

**POV**

**Community  
Engagement &  
Education**

DISCUSSION GUIDE



**AN ACT OF WORSHIP**

a film by Nausheen Dadabhoy

[www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov)



## AN ACT OF WORSHIP

In *An Act of Worship*, Muslim Americans recount the past 30 years of pivotal moments in U.S. history and policy from their own perspectives. Weaving together observational footage of activists who came of age after 9/11, community-sourced home videos, and evocative recollections from individuals impacted by incidents of Islamophobia, the film opens a window into their world through collective memory.

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This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection and designed for people who want to use *An Act of Worship* to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues, and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing experiences and viewpoints and actively listening to one another in a care-forward environment.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit <https://communitynetwork.amdoc.org/>.

## DEAR POV COMMUNITY,

We are so glad you have chosen to facilitate a discussion inspired by the film *An Act of Worship*. Before you facilitate, please prepare yourself for the conversation, as this film invites you and your community to discuss experiences of Muslim Americans, Islamophobia, activism, mental and emotional health, and U.S. political landscapes. These conversations require learning truths about society, culture, and political motivations that typically have not been taught in schools. We urge you, as a facilitator, to take the necessary steps to ensure that you are prepared to guide a conversation that prioritizes the well-being and safety of Muslims, Black and Indigenous people of color, and youth in your community. Importantly, this film shares experiences through a lens of joy and resilience, rather than focusing on trauma, and we hope this guide will aid you in conversations that expand understanding while maximizing care, critical curiosity, transformation, and connection.

### ***Tips and Tools for Facilitators:***

Here are some supports to help you prepare for facilitating a conversation that inspires curiosity, connection, critical questions, recognition of difference, power, and possibility.

## SHARE COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

### *Community Agreements: What Are They? Why Are They Useful?*

Community agreements help provide a framework for engaging in dialogue that establishes a shared sense of intention ahead of participating in discussion. Community agreements can be co-constructed and created as an opening activity that your group completes collectively and collaboratively. [Here is a model](#) of community agreements you can review. As the facilitator, you can gauge how long your group should take to form these agreements or whether participants would be amenable to using pre-established community agreements.

### *Opening Activity (Optional): Establishing Community Agreements for Discussion*

Whether you are a group of people coming together once for this screening and discussion or a group whose members know each other well, creating a set of community agreements helps foster clear discussion in a manner that draws in and respects all participants, especially when tackling intimate or complex conversations around identity. These steps will help provide guidelines for the process:

- Pass around sample community agreements and take time to read aloud as a group to make sure all participants can both hear and read the text.

## A NOTE TO FACILITATORS

- Allow time for clarifying questions, make sure all participants understand the necessity for the agreements, and allow time to make sure everyone understands the agreements themselves.
- Go around in a circle and have every participant name an agreement they would like to include. Chart this in front of the room where all can see.
- Go around two to three times to give participants multiple chances to contribute and also to give a conclusive end to the process.
- Read the list aloud.
- Invite questions or revisions.
- Ask if all are satisfied with the list.

### ESTABLISH COMMON LANGUAGE

We encourage you to use [this glossary](#) from [Racial Equity Tools](#) ahead of facilitating your discussion to create a list of common concepts which you and your community can reference. If you choose, you can share this list with participants in the conversation. Having common language and shared understandings of meaning will support your community through discussing sometimes uncomfortable topics.

## TIMELINE OF RELEVANT EVENTS & POLICIES

1965 - Immigration & Naturalization Act: This Act abolished the 1920s National Origins Formula which prioritized immigration from Western European countries and discriminated against immigration from all non-Western countries.

1979 - Iranian Revolution: The Iranian Revolution was the result of a series of civil uprisings against the autocratic Western-backed Shah government. The outcome of the revolution was a new Islamic-centered republic.

1981-1986 - Iran Contra Affair: During the Iran-Contra affair, the Reagan administration sold weapons to Iran in exchange for the release of American hostages held in Lebanon. Money from this exchange was then channeled to fund Nicaraguan soldiers known as the “Contras” in their fight against socialist-backed soldiers called the “Sandinistas”.

