POV

Community Engagement & Education

DISCUSSION GUIDE

The War Show

A Film by
Obaidah Zytoon and Andreas Dalsgaard

www.pbs.org/pov
**LETTER FROM THE FILMMAKERS**

**The War Show** is based on footage gathered by Obaidah Zytoon while she lived in Syria and took part in the uprising there. Some she shot herself; some was shot by friends. As we studied this footage together, it became obvious that it contained moments of immense power. But the collection had a very fragmented nature. Telling a coherent story without jeopardizing those moments for the sake of dramatic storytelling became our challenge. The movie is told in chapters to give the story an open-ended quality and to let the audience explore the scenes on their own. We don’t connect all the dots; rather, we let the audience do it.

With this form of storytelling, a complex reality emerged that, to us, shows a more human perspective of Syria and its war. It does so by challenging each interpretation of that moment. How did these events really happen? What is the role of the camera? How do people act toward the camera? What is the construction of self and society that plays out in front of our eyes?

**The War Show** was based on hundreds of hours of conversations. From there, we culled a selection of moments that would make it into the film. We wanted to tell a personal story about the fate of Obaidah and her friends within the bigger context of the Syrian regime’s oppression. And we wanted to lay bare the fate of millions of people who today are suffering from the events in Syria, whether they are refugees in exile or children and adults still struggling for survival inside the country. How do we comprehend their sense of being in the world? How do we gain an understanding of the tragedy they all endure? And how do we avoid exploiting their fates for the sake of entertainment, and instead gain a deeper understanding of the situation itself?

There are many important things to be said about the Syrian conflict. We, as a world community, are only beginning to grasp its repercussions. No other conflict has been filmed as much, yet the truth continues to evade us. As we analyze and learn from this ongoing tragedy, a new reality emerges based on old patterns. The global game of power played by Saudi Arabia, Iran, Russia, the United States and Turkey has turned Syrian soil into a proxy-war battlefield. Yet the desire for self-determination on the part of the Syrian people that led to the uprising in 2011 is not gone. This film shows what happened on the ground and in people’s minds. The horror of terrorism in Syria and in the larger world today is a deeply human tragedy, which can be explained and must be understood. It could have been different if the international will had been there.

The truth hides in the details. We strongly believe that when each detail is studied thoroughly and honestly, a more complete picture emerges. This is important not for the sake of entertainment, but in the interest of writing history. We wanted to leave the world a document that will have real value in years to come.

**Obaidah Zytoon and Andreas Dalsgaard**

Directors, **The War Show**
TABLE OF CONTENTS

2 Letter from the Filmmakers
4 Introduction
5 Potential Partners
5 Key Issues
5 Using This Guide
6 Background Information
6 Syria’s Arab Spring
9 Children in Syria
12 Assad’s Use of Imprisonment and Torture
15 Selected People Featured in The War Show
17 General Discussion Questions
18 Discussion Prompts
22 Taking Action
23 Resources
25 How to Buy the Film

CREDITS

Writer
Faith Rogow, PhD
Insighters Educational Consulting

Guide Producers, POV
Eliza Licht
Vice President, Content Strategy and Engagement, POV
Alice Quinlan
Manager, Community Engagement and Education, POV
Ione Barrows
Associate, Community Engagement and Education, POV

Background Research and Reporting
Kelly Thorngate

Design:
Rafael Jiménez

Copy Editor:
Natalie Danford

Thanks to those who reviewed this guide:
Andreas Dalsgaard
Director, The War Show
Alaa Hassan
Producer, The War Show
Emma Drost Jensen
Producer, The War Show
Sareta Ashraph
Phil Sands
Journalist and Eric and Wendy Schmidt Fellow at New America
Jennifer Patterson
Deputy Executive Director, USA for UNHCR
Reviewed relevant facts and statistics regarding the global refugee crisis and issues of resettlement.
A deeply personal road movie, *The War Show* captures the fate of Syria through the intimate lens of a small circle of friends. In March 2011, radio host Obaidah Zytoon and her friends join the street protests against Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad. Sensing that the Arab Spring will forever change their country, these artists and activists begin filming themselves and the events around them. Through Obaidah’s eyes, we see exuberance gradually give way to the grim realities of a destructive civil war.

