

BULLFROG FILMS PRESENTS...



A Film by ALEXANDRA SHIVA

# THIS IS HOME

*a refugee story*

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

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# Community Screening & Discussion Guide

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## THIS IS HOME

a refugee story

Use your film screening of **THIS IS HOME** as a tool for educating your community about human rights and the refugee experience in the United States. This guide offers some background information, helpful tips & discussion questions for an informative, rewarding screening. **Good Luck!**

### what you'll find inside!

- about the film & filmmaker
- synopsis
- director's statement
- discussion questions



## About the film

**THIS IS HOME** is an intimate portrait of four Syrian refugee families arriving in America and struggling to find their footing. With only eight months of help from the International Rescue Committee to become self-sufficient, they must forge ahead to rebuild their lives in a new home: Baltimore, Maryland. When the newly imposed travel ban adds further questions and complications, their strength and resilience are put to the test. Through humor and heartbreak, this universal story illuminates what it's like to start over, no matter the obstacles.



## About the filmmaker

Alexandra Shiva is an award-winning documentary filmmaker. Her previous work, **HOW TO DANCE IN OHIO**, follows a group of teenagers and young adults on the autism spectrum preparing for an iconic American rite of passage — a Spring Formal. The Peabody Award-winning film premiered at Sundance in 2015 and aired on HBO to great critical acclaim. Alexandra's other documentaries include, **STAGEDOOR** (2006), a film that follows kids through musical theater summer camp in the Catskills, and **BOMBAY EUNUCH** (2001), her directorial debut about a makeshift family of eunuchs struggling to survive in India. Alexandra graduated from Vassar with a BA in Art History.

# ready to watch!

## Ideas and best practices to help make your community screening a success!

**1. Publicize Your Event!** This is the most important step because it not only tells the world what you're up to, but it lets the Bullfrog Community team know what your plans are so we can help you publicize your event. Visit [http://www.bullfrogcommunities.com/this\\_is\\_home](http://www.bullfrogcommunities.com/this_is_home) to register and get the word out about your upcoming screening. You can also email us at [info@bullfrogcommunities.com](mailto:info@bullfrogcommunities.com) if you need help getting started!

**2. Visualize Your Goal!** What do you hope to achieve with your screening? Your goal could be to generate a lively post-film discussion about issues raised in the film, gain support or recruit volunteers for a local grassroots campaign, or raise funds for a group on your campus or in your community. Or, you can simply use the screening to provide an opportunity for your audience to watch and learn together.

**3. Where To Host?** Consider which locations in your area would be ideal for accommodating a community film screening of the size you anticipate: downtown movie theaters, churches and synagogues, town halls, community centers, public libraries, school auditoriums, university and college venues, warehouses at a business and outdoor screenings at parks and playgrounds, and even private homes have been venues for many successful community screenings.

**4. Find A Partner!** Give some thought to who is already working on this issue in your community. Can they help sponsor the event? Spread the word? Speak on a panel discussion after the screening? Some potential partners include: student groups at universities and colleges; a local public or campus library; representatives from local religious congregations or faith-based community groups; local chapters of national/global activist or grassroots organizations; faculty members at nearby universities and colleges; reporters/journalists from local news publications such as newspapers and magazines; local nonprofits; and any community organizations that share goals or views with the film you are screening.

**5. Invite A Guest Speaker!** Guest speakers and panelists are a great way to encourage discussion and debate after a community screening. When people are engaged and thinking about the issues they will stay engaged long after the screening has passed. Contact representatives of local non-profits, faith groups, journalists and reporters from local media outlets, or teachers and professors who have expertise and/or insight into the issues raised by the film, and invite them to attend your screening and participate in a discussion or Q&A session with your audience.

**6. Engage Your Audience!** Use this discussion guide to engage your audience. Included in this guide is a section called Ready to Talk! with a few suggested discussion questions to get the conversation started, and a section called Ready to Act!, — which can be used as a handout — listing additional resources for further investigation about key issues raised in the film.



