

DISCUSSION GUIDE

FROM THE FILMMAKER

We live in a world driven by a fear of the foreign, the strange, the unknown. Religions. Cultures. Skin color. LESSONS OF BASKETBALL AND WAR opens a small doorway into another culture through the experiences of the children of recent Somali refugees. Ideally by sharing a few months in the lives of these adolescent Bantu, Oromo and Somali girls as they dive into the glare of America's competitive, sexualized, consumer culture, a bit of mystery and fear might be put aside. Familiarity breeds understanding. Understanding builds tolerance.

“Lessons of Basketball and War” offers a small story that plays to the heart of a big problem. Whether we might be Americans, Europeans, Asians, Africans, Persians, Arabs - Christians, Jews or Muslims—we really understand very little about each other and this ignorance fuels fear and mistrust. It cannot be denied that we are living in a pretty scary world. Conflict and terrorism dominate our TV's and newspapers. The voices of the angry and injured scream for our attention.

But one simple truth remains--whether we live in Mogadishu, Bagdad, Munich, Kabul, Miami or Portland – we are far more alike than we are different. We want the best for our family and a safe, successful future for our children. My experience with this small group of immigrant Somali middle school girls has changed the way I look at the world.

- Ron Bourke, Director/Writer/Producer

THEMES

We learn about one another through exposure to culture and dialogue.

Multicultural groups may have conflict, but there are ways to reach understanding.

Mentoring matters, for children and adults.

Experience in teamwork can teach us trust.

Cultural assimilation and acculturation may be easier for the children than the parents.

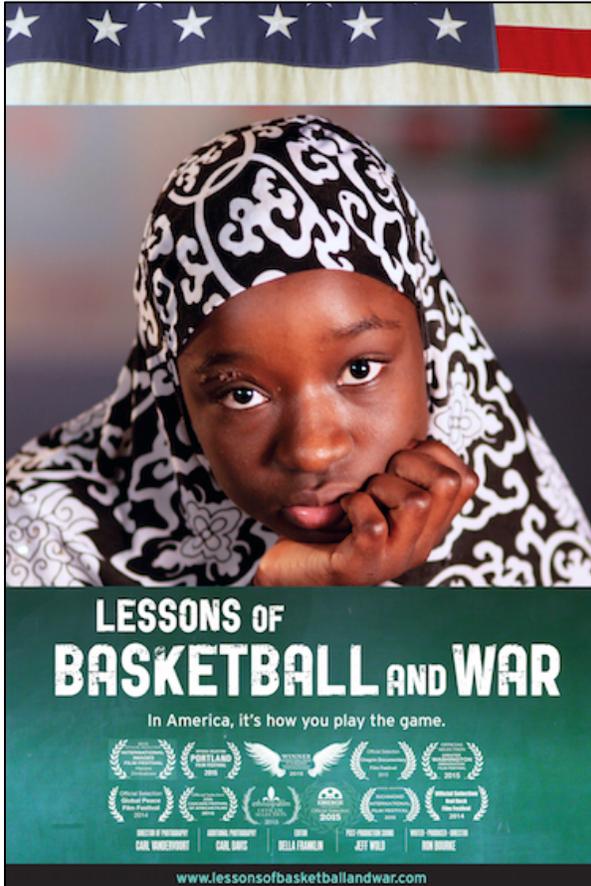
Culture, traditions and religion can provide emotional security in an uncertain world.

There's risk in the value our society places on winning.

There are lessons to be learned from losing.

The divisions in society are replicated by our youth.





SYNOPSIS

LESSONS OF BASKETBALL AND WAR explores universal issues of violence, prejudice, cultural identity and conflict resolution as seen through the eyes of adolescent girls—refugees from war and famine in Somalia who have resettled in a strange foreign city. These Somali refugee girls attempt to put the animosity of war behind them as they create a new life in America. A dedicated middle school principal is challenged as an educator, leader and peacemaker.

Will Muslim tradition and beliefs survive the onslaught of sexualized, celebrity obsessed America? Will teachers be able to help students with little previous education, rudimentary English and a propensity for an abhorrent form of personal violence? For the educators at Portland, Oregon's Hosford Middle School, these refugees presented an immediate crisis.