Like many protesters in the Arab Spring, Obaidah’s friends aren’t interested in becoming political leaders; they simply want to loosen the strictures of government repression and create a more just and free society. Instead, their days are increasingly dominated by violence, imprisonment and death. In an ever-escalating cycle, protests are met with violent repression which, in turn, provokes more protests. Demonstrators and citizen journalists seek to portray what is happening to the outside world while government-run media try to control the news and cast the uprising as a violent, radical Islamic insurgency. A media war erupts as the two sides engage in a tug-of-war over the truth about the violence in Syria. The resulting instability opens a door for religious extremists, which makes the situation for Obaidah’s companions even worse.

Adding an important perspective to debates over Syria’s future, this film humanizes the headlines and shows how a failed revolution impacts everyday people. It is a sobering reminder that there are individuals behind the numbers, each with a story that is both uniquely theirs and also universal.
The War Show is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- Your local PBS station
- Groups that have discussed previous PBS and POV films relating to Syria, the Arab Spring, political protest or armed conflict, including Dalya’s Other Country, Last Men in Aleppo, Return to Homs, Hooligan Sparrow and Beats of the Antonov
- Groups focused on any of the issues listed in the “Key Issues” section
- Academic departments and student groups at colleges and universities
- High school students, youth groups and clubs
- Faith-based organizations and institutions
- Cultural and historical organizations, institutions and museums
- Civic, fraternal and community groups, including those serving refugees
- Community organizations with a mission to promote education and learning, such as local libraries

The War Show is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people looking to explore the following topics:

- activism
- Arab Spring
- citizen journalism
- extremism
- foreign policy
- Islam
- media literacy
- peace studies
- political protest
- Syria
- Syrian refugees
- war

USING THIS GUIDE

This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection, designed for people who want to use The War Show 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 www.pov.org/engage
Syria's Arab Spring

As The War Show begins, we see Syrians participating in what was termed “the Arab Spring”: pro-democracy rebellions across Middle Eastern and North African countries in late 2010 and early 2011 that resulted in three authoritarian governments being removed from power. Protesters cited unemployment rates, a lack of political freedom under President Bashar Al-Assad and widespread corruption as motivation. The unrest was also driven by the fact that many Syrians who had earned their living by farming, largely young men, were forced into the cities to seek employment after a years-long drought devastated rural areas. Among the many drivers of instability and unrest in Syria is climate change.

These demonstrations were among the bloodiest in the region: several thousand civilians were killed as government forces used tanks and snipers to crack down against protesters. Opposition supporters began to take up arms to defend themselves and to push government security forces from their neighborhoods. As violence escalated, so did defections from the Syrian armed forces. Anti-government armed groups formed to battle government forces for control of cities, towns and the countryside and began operating in an increasingly organized fashion under the banner of the Free Syrian Army. In February 2012, amid intense countrywide clashes between government forces and organized armed opposition, the civil unrest became a civil war. That same month, Syrian voters passed a new Constitution to address the protesters’ concerns, though reports of widespread violence and boycotts led international officials to question the results. By the end of 2012, nearly 650,000 men, women and children had fled Syria in the largest annual exodus by a single refugee group since the 1999 conflict in Kosovo.

During the pro-democracy protests, demonstrators emphasized the unity of the Syrian people and their pride in the Syrian mosaic, made up of diverse ethnicities, faiths and sects. Nevertheless, sectarian elements entered the conflict, arguably stoked by a Syrian regime keen to use the vocabulary of “terrorism” to describe first the protesters and then the armed opposition. The longstanding power structures in
Syria—with the majority Sunni population ruled by Assad’s minority Alawite sect—had also raised the risk of the unrest taking on a sectarian bent. But it was arguably the entry of foreign actors—both on the ground and as financial backers of the warring parties—that turned a battle for democratic reform into a regional struggle for power between Sunni and Shia regimes. As the conflict continued, the Syrian government began to rely on Iraqi Shia militias, Lebanon-based Hezbollah and Iran, while the Free Syrian Army and other anti-government armed groups received support from Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

From another perspective, the conflict came to represent—for some, though arguably not for Syrians—a struggle for dominance on a global scale. Russia, with its historic ties to the Syrian government and a base on the Syrian coast, supported the Syrian government, first as a backer and then, beginning in September 2015, as a warring party. Anti-government armed groups received fluctuating levels of support from the United States and various European states.