1991 - Gulf War: After Iraq’s leader, Saddam Hussein, ordered the invasion of Kuwait with the goal of acquiring its oil reserves, over 30 countries, led by Egypt, the U.K., the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, joined together to successfully expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait.

1995 - Oklahoma City Bombings: On the morning of April 1995 two former U.S. soldiers, Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, bombed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people. While having nothing to do with the incident, Muslim American Ibrahim Ahmad came under immediate suspicion.

2001 - 9/11 World Trade Center Attack: On September 11th Islamic extremists attacked the World Trade Center and United States Pentagon resulting in the death of nearly 3,000 people.

2001 - Patriot Act (+ NSEERS): The Patriot Act was enacted in response to 9/11, with the goal of increasing U.S. national security, particularly in an effort to keep watch on foreign terrorism. One of the provisions of the Act was the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) which required non-citizen or green card carrying men over 16 years of age and born in any of 25 predominantly Muslim countries to register with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

2008 - Election of Barack Obama as U.S. President: The election of President Obama represented a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one that focused on a more comprehensive engagement based on mutual respect and shared common principles.

## TIMELINE OF RELEVANT EVENTS & POLICIES

2011 - Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Programs Roll Out: In 2011 the Obama Administration launched the CVE initiative. This initiative focused on community engagement, particularly, targeted interventions with individuals who had become radicalized. The goal of the initiative was to diminish violent and radical ideologies and any mobilization from them. The initiative was terminated when President Trump took office in 2017.

2011 - NYPD Spying Report: The Associated Press published leaked reports that showed the NYPD had been [mapping](#), monitoring and analyzing the daily life of Muslim Americans since 2001, doing so under the unconstitutional grounds that Muslim beliefs are a basis for law enforcement investigation. In 2013, two years after the press reported on the unconstitutional practices, civil rights organizations filed a lawsuit, *Raza v. City of New York*, arguing that such [surveillance](#) was discriminatory and violates the U.S. and New York State Constitution.

2013 - Boston Bombings: The Boston Bombings took place at the site of the Boston Marathon finish line, killing 3 individuals and injuring 260. The bombings were committed by self-radicalized domestic terrorists brothers, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev and Tamerlan Tsarnaev.

2015 - Chapel Hill Murders/Shooting: The 2015 Chapel Hill shooting was a hate-fueled attack against Muslim Americans resulting in the death of three young Muslims. The incident was initially masked as a parking lot dispute.

2016 - Election of Donald Trump: After running an Islamophobic campaign for president, the 2016 election of President Donald Trump led to an unwelcoming and at times dangerous environment for Muslim Americans.

2017 - Muslim Ban Passes (Syria, Somalia, Sudan, Libya, Yemen, Iran, Iraq): The Muslim Ban was a policy under the Trump Administration which banned travel from these seven mostly Muslim countries.

## CONCEPT LIST FOR COMMON UNDERSTANDING

*Counter-Narrative:* The stories that arise from the experiences and knowledge of those who historically have been marginalized. The idea of “counter” itself implies a space of resistance against traditional domination. By choosing their own words and telling their own stories, members of marginalized communities provide alternative points of view, helping to create complex narratives truly presenting their realities.

*Discrimination:* The unequal treatment of members of various groups based on race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, physical ability, religion, and other categories.

*Intersectionality:* A prism through which to see the interactive effects of various forms of discrimination and disempowerment. Intersectionality looks at the way that racism often interacts with patriarchy, heterosexism, classism, and xenophobia—revealing that the overlapping vulnerabilities created by these systems create specific kinds of challenges for individuals based on their multiple, and intersecting identities.

*Islamophobia:* Unfounded hostility toward Islam and, therefore, unfounded fear or dislike of Muslim people; also, a form of governmentality or an ideology that reduces the meaning of Islam and Muslims to “others” who jeopardize Western values. Islamophobic ideas, policies, and practices often generate hostility directed toward Muslim communities and individuals. Another term for Islamophobia is anti-Muslim bias or anti-Muslim prejudice.

*Muslim:* A person who follows or practices Islam.

