

"Funny and playful... Beautifully written and directed... Made with a keen eye and a light touch, *Amreeka* excels at finding the warmth and humanity in a difficult situation."

Kenneth Turan, LOS ANGELES TIMES

"Terrific... Universal in every single instance."

Kirk Honeycutt, THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

"...there's an authenticity to *Amreeka* that can't be faked... a bright warmth of storytelling that announces the filmmaker as a talent to watch."

Lisa Schwarzbaum, ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

"A lovely surprise... a fine comedy."

Scott Foundas, LA WEEKLY

# AMREEKA

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC ENTERTAINMENT PRESENTS A NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC/IMAGENATION ABU DHABI RELEASE IN ASSOCIATION WITH LEVANTINE ENTERTAINMENT A FIRST GENERATION FILMS PRODUCTION  
AN ALCANA PICTURES/QUINTAL GAL PICTURES/EAGLE VISION MEDIA GROUP PRODUCTION PRODUCED IN ASSOCIATION WITH AMANTOBA FILM & MUSIC, BOTANA STUDIOS and SHOROTIME ARABIA A FILM BY CHERIEN DABIS  
NISREEN FAJOUR FAYM ABRASS ALIA SHAHWAT MELKAR MUALLEM JOSEPH ZIEGLER YOUSSEF ABU WARDIA "AMREEKA" WITH ELLEN LONG MARSHALL and MARIA E. NELSON MUSIC BY KAREEM ROUSTON COSTUME DESIGNER DOUG BERNEHM  
EDITED BY KEITH BEAMAN DESIGNER PATRICIA HENDERSON PRODUCTION DESIGNER ADAM LEROUX DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY TOBIAS DATUM EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS ALICIA SAMIS CHERIEN DABIS GREGORY KEEVER PRODUCED BY LIZ JARVIS AL-ZAIN AL-SABAHI  
WRITTEN BY PAUL BARKIN PRODUCED BY CHRISTINA POUVESAN DIRECTED BY CHERIEN DABIS

PG-13 PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED  
SOME MATERIAL MAY BE INAPPROPRIATE FOR CHILDREN UNDER 13  
BRIEF DRUG USE INVOLVING TEENS AND SOME LANGUAGE

magenation  
REALIZES

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC  
ENTERTAINMENT

Life's best adventures are journeys  
of the heart.



IN THEATERS SEPTEMBER 2009

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

Developed by Heartland Truly Moving Pictures to accompany *Amreeka*, recipient of the Truly Moving Picture Award, an honored distinction given to films that unlock the vast potential of the human spirit and enable us to view stories that display courage, integrity and hope, taking entertainment to a higher level.

[TrulyMovingPictures.org](http://TrulyMovingPictures.org)

[Amreeka.com](http://Amreeka.com)



# AMREEKA

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>Discussion Points</b>	
Setting up the Story.....	3
Embracing an Identity .....	4
Refuting Stereotypes and Prejudice .....	5
<b>Moving Moments</b> .....	6



Amreeka © 2009 National Geographic Entertainment

# AMREEKA

## One Film Can

Heartland Truly Moving Pictures, a non-profit organization, recognizes and honors filmmakers whose work explores the human journey by expressing hope and respect for the positive values of life. We believe that one film can move us to laughter, to tears, or to make a difference. *Amreeka* is a film that demonstrates that **One Film Can**.

## Synopsis

*Amreeka* chronicles the adventures of Muna, a single mother who leaves the West Bank with Fadi, her teenage son, with dreams of an exciting future in the promised land of small town Illinois. In America, as her son navigates high school hallways the way he used to move through military checkpoints, the indomitable Muna scrambles together a new life cooking up falafel burgers as well as hamburgers at the local White Castle.

Told with heartfelt humor by writer-director Cherien Dabis in her feature film debut, *Amreeka* is a universal journey into the lives of a family of immigrants and first-generation teenagers caught between their heritage and the new world in which they now live and the bittersweet search for a place to call home.

*Amreeka* recalls Dabis' family's memories of their lives in rural America during the first Iraq War. The film stars Haifa-trained actress Nisreen Faour as Muna, and Melkar Muallen plays her 16-year-old son, Fadi. Also in the cast are Hiam Abbass, Alia Shawkat, Yussef Abu-Warda and Joseph Ziegler. Written and directed by Cherien Dabis, *Amreeka* was produced by Christina Piovesan and Paul Barkin. Alicia Sams, Dabis and Gregory Keever were executive producers; Liz Jarvis and Al-Zain Al-Sabah were co-producers.

National Geographic Entertainment released *Amreeka* in September 2009. *Amreeka* is a First Generation Films-Alcina Pictures-Buffalo Gal Pictures/Eagle Vision Media Group Production, presented by E1 Entertainment in association with Levantine Entertainment, Manitoba Film & Music, Rotana Studios and Showtime Arabia.

# AMREEKA

## Setting up the Story

Muna and Fadi live in the West Bank and immigrate to America in 1991 at the start of the the first Iraq War. This move also corresponds to the beginning of intense American media coverage on the war. This causes Muna and Fadi to not only have to deal with a new place, but also with intense scrutiny as people begin to attach Muna and her family's identity to extremist behavior, rather than identify with them as people.

*Amreeka* is a feature film that is rooted in a historical context and is based on events in writer/director Cherien Dabis' experience growing up in a small Ohio town after her family moved to America from Jordan.

