

# Madrasa

## Series Guide

### Madrasa

Director: Guri Alfi

Created By: Sayed Kashua

Release Date: 2023

Content Warnings: Mentions of racism, depiction of racist graffiti, depiction of characters experiencing racism, mentions of events in Jerusalem similar to May 2021.



### Accessing the Movie

*Madrasa* has not yet been distributed on major streaming platforms in the United States. If you are interested in bringing this program to your community, please reach out to Miranda Hellmold Stone, Task Force Programs and Operations Associate ([mirandahe@jdc.org](mailto:mirandahe@jdc.org)) to learn how.

### About the Program

This guide provides helpful content for understanding the series and putting it in context. We also recommend reviewing the Task Force on Arab Citizens of Israel and iCenter's worksheet [Exploring the Topics of Arab Citizens and Jewish-Arab Relations in Israel](#) for introductory background information on Arab Citizens of Israel.

# Character List

*Madrasa* focuses on 2 students, Shira and Khaled. The other students in the ensemble cast, as well as their teachers and families, feature prominently as well.

- **Shira** (*Shira Yosef*) - Jewish. She has a romantic relationship with Khaled. She aspires to join Unit 8200, the intelligence unit in the IDF.
- **Khaled** (*Lear Issa*) - Arab. Transfers to the bilingual school after his family moves from Haifa when his father becomes department head at Hadassah hospital. He has a romantic relationship with Shira.
- **Omer/Omar** (*Firas Mana'a*) - Has a Jewish mother and Arab father. His name is pronounced slightly differently in Arabic (Omar) and Hebrew (Omer). Gets scouted for the Beitar Jerusalem Football Club youth team.
- **Manar** (*Valerie Hamaty*) - Arab. She is very smart and aspires for perfect grades.
- **Lubna** (*Lisa Bastuni*) - Arab. She is the only religious student in her class. Lives in Silwan, in East Jerusalem.
- **Gili** (*Emma Alfi Aharon*) - Jewish. Eitan's niece who transfers to the bilingual school.
- **Maor** (*Gal Zak*) - Jewish. He has several part-time jobs.
- **Majdi** (*Amjad Sawah*) - Arab. He is a talented artist who has an unrequited crush on Manar.
- **Iman** (*Yara Zreik*) - Arab. One of the co-teachers for the 11th grade class.
- **Eitan** (*Roi Bar Natan*) - Jewish. One of the co-teachers for the 11th grade class.



## Series Information

- *Madrasa* was created by the influential [screenwriter, novelist, and essayist](#) Sayed Kashua, a Palestinian citizen of Israel. Kashua is known for creating semi-autobiographical TV series [Arab Labor](#), the first primetime Israeli TV series featuring Palestinians speaking Arabic.
- One of the challenges brought up throughout the show is army service. All Jewish citizens and [Druze men](#) are required to serve in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Other Arab citizens are not.
- Language creates barriers to socioeconomic mobility [for many Arab citizens](#). In the first episode, Ali, Khaled's younger brother, expresses nervousness about starting a new school to his mother, as he hasn't learned to speak Hebrew yet.

## Israel's School System



In Israel, [there are 4 public educational streams](#): Secular, religious and ultra-Orthodox schools serving the Jewish sector and Arab schools. Students at schools in the Jewish sector study in Hebrew and can learn Arabic. Students at Arab schools study in Arabic, and Hebrew is taught as a second language.



*Madrasa* takes place at the fictional “Peace School for Bilingual Education” in Jerusalem, where classes are taught in Hebrew and Arabic. The fictional school contains many similarities with the real-life [Hand in Hand school](#) in Jerusalem.



Hand in Hand schools are public schools. Philanthropy and parents' fees supplement government funding. Currently, the Hand in Hand network has 6 schools, serving over 2,000 students.

# Shared Society

The bilingual school in *Madrasa* is an example of a “shared society” program.



Shared society refers to a cohesive and inclusive society where communities with different ethnic, national, and religious backgrounds have equitable access to resources, power, and work in partnership.



It requires long-term engagement to promote social and economic inclusion and political participation. In a shared society framework, diversity is a source of strength for a country and community.

## Discussion Questions

These questions are meant to spark and facilitate conversations. If you do not have time to go through all the questions, select the questions that are most interesting to you. In addition to broad questions, we included questions specifically for episodes 10 and 16, which offer entry points for learning about the complexities of Jewish-Arab relations within Israel.

### General Discussion Questions:

1. What image, moment, or statement made by a character stood out to you? Why?
2. When do the stakes feel high for the students? How do their life experiences and identities inform their decisions?
3. What languages were spoken in the series? When and why do characters switch languages? How do you think Arabic and Hebrew impact how Jewish and Arab citizens relate and communicate with each other in Israel?
4. What did you learn about Jewish-Arab relations in Israel from the series? How do you think the realities outside of the classroom and the students' previously held beliefs and experiences shaped their interactions with each other?

# Discussion Questions - Continued

## Episode 10 Discussion Questions:

1. When the episode begins, the students find themselves divided by their long-held beliefs. At the end, they have gone through a journey of reflection and reconciliation together. What beliefs did you start the episode with? Were any of them challenged or changed?
2. Iman remarks that national identity forms one's personal identity. Do you agree? How do you see your personal and national identities?
3. *Madrassa* takes place at a fictional "Peace School for Bilingual Education" and is considered a "shared society" program. Review the definition of shared society above and discuss the following:
  - i. Were you previously familiar with the concept of "shared society?" How do you see the characters navigate this concept and related issues?
  - ii. What were the goals of the episode's lesson? How do they intersect with the school's mission? Do you think both were successful? Why or why not?

## Episode 16 Discussion Questions:

1. When Eitan argues with Gili about IDF service, he says "it's not personal, it's national." What do you think he means by this? How do the students explore their personal and national identities? How do you view your personal and national identities?
2. In episode 16, the students are confronted with how their paths may or may not diverge after high school. Review the definition of shared society above. As a fictional "shared society" program, does it seem like the school prepared the students for their different post-graduation realities?
3. As Shira and Khaled contend with her impending enlistment, their younger brothers learn about the military. How do they view military service? How is it different, and how is it similar, from their siblings, parents, and society?

## Further Resources



- [After Hamas killed his mother, an Israeli man chooses peace over vengeance - \*Los Angeles Times\* - Kate Linthicum - 4.24.2024](#)
- [A school in Jerusalem brings Arab and Jewish kids together to boost understanding - \*NPR\* - Eleanor Beardsley - 1.23.2024](#)
- [Sayed Kashua Watches His Son's Old Classroom Burn From Afar - \*Haaretz\* - Sayed Kashua - 12.6.2024](#)

## Stay Connected

The Task Force sends event invitations, a weekly media update, newsletters, and resources related to Arab citizens and Jewish-Arab relations in Israel. [Sign-up here.](#)



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- *Cinema Sabaya* (2021, Orit Fouks Rotem)
- *Bar Bahar (In Between)* (2016, Maysaloun Hamoud)
- *Oriented* (2015, Jake Witzenfeld)