*Prejudice:* A preconceived judgment or opinion, usually based on limited information and often a good indicator of unacknowledged racist beliefs and privilege that have yet to be recognized or reckoned with.

*Race:* What we know of race today was created by humans rather than social forces, biology, or genetics. Racial categories were created as a social and political construct to be used as a tool to differentiate and determine power relations. These socially constructed categories have changed and continue to change over time.

*Racism:* A historically rooted system of advantage based on racial categories that has been institutionalized over time and operates to the advantage of Whites in the United States and perpetually disadvantages people of color. Racism is different from prejudice, hatred, and discrimination. Racism involves one group having power to carry out systematic discrimination through the institutional policies and practices of the society.



## CONCEPT LIST FOR COMMON UNDERSTANDING

*Racist Policy:* A racist policy is any measure that produces or sustains racial inequity between or among racial groups. Policies are written and unwritten laws, rules, procedures, processes, regulations, and guidelines that govern people. There is no such thing as a nonracist or race-neutral policy. Every policy in every institution in every community in every nation is producing or sustaining either racial inequity or equity between racial groups. Racist policies are also expressed through other terms, such as structural racism or systemic racism. Racism itself is institutional, structural, and systemic.

*Systemic Racism:* This is an interlocking and reciprocal relationship between the individual, institutional, and structural levels that function as a system of racism. These various levels of racism operate together in a lockstep model and function together as a whole system. These levels are

- Individual (within interactions between people)
- Institutional (within institutions and systems of power)
- Structural or societal (among institutions and across society)

\*Sources from which these definitions were modified are included in the References section.

## Participants

- Aber: Community organizer leading a sanctuary city initiative in New York whose father was deported when she was 16.
- Khadega: An 18-year-old Sudanese immigrant living in Michigan who feels compelled to advocate for her community and struggles to overcome society's expectations of how she should live her life.
- Ameena: A civil rights lawyer in California and a mother who grapples with the need to care for her three young children and to fight for change.



**THE FILM: KEY ISSUES**

*An Act of Worship* is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people who want to explore the following topics:

- Religious diversity
- Youth development
- Racism
- U.S. history
- Hate crimes
- Islamophobia and anti-Muslim bias



## ACTS OF WORSHIP

*Allahu Akbar*. God is greater. This phrase is an important part of Muslim devotional life. Muslims hear this statement when they are born. It is also part of the call to prayer, the *ad-haan*, that they may hear on a daily basis.

The phrase is also incomplete. It is an undefined comparison. It does not indicate what God is greater than. Muslims believe that is because God is greater than anything we can imagine. The phrase is also an invitation to Muslims to engage in worship as part of an ongoing, incomplete conversation with God. Muslim is a noun, but one that contains a verb. It means “one who submits.” In Islam, submitting to God is a struggle and an ongoing process.

Because submitting to God is an ongoing process for Muslims, they have developed a range of worship practices, from the formal five cycles of salah/namaz, to qawwali, a devotional style of singing from South Asia, to whirling, often associated with Turkey, to the Grand Magal of Touba, an annual pilgrimage to Senegal, and to the wayang, shadow plays of Indonesia.

Muslims are not religious beings divorced from the rest of the world. Like all religions, Islam is embedded in the world and impacted by it. Muslims make contributions to history, and those contributions are an ongoing process as well.

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## MUSLIMS IN THE UNITED STATES

There is a long history of Muslims in what would eventually become the United States. Most of the enslaved people who were brought to North America were from regions in West Africa that had significant Muslim populations. Therefore, we suspect that the first Muslims in what would be the United States were brought there in 1619. We have more reliable records later, confirming significant numbers of enslaved people were Muslim, up to 12 percent of the enslaved population.

These enslaved people had a significant impact on the building of the United States, both literally and metaphorically. Their knowledge and culture survive in Southern cuisine, instruments like the banjo, and their descendants. In addition to the sounds of West Africa, enslaved Muslims brought the sounds of being Muslim, including the *adhaan*, the call to prayer, with them. These sounds and musical structures contributed to the rise of spirituals, blues, and jazz.

