

**POV**

**Community  
Engagement &  
Education**

DISCUSSION GUIDE



**COMING HOME**

a film by Naim Naif & Margot Bowman

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



## COMING HOME

*Coming Home* features a collective of Palestinian-American dancers living in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn as they use Dabka, a dance from their homeland, to connect with their community and back home.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

2	Film Summary
3	Using this Guide
4	The Film
5	Background Information
7	Sources
8	Discussion Prompts
10	Closing Question/Activity
11	Taking Action
12	Resources
13	Credits & Acknowledgments

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 *Coming Home* 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 viewpoints and listening actively.

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/>.

## KEY PARTICIPANTS

- Amer Abdelrasoul - Palestinian-American Founder of Freedom Dabka Group, Bay Ridge Resident
- Participants/Dancers of Freedom Dabka Group
- The Abdelrasoul family

## KEY ISSUES

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

- Middle Eastern Cultural Dance
- Palestinian Diaspora
- Culture and History of Brooklyn
- Dabka
- Activism through dance

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

*“[Freedom Dabka Group] is where I learned about my culture, how to really treat people, and how to show respect and how to earn respect.”*

-Dancer, Freedom Dabka Group

### DABKA

Dabka (also spelled dabke) is a traditional dance of Arab regions; including Palestine. It originated on the Mediterranean coast in the Levantine region. Dabka is usually performed in a line and includes steps and hops as seen in *Coming Home*. The folkloric origins of the dance trace back to a time when people of the region built their homes with tree branches and mud, which would crack during severe weather. Villagers would join one another to stomp the cracks out of the roof, engendering the process with a fun, communal ritual that has outlasted the problem for which it was created. For Palistinians, Dabka has become much more than a tradition, and now symbolizes the continued struggle for freedom from Israeli occupation. For the young people in the film, Dabka is also a way to cultivate and sustain their connections to Palestine.

### ISRAELI OCCUPATION OF PALESTINE

Israel began occupation of Palestine in 1967 after the “Six Day War ” when Israeli troops captured the West Bank. Currently, Israel occupies the Gaza Strip and West Bank regions of Palestine and restricts nearly 61% of the region from Palestinian use. There are about 4.8 million Palestinians living in the Israeli controlled regions and 5.6 million registered as refugees with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency as of December 2020. To date it is the longest held illegal occupation of contested lands recognised by the United Nations International Court of Justice. In the fifty plus years since illegally claiming the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Israel has forcibly removed Palestineans from their land through military force, ethnic cleansing , land seizures and restrictions to basic human needs such as clean water and freedom of movement.

### BAY RIDGE AND PALESTINIAN DIASPORA

*“I’m just doing my part in the city to represent the Palestinian culture.”*

- Dancer, Freedom Dabka Group

Bay Ridge is a neighborhood in Brooklyn, NY and has the largest population of Arab-

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Americans in New York City. Since the mid-2010s Bay Ridge has become a hub of Arab-American activism in response to local, national, and global anti-muslim violence and the ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestine. Protests in Bay Ridge against Israeli occupation and violence have gained global attention due to their large turnout and media coverage.

**FREE, FREE PALESTINE**

*“Palestinian culture is always gonna live. No matter what happens.”*

Film Participant

Free Palestine is a song by Palestinian rapper Ambassador MC released in 2014. The chorus of the song “Free Free Palestine” has become a common anthem at demonstrations around the world against the Israeli occupation of Palestine. The Free Palestine Movement is a human rights organization that advocates for the safety and well-being of Palestinians, as stated on their website, they seek to, “defend and advocate for the human rights of all Palestinians, and in particular the right of access to all of Palestine for Palestinians.”

Beals, Monique and Madison Muller. "Free Free Palestine." *South Side Weekly*, March 2021. <https://southsideweekly.com/free-free-palestine/>.

"Home." *Free Palestine Movement*. <https://freepalestinemovement.org/>.

"Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory illegal: UN rights commission" *United Nations*, October 2022. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/10/1129722>.

Sellman, Johanna. "More than Just a Dance: Dabke." *sellman13s Blog*, May 1, 2021. <https://u.osu.edu/sellman.13/2021/05/01/more-than-just-a-dance-dabke/>.

"UNRWA in Figures" *United Nations Relief and Works Agency*. June 2021. [https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/unrwa\\_in\\_figures\\_2021\\_eng.pdf](https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/unrwa_in_figures_2021_eng.pdf).

Weill, Sharon. "The judicial arm of the occupation: the Israeli military courts in the occupied territories". *International Review of the Red Cross* 89, no. 866 (2017): 395-418.

