



## Wadjda

Ten-year-old Wadjda rebels against the restrictions placed on girls in Saudi Arabia. Although girls aren't allowed to ride bikes, she tries to save up enough money to purchase the beautiful new bike at her neighborhood shop. When her initial plans are foiled, she enters into her school's Koran competition hoping to use the cash prize to buy a bike. Meanwhile, her mother also struggles against restrictive practices as she tries to keep her husband from taking a second wife.

**Recommended for ages 10+**

**Themes:** competition, cross-cultural understanding, discrimination, female empowerment, friendship, female point of view, identity, perseverance, religion, social/emotional development, women's rights

**Director(s):** Haifaa Al Mansour | **98 min** | **Live Action** | **2013** | **Country:** Saudi Arabia | **Language:** Arabic w/English subtitles

**Official film website:** [www.sonyclassics.com/wadjda](http://www.sonyclassics.com/wadjda)



## SET THE STAGE | THOUGHT-STARTERS

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In Saudi Arabia, women are legally forbidden to drive, leave the house unveiled, interact with men they aren't related to, or travel in public without a chaperone. These rules stem from a strict interpretation of Sharia law and are enforced by the religious police. However, women gained the right to vote in 2011, and some activists are hopeful that this signals the beginning of a change in Saudi Arabian society. Haifaa Al Mansour is the first filmmaker to shoot a film entirely in Saudi Arabia. Because she is a woman and isn't allowed to mix with men in public, she had to direct portions of this film from inside a van. This is a clip of her describing the filmmaking process on *The Daily Show*:  
[thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/ha235s/haifaa-al-mansour](http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/ha235s/haifaa-al-mansour)

### WORDS TO KNOW

- **Cultural Relativism:** The idea that a person's beliefs and activities should be understood in terms of that person's own culture instead of being judged by a universal standard.
- **Koran:** The Islamic sacred book, believed to be the word of God as dictated to Muhammad by the Archangel Gabriel.
- **Sharia:** A legal code based on Islamic teachings. Saudi Arabia's government is based upon Sharia law, which is why women are legally forbidden to go out in public without wearing a hijab or an abaya.
- **Veiling:** According to the Koran, women should cover their heads out of obedience to God and to demonstrate modesty. There are many women who choose to wear the veil because it is a way of showing their Muslim identity and faith.
  - **Abaya:** A long robe or cloak that covers a woman's body and is typically worn over other clothing.
  - **Burqa:** The most concealing of all Islamic veils. It is a one-piece veil that covers the face and body, often leaving just a mesh screen to see through.
  - **Hijab:** Hijab describes the act of covering up, but is often used to describe the headscarves worn by Muslim women.
  - **Niqab:** A veil for the face that with an opening for the eyes. It is worn with an accompanying headscarf.

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



Clues  
and  
Cues

### Pay attention while watching

- How do women and girls behave differently when they are inside and when they are in public?
- When Wadjda wears the abaya, does it affect her movement or behavior?
- In the opening shot, are there signs that tell you Wadjda might be different from other girls?

## TALK ABOUT IT | DISCUSSION

- Why is Wadjda in trouble at school throughout the film? Other girls get in trouble as well. What are some of the things they do that get them punished?
- Wadjda and the other girls at school are willing to risk a lot for fashion. Why? Would you be willing to get in trouble for fashion choices?
- How are we introduced to bicycles in the movie? What does the bicycle represent to Wadjda? How would you describe the way the film captures the bicycle when we first see it and what do you think the filmmaker chose to film it this way?
- In this movie, it may seem that women enforce the rules of modesty more than men. In other words, women are frequently getting other women in trouble. Why?
- Wadjda's life is a mixture of traditional and modern. How is her life like yours? How is it different from yours?
- What perspective does this film show? Are we looking at Saudi Arabian life from a male perspective? A female perspective? An adult perspective? A child's perspective? Do we see more than one kind of perspective?
- How does Wadjda's mother act differently in private than she does in public? Why?
- Why isn't Wadjda's name on the family tree and why does she add it on?
- Wadjda chooses not to defend her two older friends when they are about to get in trouble because she wants to win the Koran contest. What would you have done? What do you think about her decision?
- Why does Wadjda's mother change her mind about the bike at the end of the movie?
- What do you think about Wadjda's father? Why does he make the decisions he does?
- Does this film have a happy ending? A sad ending? A little bit of both?