The next large group of Muslims to arrive in the United States arrived in the late 19th century. Many Arabs from the Levantine region of the Ottoman Empire, mostly Christian, started to settle here. About 10 percent of this population was Muslim, and they settled in the Midwest. They established some of the oldest surviving mosques in the country, including one in Ross, North Dakota, and another in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

This migration coincided with the rise of American Orientalism, a cultural movement that incorporated elements from the Muslim world, including Arab, Persian, and South Asian regions. The Shriners, a U.S. fraternal organization, drew heavily on these motifs in creating rituals and designing lodges. Many Shriners lodges have been repurposed and are still in use; they include the Fox Theater in Atlanta, Georgia, the New York City Center, the Mosque Theater in Richmond, Virginia, and the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles.

In the early 20th century, interest in Islam grew among members of African-American communities. The formation of communities like the Moorish Science Temple and the Nation of Islam demonstrates the interest in lost histories and debates about U.S. belonging that would continue to impact Muslim communities in later periods. During this time, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) was also recording histories of African Americans that we now read as revealing a long history of transmission of Islam from enslaved Muslims to the present day.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The next large-scale migration of Muslims to the United States came in 1965, with a significant change in U.S. immigration law. This change allowed for professional preference, which gave engineers, doctors, nurses, and students in these and related fields an opportunity to migrate to the United States. This preference gave rise to the myth of the “model minority,” or that Asians were inherently good in these professional areas. The myth is racist toward Asians and was used as a way to be racist against Black people in this country, who were unfavorably compared to Asians.

This attempt at racial division ignored the long history of connections between Black and Asian communities in the United States. These include connections fostered by Muhammad Sadiq (1872–1957), who came to the United States from South Asia in the early part of the 20th century and worked for racial integration, and Dusé Mohamed Ali (1866–1945), a Sudanese-Egyptian thinker who worked closely with Marcus Garvey (1887–1940) on issues of racial justice.

Following the Iranian Revolution, which ended in 1979, explicitly racist and Islamophobic language and actions were used against Muslims. Although African Americans are the largest racial group of Muslims in the United States, popular understandings and depictions of Muslims turned to brown men, whether from Iran, Arab nations, or South Asia. This reduction of identity was exacerbated after the events of 9/11. Muslims were racialized. This means they were treated as a monolithic community, and that community was perceived as being of similar racial and ethnic background, even though Muslims are not a race. This is the backdrop for the stories of Aber, Khadega, and Ameena.

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## STORIES OF HOME

### *Aber and Family Longing*

Aber Kawas is a woman of Palestinian descent whose father is denied entry into the United States. One of the primary stressors for Aber is whether her father will be granted permission to enter the country for her wedding.

Her father is caught up in complex immigration laws that are often used punitively. Advocates for this usage of the laws argue that migrants to this country should be treated criminally unless proven otherwise, a position often at odds with both U.S. Constitutional considerations and U.S. law. Opponents of this position argue that neither immigration nor asylum seeking are criminal offenses.

The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act was one of the first laws affirming immigration to the United States. Earlier laws, like the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882), the Immigration Act (1917), and the Immigration Act of 1924, were focused on only allowing immigration of people from Europe; these laws were generally exclusionary. The 1965 act did broaden the pool of people allowed to immigrate to the country, but it also applied what was known as professional preference, so that immigrants had to have higher-level degrees in certain fields or be in school working toward those degrees to be allowed entry. Further immigration laws in the 1980s allowed sponsorship of people in other professions and with different educational backgrounds.

In 2016, the United States was introduced to the idea of a “Muslim ban,” a term used to describe then President Trump’s plan to exclude people from several countries that were predominantly Muslim. The phrase came from Trump’s stated intent to exclude Muslims, but the ban itself was crafted in such a way as to try to avoid violating the U.S. Constitution. It reflected a confluence of various understandings of the purpose of immigration law, including racial preferences, religious bias, and criminalizing legal behavior.

Aber’s story is also a story of migration. Immigrants often have a sense of leaving something behind even as they make a new home. The children of immigrants, like Aber, are often caught between the nostalgia of their parents for a place they may not know and the familiarity of the United States. Aber, however, is missing her father. She experiences not the memory of things gone, but a longing for family reunification.

