



Salaam Dunk

This documentary film brings us into the day-to-day lives, dreams, and frustrations of the women's basketball team at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS). We follow these young women and their coach through their third season as they try to develop both their skills as ball players and deal with the complex experiences they've had during the war. For these team members, who grew up during wartime in a restrictive society, basketball represents freedom and possibility.

Recommended for ages 10+ (explicit conversations about war)

Themes: coming of age; family; folklore; environment; cross-cultural understanding

Director(s): David Fine | **81 min** | **Documentary** | **2012** | **Country:** USA | **Language:** English, Kurdish and Arabic w/ English subtitles

Official film website: www.salaamdunkfilm.com



SET THE STAGE | THOUGHT-STARTERS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This film takes place in 2010, seven years after the U.S. invasion of Iraq with the official goal of toppling dictator Saddam Hussein. Although the U.S. Army ousted Hussein fairly quickly, U.S. forces remained in Iraq until 2011 because of an insurgency (rebellion). Insurgents opposed U.S. intervention and the new Iraqi government. Although the numbers are still debated, by some estimates nearly half a million (500,000) Iraqis died in this war, many of them civilians. Many students at American University of Iraq, Sulaimani moved to the area to escape the violence in Baghdad. The students featured in this film are Arab, Kurdish, and Christian, groups that historically don't get along in Iraq. The Kurds were an oppressed minority under Saddam Hussein

WORDS TO KNOW

- **B-roll:** Supplemental film footage that can be used to edit a scene. B-roll is the footage used to cut away from an interview to help tell a story.
- **Documentary:** A type of film that attempts to explain reality.
- **Establishing Shot:** Usually the first shot of a new scene, designed to show the audience where the action is taking place. It is usually a very wide shot or extreme wide shot.
- **Kurds:** An ethnic group in the Middle East, mostly inhabiting a contiguous area spanning adjacent parts of southeastern Turkey, western Iran, northern Iraq, and northern Syria.
- **Point of View Shot:** A section of footage that shows what a character (the subject) sees (represented through the camera).
- **Vérité Footage:** Documentary footage of characters going about their everyday lives as if the camera isn't there.

For more film terms, refer to the PCFF Film Glossary (pcfri.org/FilmHub).



Clues
and
Cues

Pay attention while watching

- Notice when the subjects of the film seem aware of the camera.
- Listen to the soundtrack. How does it create a shift in mood?
- Notice the filmmakers' use of special effects. What is their goal?



TALK ABOUT IT | DISCUSSION

- Girls in the U.S. had to fight to get equal funding for their sports teams and now there's a law called Title IX, which says it's illegal to discriminate against girls' sports. Do you think girls' sports are taken as seriously as boys' sports? Are there barriers in your school and community for girls who want to play sports?
- In the film, when some girls arrived to the first practice, they were wearing high heels and couldn't run. Remember the interviews on the street in the first few minutes of the documentary about women in sports. Based on those interviews, why do you think some girls arrived so unprepared to play basketball? Why were the girls embarrassed about running outside? Why don't girls run in public in Iraq?
- Ryan believes that basketball is about more than playing ball. What does Ryan believe basketball teaches? Why is basketball so meaningful for the different characters? What does it mean to them beyond learning a sport?
- How does the team help Kurdish, Arab and Muslim girls get past their stereotypes about each other? Have you had similar experiences on a team or through some other activity such as a play, camp, community service project, etc.?
- Even though this documentary is about the basketball team, it's also about the after effects of the war in Iraq. What did you learn about that war through this film?
- Right before the title there's a shot of a girl running towards the camera and dunking. How does that shot make you feel about women in sports? Would this shot be as powerful from a different camera angle? What other techniques do the filmmakers use to create different feelings in the audience? Think about the times when they speed up, slow down, use music, etc. For example, what mood do the soundtrack and the song "Kush Kush" create?
- Although a documentary film is a representation of real life, the filmmakers choose what to shoot, edit out, and include. What story did they choose to tell? Were there other stories that you wish had been included? For example, did you want to know more about a certain character, or hear about someone not actually given a voice? Could they have structured the documentary in a different way?

GET CREATIVE | EXTENSION ACTIVITIES



For Activity Reel details, downloadable storyboard template and more, visit the the Film Hub website: www.pcffri.org/FilmHub

- **Writing Prompts**
Option 1: Write a letter to Coach Ryan after he moves back to the U.S., filling him in on your life and your feelings about basketball as if you were one of the main characters in the movie. Incorporate what you know about your character's history.

Option 2: Have you ever had a meaningful experience playing sports? What did you learn from that experience? Were your experiences similar to or different from the experiences of the girls in the film?
- **Storyboarding Everyday Life**
Materials: Storyboard printout (available from pcffri.com/FilmHub) or blank pieces of paper, pencils
 Documentaries create one particular version of real life. Working in a small group or individually, create a storyboard of your year in school. How would you plot out your year in this classroom? What were some dramatic moments? Were there any struggles or achievements? Frustrations? A storyboard is a graphic organizer for a film, sort of like a comic book. After making your storyboard, share it! Discuss the different "plots" chosen by each group. Why did you include certain events and leave out others? Whose point of view are you representing? Whose point of view are you excluding?
- **Playing with Perspective**
Materials: Camera or a phone with a camera
 Think about the image right before the credits of a girl dunking the ball. Because the image is shot from below—a low angle—she looks strong and powerful. Take your own pictures of people and practice using similar techniques to create different feelings for your audience about your characters.



MAKE CONNECTIONS | ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources complement the film and inspire further discussion or programming.

FILMS

• **Wadjda** (2013)

Ten-year-old Wadjda challenges deep-rooted Saudi traditions in a determined quest to buy a bicycle.

• **Speed Sisters** (2015)

Demolishing stereotypes without wrecking their cars, the Speed Sisters are the Middle East's first all-female car racing team.

• **Almost Friends** (2014)

A documentary about two Israeli girls—an Arab and a Jew—who live only 40 miles away but in many ways live worlds apart.

• **HÖRDUR: Between Worlds** (2015)

Aylin, age 17, finds herself caught between worlds: A world of accepting her mother's death or not. A world of struggling to survive as a Turkish family in Germany or returning home.

• **The Boxing Girls of Kabul** (2012)

A documentary about female Olympic boxing hopefuls in Kabul.

•  Indicates PCFF festival selection

BEYOND THE FILM | RELATED INTERNET LINKS

• **Saudi Arabia Sends Women to Olympics:**

www.theguardian.com/sport/2012/jul/12/saudi-arabia-women-olympic-games

• **Lesson plans on Title IX:**

bento.cdn.pbs.org/hostedbento-prod/filer_public/2013/02/11/title-ix.pdf

• **President Obama honors women's WNBA player:**

cronkitenews.azpbs.org/2015/08/26/obama-honors-phoenix-mercury-at-white-house-for-2014-wnba-title/