LESSONS OF BASKETBALL AND WAR offers an entertaining and moving account of a year in their young lives and the challenges faced by one dedicated educator and peacemaker.

BACKGROUND

What could it possibly be like to be a 13- or 14-year-old Somali Bantu immigrant to the US? One day you're in a refugee camp under the blazing Kenyan sun, and the next you're plunged into a country you don't understand. And what if you're a Muslim girl, head and body modestly covered in a world of halter tops and short skirts – Lady GaGa, Beyonce, Rihanna?

How do you teach a 14-year-old algebra or American history when they speak little English or have never held a pencil? Outside of class, the Somalis banded together--rarely straying from their group to engage other students – black or white. To make matters worse, old tribal rivalries could erupt into fights between the girls - the ultimate form of vengeance being the scar of a deep bite to the other girl's face. Something had to be done, but what?

And then one morning Principal Kevin Bacon noticed a couple of the Somali girls tossing a basketball at a basket on the school's playground and the idea for Hosford Middle School's African Girls Basketball Team was born.



Waiting for practice to begin

STORY

On the surface, our story is a documentary about basketball and how a dedicated middle school principal and coach forged a successful team from a dozen African refugee girls who knew little English and even less about this very American sport. But on a deeper level, this is a story about belonging - to a team, to a community, to each other.

Although the film is structured as a sports documentary, it's more concerned with the girls' experiences as they become more comfortable and adept at navigating their new home and culture. Their story is told through their own words as well as those of their coach Kevin Bacon, their teachers, their parents and social workers.

From early practice sessions that concentrated on the most basic principles and rules of the game to more advanced team drills, the girls slowly began to coalesce into a group of young women with a common purpose. Since most of the girls were Muslim, there were questions on how to create a uniform that wouldn't impede their ability to play the game while providing for the necessary modesty their religion and culture demanded. And how would the other teams react to the unconventional long tunics and heads covered by colorful hijabs?

Confidence was built and at times shattered as they began to play actual games with other Portland teams. There was the first practice game where they were only able to make a single basket. There were the continual issues of discipline and focus. And then there was that first win – nailed by Ruth as she swished her first-ever free throw with seconds left on the clock. The season ended with as much drama as it began in a way in which Coach Bacon, their teachers or the filmmakers could never have predicted. Tears were shed. Hard lessons were learned.

This is a story of basketball and belonging. Yes, there is the “thrill of victory and the agony of defeat,” but there is also the story of a dozen young refugee girls learning to become modern American women - holding firm to their family and religious traditions while dreaming of a future not even imaginable two or three years ago in a sprawling Kenyan refugee camp. Although the basketball season provides an exciting narrative arc, the film is primarily a story about belonging. About learning to work with one another for something larger than ourselves. About opportunity and the meaning of community. About learning to live together in peace.

AMERICAN CONTEXT

The United States is a nation of immigrants. Unfortunately, this fact has been all but forgotten by many of its citizens and politicians. In the post-911 world in which we find ourselves, many of America's most recent immigrants are feared and at times demonized. Are they stealing our jobs or perhaps building bombs in their basements?

This is why it's important to tell a story that can serve to introduce a broad audience to some of the newest Americans. There is little difference between what the average American wants for their children and what these Somali families would like for theirs.



Amina with her father, a brother and sister.

For example, Amina's father works as a janitor at Walmart to support his wife and six children. His goal is for all of his children to attend college – to become successful adults able to live the promise that this country offers. It will certainly be an uphill road for this family, but isn't this what we all want for our children – happiness and success? This is an important story that can remind any society stressed by an influx of refugees just who we are as a people and how our differences are far smaller than the dreams that bind us together.



Maryan with her mother, sister and brother

GUIDED DISCUSSION

Education Themes:

- Innocence and exposure
- Skin color and race
- Schools as an agency to shape culture and establish behavioral norms
- Storytelling as a tool for understanding
- Coming of age experiences (“firsts”, education)
- Social promotion
- Shame and bullying across and within cultures
- Trial and error in conflict resolution
- Monitoring behavior within the school but outside the classroom
- Connecting school and home life
- Raising teenagers in a way that they can keep their home cultural values within the American system of education and media

Accessing Prior Knowledge

1. How would you describe the game of basketball to someone who had not experienced it?
2. Name a time you have been on a competitive team. How did that experience impact who you are now?
3. Have you ever known someone from a Muslim or other culture very different from your own? Did your opinion of them change as you got to know them better?
4. Does a person’s skin color define their race or culture?