The war in Syria has only become more brutal since 2012, and it has also metastasized into multiple, overlapping conflicts. The original war between the Syrian government and anti-government armed groups continues. With significant Russian military support, the government had by December 2016 regained control of Aleppo, the last city that was partially in rebel hands. In 2013, what would become known as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, or ISIS, crossed from Iraq and established itself in northeastern Syria. ISIS has battled against all other armed groups that have not sworn allegiance to its caliph, or spiritual leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The Syrian Democratic Forces, a coalition of armed groups predominantly composed of and led by Syrian Kurdish forces, are battling ISIS with the backing of a U.S.-led coalition. This has increased tensions with Turkey, which, fearing greater unrest within its own Kurdish population, will not tolerate a Syrian-Kurdish autonomous area along its southern border.
As of early 2016, 470,000 Syrians have been killed, just over two percent of the total population. By late 2016, the war had devastated Syria, with one in every two Syrians having fled their homes, becoming either internally displaced in their own country or refugees in other countries. Nearly 70 percent of Syrians live in extreme poverty, with an unemployment rate close to 58 percent. Diseases such as typhoid and tuberculosis have become endemic. Polio, previously eradicated, has resurfaced. More than 500,000 Syrians have died as a result of the war, and more than 2 million have been injured. A March 2016 study estimated that the total economic loss as a result of the conflict was 275 billion U.S. dollars.

Sources


Children in Syria

Children have played an important role in the evolution of the Syrian conflict from the initial demonstrations to the ongoing war. The first protests in Syria during the Arab Spring were triggered, in part, by the arrest and torture of 15 teenage boys for painting anti-government statements on a school wall. As protesters called for the boys’ release, government forces killed several demonstrators by firing into the crowd. A relative of one of the boys said, “We were asking in a peaceful way to release the children, but their reply to us was bullets.”

Young Syrians have paid a significant price for the ongoing conflict. According to UNICEF, more than 80 percent of Syria’s child population has been affected in some way by the conflict, and 8.4 million Syrian children are in need of humanitarian aid. Half of Syria’s displaced persons are children, including hundreds of thousands inside Syria’s borders.

Thousands of children have been killed and injured in the government’s aerial bombardments of cities and towns across Syria. Multiple schools have been hit. In October 2016, the White Helmets, a group of voluntary rescue workers, reported pro-government airstrikes on a school in northwestern Syria that killed 35 people, 20 of them children.

The government often detains boys it considers old enough to fight. Many of these children are imprisoned with adults and tortured. The United Nations has documented the presence of male and female detainees as young as 11 in government security branches in Damascus. In several of these
branches, the torture and rape of minors was also documented.

Groups within Syria, including those designated as terrorist groups, such as ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra, are recruiting children as young as seven years old to receive military training and participate in combat. ISIS, in particular, has not only executed children, but has forced them to watch executions and, in some instances, to serve as the executioners. In 2015, the terrorist group released videos showing a firing squad of children executing captured men in Palmyra, as well as of a 10-year-old cutting the throat of a captured soldier in Homs.

Throughout the conflict, unlawful sieges of cities and towns have occurred. The government has inflicted the longest and most deadly sieges, though anti-government armed groups and other groups such as ISIS have also besieged civilian-inhabited areas. Children are widely affected by sieges. The majority of those who have died of malnutrition or dehydration in these situations are young children.