Her family’s story is put into sharp relief against the broader story of Palestinians in the United States. Many Palestinians in diaspora are there because of the loss of their homeland and forcible expulsion from their homes. While not a dominant theme of Aber’s story, the layers of ongoing loss are always present.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION*****Khadega and Balance***

Khadega is a young person trying to figure out who she is, including how to balance all her commitments. As we see in the film, she is a student, an employee, an activist, a politician, and a daughter. She struggles with the physical demands this places on her, as she misses things and cannot spend time with her mother. She is mentally taxed, as she does not know how to manage it all, though she does ask for help at one point. We do not see a lot of her religious life, but we can surmise that she is juggling her religious practice with everything else.

Khadega's story highlights two separate sets of social pressures. The first set consists of the increasing expectations we place on children to excel at all things. To get into college, students need good grades, good test scores, and leadership positions in activities, but they cannot be too studious, or they risk being seen as not socially well-rounded. These expectations are often accentuated in marginalized communities, as members see these as important markers of success and a way out of marginalization.

In Khadega's case, the normal pressures of youth are exacerbated by juggling multiple marginalized identities. Members of communities that are marginalized carry the burden of having to explain themselves and are often subject to legal, social, and political forces that require them to demonstrate constantly that they "belong." Some of Khadega's work and activism may be the result of these sorts of pressures. She is Black, a woman, and visibly Muslim. She must constantly navigate these identities and the ways they are marginalized individually and collectively.

An important part of Khadega's story is her search for support and mental health resources. One of the questions that emerges is how well-resourced support services for children and youth are. Ultimately, that is part of a larger question about whether our society is properly structured for children and adults to find balance in their lives.



### ***Ameena and the Future***

At a different point in her life than the other two subjects, South Asian American Ameena is a pregnant civil rights attorney. Like Khadega, she feels the tension between work and family life and is constrained by the social and legal pressures of being a brown, visibly Muslim woman. She protests and organizes against the “Muslim ban,” while also helping individual Muslims with their cases.

Her work is shaped by years of legal suspicion of the American Muslim community, the structures of which were adapted from the legal disenfranchisement of African-American communities. COINTELPRO was a federal surveillance and intelligence manufacturing program that targeted Black communities and organizations. After the Iranian Revolution, some of its strategies began to be deployed against American Muslim communities, and after 9/11, an evolution of the program was deployed against American Muslims on a larger scale.

Federal agents were deployed to encourage Muslims to commit acts of violence, and then when the communities these agents had infiltrated reported them to authorities, the original agents were often arrested by other federal agents. Local police departments began surveying houses of worship and sending undercover agents into them, and in one infamous instance the NYPD created a list of restaurants that Muslims frequented. These actions eroded trust with law enforcement and within communities. Muslim students no longer felt free to practice their religion on college campuses, especially after stories of their peers being forced to spy on them came to light.

Ameena is thinking not only of the crisis of the moment, but of the crises of the past, and of the potential crises of the future related to civil rights. The fact that one community has had its rights violated does not mean that other communities should suffer the same fate.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

## ACTS OF WORSHIP, ACT II

*Allahu akbar*, God is greater. All the main subjects of this film identify as Muslim, and they turn to their religion in different ways. Many of the voices we hear in the film also speak of being a Muslim. Yet, for a film called *An Act of Worship*, we see very little in the way of formal Muslim worship life. The film forces us to confront stereotypes of Muslims as being interested only in formal religion. It shows us that fighting for justice is also an act of worship. It also forces us to consider what it means to be Muslim when someone places that label on you and requires you to perform it publicly, but then punishes you for being religious.

*An Act of Worship* is very much about the religious life of Muslims in the United States and how it is both more than what most viewers expect and less than what it could be. It reflects the diversity of Muslims in the United States, and how those diverse Muslims live out their own understandings of Islam, driven by social and political pressures. Religion is always shaped by the world, and for Muslims in the United States, the situation is no different than it is for any other religion in any place in the world.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen or pose a general question (examples below) and give people some time to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion to the entire group.

- What general emotions are you feeling after watching this film?
- What parts of the film are especially difficult to digest? Why?
- What questions or statements might you want to ask or say to any of the key participants?
- What are some things you admire about each person in the film? What lessons did they teach you?