In the "Production Notes for *Amreeka*," courtesy of National Geographic Entertainment, Dabis frames the context for the movie by stating, "When 9/11 happened, the U.S. was invading Iraq again, history was repeating itself," she says. "There was, and still is, incredible suspicion and fear of Arabs, even if they're American. That was when I realized that it was time to sit down and write my version of the coming-to-America story."

**Read Tribeca Film Festival's interview with Cherien Dabis to learn more about her inspiration for the film here:**

[www.amreeka.com/html/ps.html](http://www.amreeka.com/html/ps.html)

To get a better context of the West Bank and the area in which Muna and Fadi were living at the start of the film, do some research on the first Iraq War. Focus not only on what was going on in the Middle East at the time, but also do some research to to learn more about the United State's involvement.

Be certain to look at all perspectives of the conflict in your research.

**Here is a reference to get to you started:**

"The Gulf War: An In-depth Examination of the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf Crisis"  
[www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf)

## Discussion Points

- After learning more about Dabis' inspiration for *Amreeka*, do you view the film any differently? Why?
- After learning more about the first Iraq War, do you understand the context of the film more fully? Does understanding the historical context give you a different appreciation of Muna and Fadi's experience?

# AMREEKA

## Embracing Your Identity

The trailer for *Amreeka* flashes a message that reads, “You can do anything, except fit in. In a changing world you have to hold on to who you are.”

Muna and Fadi embody the experience that many immigrants face as they learn to assimilate to a new culture while still retaining their own identity.

Use the points below to explore the universality of Muna and Fadi’s experience and how people everywhere struggle to assimilate.

## Discussion Points

- At one point in *Amreeka*, Salma’s mother expresses that when Salma is in their home, she is in Palestine. What do you think is the significance of Salma’s family building boundaries between the American culture outside of the home and the Palestinian culture within?
- Do you embrace a certain cultural identity with your family that you celebrate in your home, but that you do not embrace as completely outside of your home? Why?
- If you and your family do not celebrate a particular identity, do you know what your cultural heritage is? If not, do some research to discover more about your heritage and the significant aspects of it, and then share with others.

### Here are some links to get you started:

MyHeritage.com  
Ancestry.com  
FamilySearch.org

- Why do you believe people’s cultural identity is sometimes so easily forgotten?
- Why do you believe some people in a nation such as the United States, with its rich history of immigration, are still close-minded about others who immigrate to this country? Survey those around you to understand that everyone in this country, at some point or another in their family’s history, came from a country other than America.

Instruct each person in your group to identify himself or herself, using the following questions until everyone has been identified. It might be surprising how many families haven’t been in the United States for very many generations.

1. Are you the first generation of your family to be in America?
2. Are you the second generation?
3. Are you the third?
4. Are you the fourth? Fifth? Sixth? Continue until everyone has identified himself/herself according to his/her ancestry.

# AMREEKA

## Refuting Stereotypes and Prejudice

Though Dabis was born in Nebraska, she was influenced to write *Amreeka* based on her experiences growing up in Midwest America with a Jordanian father and a Palestinian mother. In the “*Amreeka* Production Notes,” courtesy of National Geographic Entertainment, Dabis says, “We got death threats, and the Secret Service even came to my high school to investigate a rumor that my 17-year-old sister threatened to kill the President.”

Many of the antagonists in *Amreeka* seem to have fear-based prejudices and associate Fadi’s identity with extremist behavior, even though there is no basis for this association.

Use the discussion points below to explore stereotypes and prejudices in the film and in society today.

### Discussion Points

- Have you ever traveled out of the country and experienced prejudices based on your American identity?
- Muna and Fadi move from the West Bank to America and trade military checkpoints for harassment and difficulty finding work. Where do you believe Muna and Fadi experienced greater struggle? Why? What positive aspects did each location bring to Muna and Fadi’s lives? What are the negative aspects of each location?
- Consider the political climate during which the movie is set and today’s political climate. Can you identify with some of the stereotypes perceived by the antagonists in the film? How do you see situations such as this play out in your own school or community?
- People in *Amreeka* harass Fadi and associate him with terrorism. They do so because they believe that because he is an Arab, he is a Muslim. These assumptions are not correct. An Arab is an individual who identifies with Arabic language, culture or ethnicity. Arabs are a race, like Caucasioan or Asian, not a religion.

Do more research if you are interested in developing a greater understanding of the rich and diverse Arabic culture. The University of North Texas Foreign Language Learning Center is a good place to begin. [flc.unt.edu/arabic](http://flc.unt.edu/arabic)

### Take Action

Play your part to refute stereotypes and prejudices you see around you each day. Think of things you can do in your school or community to shed light on issues that are misunderstood so that all people can celebrate their rich cultural identity without fear of harassment.

# AMREEKA

## Moving Moments

*Amreeka* has been honored as a Heartland Truly Moving Picture Award-winning film. This award was created to honor films released theatrically that align with Heartland's mission to recognize and honor filmmakers whose work explores the human journey by artistically expressing hope and respect for the positive values of life.

These award-winning movies are made up of moving and inspiring moments — those moments that cause you to think, see something in your life differently, be inspired to take positive action. It's what makes the movie and its message remain with you well after you've left the theater.

Think about *Amreeka*. What were the moments that stood out to you? How did they make you feel? How will they cause you to think about things differently in the future? Share those moving moments with others at [TrulyMovingPictures.org](http://TrulyMovingPictures.org). Simply login, or create an account if you don't already have one, and search the movie list for *Amreeka*. You can leave your review or comments about this film under the "Review" section.



*Amreeka* © 2009 National Geographic Entertainment