Lack of access to medical care has also profoundly affected children. While access has been interrupted by war, warring parties have also deliberately attacked healthcare infrastructure. By November 2016, as a result of aerial bombardments by government forces, there were no functioning hospitals left in eastern Aleppo. On November 16, 2016, government planes struck the only remaining children’s hospital in Aleppo. Staff frantically moved children, including premature babies, to the basement of the building to shelter them from the bombing. With little or no medical care available, vulnerable newborns and vaccination programs continue to suffer. In March 2017, a rebel-controlled area of Damascus where 80 percent of children are unvaccinated and where there is a vaccine shortage suffered a measles outbreak.

UNICEF reports that Syria’s development has already been pushed back four decades, as Syria’s children face devastating poverty rates and have poor access to food, water and medical care. Approximately half of school-age Syrians,
including refugees across the globe, have no access to education, in part because more than 4,000 attacks on schools in Syria occurred between 2011 and 2016. The director of the Syrian Relief Network, when describing the harm to Syrian children kept from school, noted, “We have lost a generation. We are trying not to lose a second one.”

As a result of repeated exposure to violence and insecurity, children across Syria, as well as many Syrian children who now live elsewhere as refugees, are exhibiting symptoms of trauma and post-traumatic stress.

Sources


UNICEF. “No Place for Children,” March 14, 2016.

https://www.unicef.de/blob/106970/ef5ba0af8e768eacb0baef0ca13d3ae/unicef-bericht-no-place-for-children-2016-03-14-data.pdf

Assad’s Use of Imprisonment and Torture

Since the Arab Spring began, an estimated 100,000 to 200,000 Syrians have been arrested or forcibly disappeared, although tracking these numbers has proven difficult for the international community. Across Syria, abandoned sports stadiums, hospitals, schools and homes have been converted by Syrian security forces into makeshift prisons, and regime-aligned militias operate their own secret sites. The vast majority of detainees—tens of thousands of people at any one time—are held in Syrian government prisons, military hospitals and detention centers of Syrian intelligence agencies. In interviews, former detainees and other witnesses to the prison conditions report that prisoners are beaten, starved and dehumanized.

The United Nations and human rights organizations report the Syrian government has used various methods of torture. Former detainees described being severely beaten about the head and body with electric cables, whips, metal and wooden sticks and rifle butts, burned with cigarettes, kicked and subjected to electric shocks applied to sensitive parts of the body, including the genitals. Many have described being beaten on the soles of the feet.

Other common practices included keeping detainees in prolonged stress positions, including hanging from walls or ceilings by their wrists, sometimes with their wrists tied behind their backs. Some detainees were subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence.

Other forms of torture and ill treatment employed do not result in physical evidence but can be equally damaging. For example, some detainees interviewed by the United Nations were forcibly shaved, or made to imitate dogs. Others stated that they were forced to undress and remain naked for prolonged periods. Some were threatened with execution or made to undergo mock executions. In several instances, interrogators threatened to arrest and rape detainees’ female relatives. Many former detainees bear the mental wounds of torture.

In a 2016 report based on interviews with more than 600 people, the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Syria determined massive and systematic violence was taking
place inside official and makeshift detention facilities. The commission found that some detainees held by the government were beaten to death, or died as a result of injuries sustained due to torture, while others perished as a consequence of inhumane living conditions. On a far smaller scale, anti-government armed groups were found to have summarily executed people in their custody. Designated terrorist groups Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS subjected detainees to serious abuses, including torture and summary executions.

Hundreds of thousands of detainees remained locked behind bars in Syria’s prisons, intelligence agencies, and military hospitals. Amnesty International estimated that as many as 13,000 people, mostly civilians convicted in sham trials in military field courts, were hanged from 2011 to 2016 at Saydnaya, Syria’s most notorious prison. The United States Department of State assessed in May 2017 that the Assad regime had built a crematorium at Saydnaya to incinerate hanged prisoners in what Stuart E. Jones, the acting assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, told The New York Times was “an effort to cover up the extent of mass murders.” As of August 2016, at least an additional 17,000 people were estimated to have died in prisons across Syria since 2011 as a result of inhumane conditions and torture.