### Starting the Conversation

*NOTE TO FACILITATORS: You may choose to transition from screening to discussion by selecting the following activity, questions, or a combination of both. We encourage you to select the questions and activities you'd like to use during your facilitation ahead of time.*

1. The film opens with people off-camera speaking in English. The video shows signs in both English and Arabic. What is the feeling that is created by focusing on bilingual posters? Does it indicate that Muslims (Arabic) are American (English)? Or does it indicate that Muslims are different from Americans?
  - a. Do you wonder why Arabic is associated with Muslims when Arabs are only about 20 percent of the worldwide Muslim population?
2. Young people are asked at the beginning of the film about experiences that made them uncomfortable as a way to set the tone for what comes next.
  - a. What is a moment when you have felt uncomfortable?
  - b. Has there been a moment when you've intentionally made someone feel uncomfortable? Why?
3. One young person says that they experienced racism, but that they were called the wrong race. This conflation reveals that we expect Muslims to look a certain way and connect that look with a particular race. What race is most closely connected with Muslims? Why do you think that is? Do we know what race Muslims in the United States are?
4. There is a sequence of still images of Muslims smiling. They are different races, genders, and ages. How did that sequence make you feel? Why do you think it was important to show those images? Are Muslims allowed to have a full range of emotions?
  - a. Are Muslims allowed to grieve for 9/11? Or because of being assigned collective guilt for that day, are they not allowed to grieve?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

5. Teachers play an important role in disciplining student identities. One teacher asks young sisters, “Why don’t you stop being so different?” Another changes a student’s name from Farooq to Jimmy without the student’s permission. How do you think these comments make the students feel? How do you support teachers in dealing with students who are different from what they are used to?
6. At one point, Islam is described as the religion of the devil. How do we determine what is a religion? What is an acceptable religion? Who decides?
7. The tools of Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) are mentioned repeatedly in the film. What is the purpose of CVE? Does it imply an entire community is suspect? Or is it a system to make an entire community suspect? Why is CVE not used against groups like White nationalists who commit most acts of terrorism in the United States?
8. Khadega experiences racism in both Saudi Arabia and the United States. What does that reveal to us about anti-Black racism? Can non-White people be racist? Can non-White people in the United States be racist?
9. Some of the interviewees point to Barack Obama’s election as a hopeful point in U.S. history. Can one event change a cultural narrative of who belongs in this country and who doesn’t?
10. Obama makes a speech in Cairo talking about relations between the “United States and Muslims around the world” and saying that “America and Islam are not exclusive.” Yet, even in that framing, he seems to differentiate between being American and being Muslim. How could he have framed his language to offer a more inclusive definition of what it means to be American?

## POST-SCREENING ACTIVITIES FOR HEALING AND CONNECTION

### NOTE TO FACILITATORS:

*We encourage you, ahead of screening, to thoughtfully prepare any space you are going to be inviting people into for healing activities. Ideas can include burning a comforting incense or candle, having soft music playing in the background, or hosting this portion of the post-screening dialogue outside in nature. All of these activities are designed to be done with participants in a circle facing one another.*

### SHOW AND TELL ACTIVITY

NOTE: All participants will need paper and color pencils, pens, or markers.

#### STEP ONE:

Ask each participant to write the name of a person, place, or thing special to them and that is not currently a part of their life.

#### STEP TWO:

Ask each participant to close their eyes (if they are comfortable) and spend a few quiet moments reflecting in their mind on why that person, place, or thing is special. Is it connected to a memory, a past, or a history? Is it something you aspire toward? Someone you miss?

#### STEP THREE:

Ask each participant to draw a creative representation of the feelings that emerged for them as they quietly reflected on their significant person, place, or thing. Remind participants to focus on feelings and offer color markers, pens, or pencils so they are able to associate freely however they'd like.

#### STEP FOUR:

Ask participants to look at their drawings and to consider how their images reflect longing. Tell them to recall Aber and her family's feelings. Ask them if Aber's story helps them connect with their own feelings of longing.

