

MY FELLOW AMERICAN

My Fellow American: Post-Screening Interfaith Dialogue Guide

Now that you just finished watching My Fellow American, bring together a diverse group to host a dialogue! This guide is a manual for discussion leaders to guide their group in a process of discovery, reflection and dialogue designed to lead to group cohesion and action.

20,000 Dialogues

The 20,000 Dialogues process gets people talking about some of the major issues of our time: the perceived clash between Islam and the West, and the coexistence between Muslims and people of different faiths. Confronting stereotypes that abound in popular culture about faith, violence and extremism, 20,000 Dialogues brings everyday people to the same table in candid dialogue to promote greater understanding: Learn more at: www.20000Dialogues.org.

Dialogue

Dialogue is a new approach to an age-old challenge. It is the meeting of minds and hearts in candid discussion. Its goal is as simple as it is challenging: to enable participants to see the “other” in a new way and to learn and grow from the experience. Dialogue is inherently risky, because it opens us up to the possibility of change and transformation.

Then Take Action

The “20,000 Package” of watching the film and engaging in small grassroots-generated discussions enables participants to create an ongoing forum for taking action together. The dialogue process is designed to promote sustained interaction between the participants.

Discussion Guide:

Introductions and Icebreaker

Logistics

Have participants break into groups of five. If you have a group of seven or eight, stay in one large group. Ask participants to join a group they didn't come with. As people are moving into their groups, pass out the pre-viewing evaluation and have everyone fill it out—it should only take a couple of minutes. Then have each person introduce themselves with their name and one word describing their state of mind tonight.

Optional Icebreaker to get everyone comfortable and in sync with one another:

Everybody has a dream—and some dreams are harder than others to make come true. Each person in your group has one minute to tell about a dream or goal they have/had. What obstacles did you or will you have to overcome to achieve your goal? The facilitator(s) should model this, making sure that they are talking about a personal dream, not a broad hope for society (ie, this is my dream, not “I have a dream...”).

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Setting Ground Rules:

Ask the group: What do you need from yourself and others in order to feel safe having this conversation? Let each group generate ideas, or do this as a group, but let the participants come up with ideas first, then fill in. You may want a flip chart to write them down on.

Examples of possible guidelines are:

- Everyone has the right to pass;
- Everything that is said is confidential;
- Seek clarification if you don't understand something that is said;
- Suspend your judgment;
- Use 'I' statements; etc.

Assign a Notetaker: someone should take notes on the group's comments, especially as you approach the reflection/action section.

Previewing question:

[Asking the first question before the film will focus the dialogue participants to an active role in responding to the film, rather than simply passively watching.]

This is a powerful short film we are about to watch. Make note of your initial reactions and feelings to the voices heard so that we can share after the film.

Post-viewing discussion:

1. The voices heard in the film are from real people talking in America, most of them drawn from YouTube, or other websites. What is your reaction to these voices?

2. What do you think is the most significant obstacle Muslim Americans face today?

Group may come up with some or all of the following:

- Stereotypes of Muslims
- Active prejudice against Muslims
- Law enforcement/FBI
- Images of 9/11 and Muslim terrorists in planes

Which of these tensions or obstacles are universal, and which do you feel are specific to a Muslim American identity?

3. A lot of hate speech is based on stereotypes of the "other". How are these portrayals/stereotypes created?

- How does the media fuel these stereotypes?
- What are some ways to combat these stereotypes? How can stereotypes change?
- How effective is this film in confronting these stereotypes?

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A recent study shows that for every negative image, there needs to be fourteen positive images to overpower the negative stereotype. What are some ways to introduce positive images into the mainstream conversation?

4. What does it mean to be American?
5. Are there aspects of the film that challenged your ideas about Islam or Muslims?
 - What new questions do you have about these subjects, and how might you go about answering them?

Reflection and Action

America is home to many diverse communities and religious traditions. Islam is one of the fastest growing among these. But we often find enormous misunderstanding and tension around Islam and Muslims in America.

1. One week from now, what will you remember about this film and campaign? Why?
2. Read this quote and then ask the group to transition into a discussion about it:

“Diversity creates friction. If you eliminate diversity, there will be no friction or creativity that results from that tension.”

What does this quote mean? How can our society channel the energy of diverse communities and individuals into creative and positive action? What role can each of us play in this endeavor?

3. To increase understanding between Muslims and people of other faiths, what are the most effective things you can do?
 - Give examples: You can continue dialogue, work on community service projects with a Muslim congregation, think or look at the news about Muslims differently, etc.

Follow-up: What is one action you can commit to doing that will help further the goal of increasing understanding between Muslims and people of other faiths in the United States?

Coming Back Together

Reconvene as a full group, and ask each notetaker in turn to share one epiphany, shared insight, or important story from their group.

Pass out the post-viewing evaluation and ask everyone to fill it out.

Once evaluations are completed, thank everyone for coming!