In March 2017, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights called Syria a “torture chamber.” However, even though the United Nations has denounced the regime’s use of torture and the mass death of detainees inside its prisons as crimes against humanity—and despite the substantial documentation of a range of atrocities being committed by the warring parties—the U.N. Security Council’s efforts to refer Syria to the International Criminal Court have failed because of objections from Russia and China. Rejecting a military solution to the conflict, the United Nations and its member states have focused their attention on ending the conflict through diplomacy.
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This square in Kafranbel where demonstrations took place was destroyed by government bombings.
Credit: Courtesy of BOND/360

**Sources**


Selected People Featured in The War Show

**Obaidah Zytoon** - in 2011, she was a radio deejay hanging out with her small circle of friends; we see the film’s events unfold through her eyes.

**Amal** - age 19, often seen filming with her phone.

**Houssam** - architecture student, Obaidah’s neighbor, responsible for video editing.

**Rabea** - a musician who had been arrested in the 1990s.
Selected People Featured in *The War Show*

**Lulu** – the most reluctant to break the rules

**Anonymous** – poet in love with Lulu; his apartment is their gathering place

**Argha** – friend of Houssam and Anonymous’, about to graduate from dental school when the uprising begins
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 themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion:

- If a friend asked you what this film was about, what would you say?
- Describe a moment or scene in the film that you found particularly disturbing or moving. What was it about that scene that was especially compelling for you?
- What was familiar in this film? Was there anything so different from your own personal experience that it was difficult to grasp? If so, what?
- If you could ask anyone in the film a single question, whom would you ask and what would you ask them?

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:

- What did you learn from this film that you wish everyone knew? What would change if everyone knew it?
- If you could require one person (or one group) to view this film, who would it be? What do you hope their main takeaway would be?
- Complete this sentence: I am inspired by this film (or discussion) to ________.
**Resistance**

The friends question the decision to participate in demonstrations: “Is it true that if we try to alter destiny, we can make it better, or will it become worse?” Given the uncertain outcome, why do you think the group chose to take the risk? What factors would you consider before engaging in street protests against an authoritarian regime?

In the beginning, Obaidah recalls, “Everyone was witnessing their first moments of transformation. Disobedience was the essence of this ritual, not political achievement.” What does this insight suggest about the relationship between protest and social change?

How would you describe the symbolism of protesters using the Syrian flag as a hijab-like facial disguise?

One protester explains the demonstrators’ purpose simply as follows: “Either we live with dignity or we die.” Why might these appear to be the only available alternatives? Can you imagine other possible options?

A protester declares, “Silence in the face of injustice is complicity with the devil.” What sorts of circumstances lead people to choose silence? Are there issues on which you’ve chosen silence? Did you feel complicit in perpetuating injustice?

Rabea urges his friends to choose their tactics with care, even accepting some humiliation (like saying they love Bashar) in order “to live to fight another day...You can’t win without stubbornness. But you must be stubborn the right way.” What do you see as “the right way” to resist?

Obaidah and many of her peers join Waw Al-Wasel, a peaceful resistance group. She notes that the group produced a flyer for the Free Syrian Army on rules for war that was based on sayings from the Quran and New Testament. In the midst of ongoing atrocities, why do you suppose the group would bother to advocate for armed resistance to be guided by religious ethics?
Obaidah remembers that for years she and Houssam, “would spend nights and days stoned, imagining life in a different world. An ideal world without wars or borders.” What did you feel as you watched Obaidah and her friends get high? How did they transition from escapism into resistance?

How are traditional gender roles in Syria affected by the crisis? Why does Obaidah refer to Lulu as wearing a “veil of fear”? Why do Obaidah and her female friends show up to film at an all-male activist meeting, and what do you think the effect of their presence is on the group’s discussion?

Repression

Obaidah’s initial protest experience was energizing: “I could not believe it when I was chanting during my first demonstration. I felt a euphoria.” Have you ever participated in a large public protest? What was it like for you? If successful street protests, by nature, fuel more resistance, was the government’s violent response to peaceful demonstrations predictable? Was it reasonable?