#### STEP FIVE:

In this step you'll ask participants to sit with the feeling of longing and work to discover feelings of warmth, comfort, joy, or a happy moment from their past that is rooted in this longing. Remind participants that we long for something or grieve something because we loved. Ask participants to allow both the longing and the joy or warmth. Instruct them to write a short description of this experience that moves from the feeling of longing but arrives in the space of warmth, comfort, or joy. We will focus on the joy in the sharing portion, but allow room for expression of longing as well.

## POST-SCREENING ACTIVITIES FOR HEALING AND CONNECTION

### STEP SIX:

Invite participants to volunteer to share their creations. Ask them to show what they created and share a little of the significance and the connection to longing.

### NORMALIZING DIFFERENCE ACTIVITY

#### NOTE TO FACILITATORS:

*Each time you ask participants to engage in writing or reflection, consider playing soft music and letting them know how long they will have to write each time. Remind them that there is no right or wrong—this is an activity that is focused on deepened understanding and curiosity.*

“It’s not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, celebrate, and accept those differences.”

— Audre Lorde

Aber says that the normal teen is someone we imagine in our heads, but as we all know, “normal” is impossible to define, and what we come to imagine as normal can be more of a burden than a guide. In this activity we are going to begin by imagining characteristics or traits of a “normal” teenager. Then we are going to focus on recognizing, celebrating, and accepting those differences as we co-create a new vision of “normal.”

### STEP ONE:

Ask participants to freewrite responses to the following questions in a journal or on paper provided by the facilitator:

What work does “normal” do?

How does it feel to be normal? How does it feel not to be normal?

Why does normal have the power to make us feel one way or another?

What does aspiring to be “normal” motivate many people to do?

### STEP TWO:

Ask participants to reflect on a time in their lives when they didn’t feel “normal” or weren’t doing something the “normal” way. Have them write down that thing or situation.

### STEP THREE:

Now that they have identified times in their lives when they didn’t feel “normal,” invite them to think about why they didn’t feel “normal” and what “normal” would have looked like. Have each draw a line down the middle of their journal page/piece of paper. On the left,

## POST-SCREENING ACTIVITIES FOR HEALING AND CONNECTION

ask them to write “What I Thought Was Normal.” On the right side each should write their name.

Now ask them to list in the left column what would have been “normal,” and to write in the right column about themselves and what about them was different. Here is an example:

<u>“What I Thought Was Normal”</u>	<u>Audre (aka: me)</u>
People at camp had a mom and a dad.	Audre had two moms.

### STEP FOUR:

Once you’ve given everyone 5 to 10 minutes to reflect on this, ask each participant to fold their paper in half along the line down the center of the page so that all they can see is the column with their name at the top.

### STEP FIVE:

Take a few minutes for everyone to share how it felt to remember those moments or experiences when they didn’t feel “normal.” Ask them if they, like Khadega, were made to work twice or three times as hard because they didn’t fit into someone else’s idea of “normal.”

Ask them, “In what ways can ideas of ‘normal’ become really oppressive?” Guide them to consider the ways that dominant social and cultural ideas of “normal” have been defined through standards that are based on Whiteness and masculine/patriarchal terms. Ask them to consider why these norms still hold so much power and what we/they can do to redefine these standards, thus redefining what we view as “normal.”

### STEP SIX:

Instruct participants, “Looking only at the column with your name, write a story or short description of all the great things the person described in that column could teach you. Continue to write in the third person as you describe what types of insight, wisdom, and gifts that person can contribute to the world.” *Feel free to conclude the activity by asking participants how writing these stories made them feel.*

## POST-SCREENING ACTIVITIES FOR HEALING AND CONNECTION

### CHANGING WHAT YOU CAN ACTIVITY

One of the most common tropes in time travel stories is that you shouldn't change anything in the past because it can have a dramatic effect in the present. Another way to consider that warning is as a promise that the small things we do today can have a large impact on the future. The following steps will guide you through an activity with the goal of clarifying individual and collective power to engender larger change.

#### STEP ONE:

Ask participants to think of one thing they would like to see change in the United States.

#### STEP TWO:

Discuss as a group what participants have decided they would like to see change.