"In Facts and Figures." *United Nations: The Question of Palestine*. N.D. <https://www.un.org/unispal/in-facts-and-figures/>.



## STARTING THE CONVERSATION

Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. You could pose a general question (examples below) and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion. Alternatively, you could ask participants to share their thoughts with a partner before starting a group discussion.

1. What surprised you in the film?
2. What are you curious about in the film?
3. What is one thing you learned from watching this film?
4. Were there any aspects of the film that felt familiar to you or allowed you to feel connected to the people in the film?

## DABKA: CULTURE IN DANCE

A common saying within the Palestinian Diaspora is, “existence is resistance.”

1. How is dance an expression of existence?
2. Do you think dance, or any other embodied practice, can be political? Why or why not?
3. Have you seen other historical dances that have been part of a political movement?
4. How does dancing make you feel? Has dancing, or another form of creative expression, ever helped you feel connected to the community?



**BAY RIDGE, PALESTINIAN BELONGING, and DIASPORA**

Bay Ridge, New York and occupied Palestine might seem like drastically different places. Geographically-speaking, they have very little in common, they have different forms of government and governance; however, many Palestinians are drawn to Bay Ridge because of its familiarity.

1. What makes a new place feel familiar, safe, and or even like home?
2. In what ways is belonging cultivated in Bay Ridge by the people in the film?
3. In what ways might practicing cultural traditions support a sense of belonging across generations?
4. Does your experience with your home relate to theirs? How is it different?
5. How might being forced to leave your home change your relationship to where you live?

**FREE FREE PALESTINE, “EXISTENCE AS RESISTANCE”**

Coming Home offers a glimpse into different forms of creative resistance. The men in the film repeatedly refer to their existence as resistance to occupation, and to Dabka as a tool for enacting creative resistance. In so doing, they create a counter-narrative to the more widely-known narrative of war, displacement, and violence in Gaza and the West Bank.

1. What story do you think the dancers are telling about their existence?
2. How does that narrative change your perspective of the conflict? Of Palestinian people?
3. How is dancing at a demonstration different from marching or speaking?
4. When might it be more effective to dance than to speak?

**CLOSING QUESTION/ACTIVITY**

At the end of your discussion, to help people synthesize what they've experienced and move the focus from dialogue to action steps, you may want to choose one of these questions:

1. How would you take action for your community?
2. What is something you can do in your own neighborhood to help displaced people?
3. What is something you learned from this film and discussion that you'd like to share with others?
4. Who will you share it with?

If the group is having trouble generating their own ideas for next steps, these suggestions can help get things started:

1. Find an event in your area that supports Palestinians and attend with a friend
2. Many people in the Palestinian freedom movement suggest that folks refuse to buy from Israeli companies. Do you know if you purchase items that benefit the Israeli government? If so, would you switch to a different product?
3. The Freedom Dabka Group offers classes and event services. Do you know someone who might benefit from their performance, or could your school (organization etc) bring the group to perform?

Explore content related to Coming Home on the [POV](#) website, where you'll also find other relevant features, shorts and digital projects. Additionally, explore the following social movements, non-profits, and organizations for more perspectives and opportunities to engage.

[Radio Free Bay Ridge](#) is a podcast focused on activism in Bay Ridge, New York that often covers activism and events related to Palestinian sovereignty.

[Bay Ridge for Social Justice](#) is a social justice organization in Bay Ridge, New York that facilitates demonstrations and other events in support of freeing Palestine and other social justice projects

[Free Palestine Movement](#) is a social justice organization dedicated to the sovereignty of Palestinian people and the end of Israeli occupation in Palestine.

## DISCUSSION GUIDE AUTHOR

CHRISTINE GWILLIM, PHD

Christine Gwillim is a performance studies scholar and artist. Her work focuses on transnational exchange through performing arts curation. She writes about art and performance for academic and general audiences. Her work has appeared in *Performance Matters*, *Sightlines*, and *Glasstire* among others, and she has been a writer in residence for Fusebox festival, Time-Based Art Festival at Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, Concept Animals, and Deeply Fascinating. As a teaching artist and social practitioner she has worked with the High Museum and Alliance Theatre, the Blanton Museum of Art, the Visual Art Center, The Kitchen, Moiety, and universities throughout the United States. She holds a PhD in performance studies from the University of Texas at Austin with certificates in LGBTQ+ studies, Museum Studies, and Integrated Behavioral Health.



### Discussion Guide Producers

Courtney B. Cook, Phd | Education Manager, POV  
Jordan Thomas | Education Assistant, POV

### Thanks to those who reviewed and contributed to this resource:

Natalie Danford, Copyeditor  
Meghan Doherty, Coming Home Producer