Several people in the film say that Assad’s violence only made them more resolute. How do tactics like deprivation (with snipers taking shots at those attempting to get food), bombing of civilians, indiscriminate arrests, torture, banning funerals and shooting mourners who dare to bury loved ones actually increase opposition, rather than repressing it? How does violence beget more violence?

Obaidah says, “The regime fought art with violence. But the embers beneath the ashes were never extinguished.” In 2015, the world was shocked by footage of ISIS militants destroying priceless artifacts in a museum in Mosul, Iraq. Why have ISIS and repressive regimes specifically targeted artists? What does a government gain by controlling artistic expression and cultural heritage?

For Better or Worse?

What did you learn from the film about how peaceful protest can morph into armed conflict?

What’s your response to Obaidah’s insight that “regional powers supplied the rebels with light weapons, not enough to win the war but enough to ensure it continued.”

According to one member of the resistance, “America and Europe should not stand by as innocent people are killed. What are they waiting for?” How do you think democratic nations should respond to events in Syria?

What are some reasons why governments would intervene or choose not to? Did this film change your view on the United States’ obligations to war-torn countries like Syria?

Initially, Obaidah observes, “Hatred [of Assad] unified the people.” In your view, why wasn’t that hatred enough to keep the resistance from splintering into competing factions of secularists and Islamic extremists?

As the protests morph into an armed opposition, more Islamist elements become visible and vocal. How are women and men affected by this situation differently? How might gender play into decisions about whether or not to cooperate with the Islamists or support Assad’s fight against them?

One man argues that by so enraging people that they feel compelled to fight back, the Assad regime is intentionally helping to create extremism, so it “can say to the West, ‘These are extremists, come help us!’” From your perspective, how does the West’s “war on terror” contribute to the situation in Syria?

Some Syrian soldiers defect because commanders order them to shoot demonstrators. They continue to function as soldiers, but now protect the opposition. How does this affect the conflict?

As the civil war escalates and continues, Obaidah says, “A proxy war gave the power to warlords and arms dealers. There was a place for everybody in the war show, except the people.” Is militarization inherently in conflict with empowering “the people”? What would a Syrian political or social system that did actually empower the people look like?

The Cost

Despite admonitions that guns are for grownups, we see children play with weapons, both real and pretend. What do you imagine the long-term affect of the Syrian war will be on Syria’s children?

Reacting to the torture and murder of her friends, Obaidah says, “All this reinforced our obstinacy to work and be inside Syria.” Why do you think she decides to stay while other Syrians (eventually including Amal and Lulu) choose to flee their homeland?

A supporter of the revolution says that extremists “understand Islam in a shallow way.” Another says they grow beards “as if there was no Islam before the revolution. But the essence of Islam is something totally different. The essence of Islam is to call upon God through good preach-
How does the Syrian conflict contribute to a distorted view of Islam among extremists?

Obaidah acknowledges, “Syria as we knew it is gone and the Syrians have become the new map, wherever they are.” What do Syrians have in common with other peoples in diaspora?

Obaidah concludes, “There is no cure, no condolence... This show will end now, but the crime is ongoing. So who is going to end the show at the theater of war?” How would you answer her?

Lulu and Amal eventually join the ranks of those who have fled Syria. How does knowing their story inform the way you think about policies regarding Syrian refugees? What did you learn from the film that influences the way you think about our government’s approach to the Syrian war?

Media Literacy

How did the film compare to other media depictions of Syria or the Arab Spring that you’ve seen, heard or read? What do you think accounts for the differences?

What’s your interpretation of the film’s title?

Obaidah explains that during demonstrations or attacks, Assad forces targeted people who had cameras because, she says, “The camera was their source of fear.” Why would this have been so? Why do people in power feel threatened by cameras? Do you think cameras are a greater threat to authoritarian leaders than to leaders in a democracy? Why or why not?

Obaidah states, “It was hard for the regime to control the stream of information from the uprising.” Why did they think control was important? What did each side stand to gain by controlling the narrative?
After an accidental car explosion was erroneously blamed on the government, Obaidah observes, “In any conflict, truth is the first victim.” Why might this be so?