**7. Spread The Word!** Think about the best methods available to you for publicizing your film screening to people in your community. Sending emails to a contact list, creating event notifications on Facebook, Google+, Eventbrite or an online community calendar, using Twitter to announce your event, and placing screening announcements in local newspapers and newsletters is a good start. In addition to this guide, you can find and download a screening poster and press photos at [http://www.bullfrogcommunities.com/this\\_is\\_home](http://www.bullfrogcommunities.com/this_is_home) that can be used to help publicize your event.

**8. Tell Us How It Went!** Visit [http://www.bullfrogcommunities.com/this\\_is\\_home](http://www.bullfrogcommunities.com/this_is_home) to tell us about your event. Contribute to the film's discussion page to help other student groups, universities, non-profits, congregations and community groups further the discussion and put on successful screening events of their own. Where was your screening held? Who attended? What went well, and what was challenging? What did you discuss? Your feedback will help others to organize their own events, and will energize Bullfrog Communities as a whole.



# Synopsis

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Only twenty-one thousand Syrian refugees out of five million have been accepted into the United States since 2011. *This Is Home* follows four families sent to resettle in Baltimore in 2016. They have just eight months to find jobs, learn English, and become self-sufficient. The clock starts right when they land. For Syrians like Khaldoun, who was tortured and left physically disabled, and children like Mohammad, who suffers from PTSD, their needs are vast and complicated. Halfway through the process, President Trump issues a travel ban on all refugees from Muslim-majority countries, and suddenly their lives, and the safety of loved ones still trapped in Syria, become all the more perilous. With much-needed empathy, the film reveals the inherent decency of a displaced community desperate for help within a country increasingly hostile to principles of inclusion and opportunity. *This Is Home* is the winner of the 2018 Sundance Audience Award: World Cinema Documentary.

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# Director's Statement

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*This Is Home* began when someone involved in refugee resettlement asked me to make a film about refugees in a similar style and tone as my previous film, *How To Dance In Ohio*. I understood immediately why my style of filmmaking would be effective for this subject matter. The approach I took with my previous documentary was to foster connections between film and audience by creating an opportunity for the viewer to be with the subjects, to walk alongside them, rather than looking at them from a distance. Part of the strategy was to stay personal and away from the political.

My approach with *This Is Home* is similar. No expert talking heads or political advocates explaining why you should care or believe one thing or another, but rather direct human connection through vérité and interviews with our subjects. What does it feel like to be uprooted from everything they know and start over, after intense trauma? How does it feel to come from a rich culture and adult life and in some ways, feel like a powerless child, having to learn the details of basic living all over again? What is it like to be a child, trying to develop a sense of rootedness and sense of self, while watching your parents – your role models – struggle with their own sense of identity and belonging?

By bypassing the highly charged political aspects of this enormous crisis (while still allowing for the context) and landing the viewer in the intimate worlds and the drama of everyday life, struggles and triumphs, I hope to pierce the veil of indifference. To find a way in, so that we see all our common humanity and similarities instead of an intense focus on difference.

I believe that people want to connect and care about the current refugee crisis, but that fear, indifference and alienation, borne out of a complete lack of exposure or understanding, stands in the way. Refugees have been reduced to statistics or nameless faceless millions. I think that by focusing in on a few individuals and making the story as personal as possible we can create a bridge to the universal and shed light on a larger issue.

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As the daughter of an Israeli immigrant father, I have a very up close and personal interest and understanding of issues around displacement, alienation, identity and belonging – all the more reason why I wanted to tell this story.

- Alexandra Shiva, Director/Producer

# Discussion Questions

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Below are questions to help begin a discussion following the film. We encourage you to add or amend.

1. How do you feel after watching the film? What are you thinking about? What scenes are most memorable for you? What was most surprising?
2. Did you know about the resettlement process here in the US? How did this film change your perception of what it is like to resettle here?
3. When did your family immigrate to the United States? Can you share a bit about your family's history?
4. When you moved to a new neighborhood or town, what was most helpful to you in settling into that new place?
5. In the film, the Employment teacher says she has to destroy many of the preconceived ideas of the US that refugees come to this country with. What do you think those ideas are? And why?
6. What are some traditional recipes that your family like to cook?
7. In the film, every member of the family played a role in helping adjust to new life in the United States. What various roles do members in your family play in your everyday?
8. What do you think is the hardest part of this transition to a new country? What would be your one piece of advice/encouragement with these families?