand the topic? (Think about the structure of the film, the music, etc.)

**CRITIQUE: WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

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 opinion about a film, and explaining your thoughts.

What did you find interesting about *The Space Between*? Why?

Why is *The Space Between* 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 Space Between* 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.

- **Tower Stories: An Oral History of 9/11**  
  by Damon DiMarco

- **Touching History: The Untold Story of the Drama That Unfolded in the Skies Over America on 9/11**  
  by Lynn Spencer

- **Blood and Rage: A Cultural History of Terrorism**  
  by Michael Burleigh

- **Crisscrossing the Globe: The Crazy Life of a Charter Flight Attendant**  
  by Cynthia Swenson McAlister

**ONLINE RESOURCES**  
Discover more information on the web about The Space Between and related topics.

- **The Space Between**: spacebetweenmovie.com  
  Official film website

- **Children of September 11th**:  
  www.childrenofseptember11.org  
  Resources and information for children dealing with trauma related to 9/11.

- **9/11 Memorial**: www.national911memorial.org  
  Up-to-date information on the upcoming 9/11 Memorial and Museum being built in NYC.

- **The Arab-American Institute**: www.aaiusa.org/  
  Resources promoting tolerance and understanding of the Arab-American community.

**FURTHER WATCHING**  
If you liked The Space Between, you might also like some of these other films and television shows.

- **United 93**  
  The story of the heroic passengers that took back their plane in an effort to stop a 9/11 terrorist attack.

- **September 11**  
  The effects of the 9/11 terrorist attacks are told from different points of view around the world.

- **National Geographic—Inside 9/11**  
  A comprehensive look at the events leading up to, during, and following the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

- **Fahrenheit 9/11**  
  Michael Moore’s view on what happened to the United States after September 11; and how the Bush Administration allegedly used the tragic event to push forward its agenda for unjust wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.
THE TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES PRESENTS NYC PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS AND TEACHERS WITH ACCESS TO FREE, EDUCATIONALLY-RELEVANT AND CHALLENGING FILMS. TFI CREATES STUDY GUIDES FOR EACH FILM AND PRODUCES Q&A SESSIONS WITH FILMMAKERS AFTER EACH SCREENING.

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