## GET CREATIVE | EXTENSION ACTIVITIES



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

- **Writing Prompt**  
Wadjda is told over and over again what girls can do and what they can't: "Here girls don't ride bikes!" Have you ever been told you could or couldn't do something because of your gender or religion? Who enforced those "rules?" Adults? Other kids? How did it make you feel and how did you respond?
- **Writing Prompt**  
What are the big ways that Wadjda rebels against authority and what are the small ways? [hint: remember her shoes]. Are there big and small ways that you rebel against authority?
- **Interview Wadjda**  
**Materials:** Pencil, paper or blank index cards.  
In groups, pretend you are a documentary filmmaker going to Saudi Arabia to interview Wadjda. What questions would you want to ask her about her life? Working in teams, select "the interviewer" and "the interviewee" (Wadjda) and perform the conversation for the group. [activity from [www.filmclub.org/assets/pdf/Identity-and-belonging-Inclusion-Resource-Wadjda.pdf](http://www.filmclub.org/assets/pdf/Identity-and-belonging-Inclusion-Resource-Wadjda.pdf)]
- **Point of View Storyboard**  
**Materials:** Blank paper to draw a storyboard, or print a storyboard template.  
Abdullah, Wadjda's friend, has very different experiences and a somewhat different perspective from her. If you were filming his story about wanting a new bicycle, what do you think would be the obstacles he might encounter? How might they be different from hers? How do you think Wadjda (as his friend) would help Abdullah in his quest? Now that you have some ideas about what his story would look like, try to capture a scene or two in a storyboard. [Hint: Would we ever see Wadjda or her mother without a veil if we were telling this from Abdullah's point of view?]

## MAKE CONNECTIONS | ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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

### BOOKS

- **Persepolis I and II**  
by Marjane Satrapi  
This series of graphic memoirs chronicles the life of a rebellious girl in Iran.

### FILMS

- **Maidentrip (2013)**  
The adventure of Laura Dekker, a 14-year-old Dutch sailor, who set out alone on a two-year voyage to fulfill her dream of becoming the youngest person ever to sail around the world.
- **Salaam Dunk (2012)**  
An insightful look into young Iraqi life as experienced by a current women's college basketball team.
- **T-Rex (2015)**  
"T-Rex" is an intimate, true coming-of-age story about a new kind of American heroine.
- **Persepolis (2007)**  
Adapted from a graphic novel of the same name, chronicles a rebellious young girl in Iran.
- **He Named Me Malala (2015)**  
The story about Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani girl, attacked by the Taliban for speaking out for girls' education, was awarded the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize for her activism on behalf of women and children.

 Indicates PCFF festival selection

## BEYOND THE FILM | RELATED INTERNET LINKS

- **11 Things Women in Saudi Arabia Cannot Do:**  
[www.theweek.co.uk/60339/eleven-things-women-in-saudi-arabia-cannot-do](http://www.theweek.co.uk/60339/eleven-things-women-in-saudi-arabia-cannot-do)
- **Muslim women use social media to discuss their thoughts and feelings about wearing the hijab:**  
[www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/women-reveal-what-wearing-a-hijab-is-really-like-through-anonymous-confessions-app-10476756.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/women-reveal-what-wearing-a-hijab-is-really-like-through-anonymous-confessions-app-10476756.html).
- **Some Muslim women explain why they choose to wear the hijab:**  
[religion.blogs.cnn.com/2010/08/23/muslim-women-who-wear-the-hijab-and-niqab-explain-their-choice/](http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2010/08/23/muslim-women-who-wear-the-hijab-and-niqab-explain-their-choice/)
- **In January 2015 Michelle Obama chose not to cover her head while accompanying her husband on a state visit to Saudi Arabia. This caused a fair amount of controversy:**  
[www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/michelle-obama/11373787/Michelle-Obama-causes-outrage-in-Saudi-Arabia-by-not-wearing-headscarf.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/michelle-obama/11373787/Michelle-Obama-causes-outrage-in-Saudi-Arabia-by-not-wearing-headscarf.html)