Essential Questions

1. Can we avoid losing our own cultural values as we learn someone else’s?
2. What experiences can be of the most value for students transitioning into a new country and school?
3. How can mentors of youth approach previous experience in a culturally responsive way while shaping new memories?
4. Do lessons learned in extracurricular activities translate to the classroom?
5. Can there be risk and danger in sports? What sports and what risks? Is the danger worth the risk?

6. What does “being nice” mean: cross-culturally, individual-to-individual, family-to-family?
7. How do we handle disappointment and frustration?
8. Is there value for the immigrant population to be involved in community building?

Debriefing Topics

1. Where do students learn conflict resolution in schools?
2. What role does athletics play in schools?
3. What makes being on a team worth it--through all the challenges, dreams, trials?

Extension Activities

1. Attend a sporting event.
 - a. Observe how the team interacts with players on their own team.
 - b. Track interactions between the two teams.
 - c. Write down a series of suggestions for the players--and for the coaches--when it comes to teamwork, sportsmanship and healthy competition.
 - d. Report back to the class what you noticed.

ADDITIONAL DIALOGUE

Prior to Viewing the Film

1. What do you know about Somali culture?
2. List aspects of the game of basketball.
3. Describe how participating in sports shapes an individual.
4. What access do immigrant students have to “traditional” youth activities?
5. What questions do you have that might be answered by this film?

After Viewing the Film

1. For you, what were the most significant moments in the film?
2. Were there any aspects of culture that were new to you or interesting?
 - a. Somali culture?
 - b. School culture?
 - c. American adolescent culture?
 - d. Sport or basketball culture?
3. For adults working with youth, what techniques, skills, or strategies can you take away to shape your leadership?
4. For students, will this film help to shape your interaction with others?

THE TEAM



ALIYA



AMINA



ASHA



AYSHA



EBLA



MARYAN



MADINO



KHADIJA



NSENE



HABIBA



CHO NAL



RUTH



VICTORIA



FATUMA



KEVIN BACON - COACH



ZSUZSA NEMETH – ESL TEACHER

ELIZABETH GERN–CATHOLIC CHARITIES

SUE SHATTUC - VOLUNTEER

ON-LINE RESOURCES

Official Film Website

www.lessonsofbasketballandwar.com

Film Facebook Page

www.facebook.com/pages/Lessons-of-Basketball-and-War/874092539306968

Somalia - History

<http://www.everyculture.com/Sa-Th/Somalia.html>

Bantu and Oromo Peoples

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bantu_peoples

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oromo_people

Language:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maay_language

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swahili_language

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oromo_language

Organizations:

<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e483ad6.html>

<http://catholiccharitiesusa.org/>

<http://lcsnw.org/>

<http://www.refugeesinternational.org/where-we-work/africa/somalia>

Life in a Refugee Camp - Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wf9jYR3Yg>



BASKETBALL VOCABULARY

Dribble: the legal method of advancing the ball by oneself.

Foul: illegal personal contact with an opponent and/or unsportsmanlike behavior.

Foul out: when a player exceeds his or her personal foul limit for a game and is disqualified from participation in the remainder of the game.

Free-throws (or foul shots): unopposed attempts to score points from a restricted area on the court (the free throw line), and are generally awarded after a foul on the shooter by the opposing team.

Play: a strategy executed by a basketball team in order to score on the offensive end.

Pass: a deliberate attempt to move a live ball between two teammates.

Press: a defensive style in which the defense applies pressure to the offensive team the entire length of the court before and after the inbound pass.

Screen: the offensive player setting the pick must remain stationary at the moment of contact with the defender.

Steals: when a defensive player legally causes a turnover by his positive, aggressive action(s). This can be done by deflecting and controlling, or by catching the opponents pass or dribble of an offensive player.

Travel: a violation of the rules that occurs when a player holding the ball moves one or both of his feet illegally.



We would like to acknowledge the tremendous help from Sarabeth Leitch in the preparation of this discussion guide.

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