#### STEP THREE:

Ask participants to imagine a future in the United States and what they would like to see in that future. For instance, what do they envision in their schools, communities, states, cities, homes in an imagined future that is centered on justice? They should use the previous group discussion to reflect and potentially guide their imagination and thinking.

#### STEP FOUR:

Ask participants to reflect on how society would be impacted if what they imagined became a reality. Specifically, have participants think about how the United States would look in 20 years or in 30 years if their change took place. Participants may reflect on their own or share as a group.

#### STEP FIVE:

As a group, invite participants to discuss concrete steps they can take as individuals in the next calendar year to create the change they hope to see in 20 or 30 years.



[99 Clay Vessels: The Muslim Women Storytelling Project](#): This project grew out of a conversation between friends to become a multilayered healing resource for Muslim women activists, advocates, and creatives who have endured, overcome, and transformed bigotry to nourish the work they do now.

[ACLU, “Discrimination Against Muslim Women Fact Sheet.”](#) This fact sheet includes information about the legal rights of Muslim women to wear hijabs and scenarios in which these rights have been infringed upon.

[Center for Intercultural Dialogue](#): This organization facilitates intercultural dialogue by helping scholars learn about the work of international peers, locate researchers with similar interests in other countries, and collaborate for research purposes.

[Challenge Islamophobia](#): This project consists of a series of lessons that frame Islamophobia as a form of racism that is a product of Western imperialism.

[Institute for Social Policy and Understanding](#): This group envisions an America where Muslims are thriving and equal. Its work strengthens Muslim communities and equips those working toward full and equitable inclusion with solution-seeking research.

[Kendi, Ibram X. How to Be an Antiracist](#): This 2019 book challenges us to think about what an antiracist society might look like and how we can play an active role in building it.

[Kysia, Alison. Zinn Education Project, “A People’s History of Muslims in the United States:”](#) This article offers an overview of the history of Muslims in the United States with a discussion of how textbooks perpetuate a narrow view of Islam.

[Mapping Muslims: NYPD Spying and Its Impact on American Muslims](#): A study conducted by CUNY School of Law details the NYPD surveillance program that unlawfully mapped, monitored, and analyzed the daily life of American Muslims in New York City from 2001 to 2016.

[Muslim Advocates](#): A national civil rights organization works in the courts, in the halls of power, and in communities to halt bigotry in its tracks. Goals include ensuring that American Muslims have a seat at the table with expert representation so that all Americans may live free from hate and discrimination.

[Muslim Girl](#): This website stems from the work of Amani al-Khatahtbeh, an Arab-American woman who began writing to express her frustration with growing up with Islamophobia

in New Jersey.

[Muslims in Brooklyn](#): A collection of curated oral history clips reflects diverse Muslim voices. The website contains lesson plans that can be used in K-12 or higher education.

[Racial Equity Tools: “Intersectionality Resources and Tools:”](#) A nuanced list of resources that educate and take deeper dives into different points of intersecting identities.

[Right to Be](#): This platform provides training programs for individuals, businesses, organizations, schools, and colleges to respond to, intervene in, and heal from harassment.

[Sapelo Square](#): The vision of Sapelo Square is “to be a source of expert content on Black Muslims and the issues that impact their lives as Black people and as Muslims.”

[Western States Center, “Confronting White Nationalism in Schools:”](#) This resource includes a toolkit for parents, students, teachers, school administrators, and the wider community with strategies to confront instances of White nationalism in schools.



## CREDITS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



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Hussein Rashid, PhD, is a scholar specializing in Muslims in U.S. popular culture and Shi'i justice theologies. He is also founder of a consultancy, islamicate, L3C, focusing on religious literacy. His books include *Ms. Marvel's America: No Normal* (co-edited with Jessica Baldanzi), *Muslims in North America* (co-edited with Huma Mohibullah), forthcoming *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Muslims and Popular Culture* (co-edited with Kristian Petersen), *Teaching Critical Religious Studies* (co-edited with Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand and Beverley McGuire), and *Muslims in the U.S.* (co-authored with Precious Rasheeda Muhammad). He works with cultural institutions in crafting narratives around religion.

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