Members of the resistance recognize that the government justifies its repression by labeling protesters as “armed gangs” and “terrorists.” Why is word choice important? Who controls the choice of labels in the news and information sources you rely on? What sorts of groups have been labeled “terrorists” and what were/are the consequences of that label?

Obaidah reports, “In the streets there was an obsession with talking to the camera. People wanted to show the Assad regime’s brutality and deliver their voice to the international community… as if sharing the story and screening their wounds would cure them of the pain.” How might visibility contribute to healing? How do authoritarian leaders use invisibility to make things worse?

Obaidah notes, “There were great rebels against injustice who were true in their struggle. But some of the armed groups started securing funds through a set method: Blow things up, film, upload and get paid.” Given the circumstances of Syria’s civil war, what ethical standards do you think should govern the staging of events for the camera?

Even before the war, Obaidah experienced living under Assad’s rule as being in a “dark prison.” Because she wanted to broadcast forbidden tunes, she says, “Going on-air [as a radio host] was like dancing in a minefield.” What lessons does Obaidah’s experience offer about the value of freedom of speech and freedom of the press?

Lulu learns what happened to Anonymous because she is able to search through prison torture pictures leaked by an anonymous photographer. Many Syrians do not know whether their disappeared loved ones are dead or alive. What’s the importance of documentation to survivors? What difference does it make to Lulu that she doesn’t have to spend the rest of her life wondering about Anonymous’ fate?

On viewing footage from locals of a girl injured in a bombing, Obaidah says, “Seeing that wound and how it was filmed pierced my spirit. My relation to reality changed.” What do you think she meant? Have you ever seen a photo or video that changed your perception of reality?

Obaidah describes the events she experienced as an ongoing catastrophe and a “crime broadcast live.” What are the benefits and drawbacks of having access to images or social media posts in real time?

What do you think about the filmmakers’ decision to include painful images of victims’ corpses? How do you think the media should represent graphic violence in global conflicts? Have any images of violence on the media either desensitized you or inspired action, and why?

Additional media literacy questions are available at: www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php
Taking Action

- Host a teach-in or panel discussion on the history of the conflict in Syria, how it relates to other conflicts in the region and options for U.S. and/or global response.

- Investigate ways to help organizations that provide humanitarian aid to Syria or Syrian refugees.

- Using Syria and what you see in the film as a case study, convene a debate on the efficacy of armed resistance to achieve social or political change.

- Find ways, either online or in your community, to help Syrians like Obaidah and her friends tell (or publicize) their stories. If there are Syrian refugees in your community, consider working with them to record and share their stories and help neighbors get to know them better.
FILM-RELATED WEB SITES

THE WAR SHOW
http://thewarshow.com
The film’s official website includes information about the film, as well as links to its Facebook, Twitter and Instagram pages/feeds.

Original Online Content on POV
To enhance the broadcast, POV has produced an interactive website to enable viewers to explore the film in greater depth. The website for The War Show —www.pbs.org/pov/thewarshow—offers a streaming video trailer for the film; an interview with filmmaker; a list of related websites, articles and books; a downloadable discussion guide; and special features.

Resistance

STUDENTS ORGANIZE 4 SYRIA
www.organize4syria.com
A student-led solidarity organization supporting the campaign for freedom and democracy in Syria. Their site includes suggestions on how to get involved and a downloadable fact sheet: http://organize4syria.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Factsheet-Full-Page.pdf

WAW AL-WASEL
https://twitter.com/WawAlWasel
In the film, Obaidah references belonging to this peaceful resistance group, which created a set of rules for the Free Syrian Army to follow. Most of the items on its Twitter feed are in Arabic. For more information, see Syria Untold (below).

Stories from Syria

INDEPENDENT INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY ON THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC
This website provides ongoing reports about the Syrian conflict from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

SYRIAN OBSERVATORY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
www.syriahr.com/en/
The website of this Britain-based collective of pro-democracy people inside and outside Syria aggregates news stories and reports on human rights in Syria.

SYRIA DEEPLY
www.syriadeeply.org
This independent digital media project is dedicated to the conflict in Syria.

SYRIA UNTOLD
Through this independent media project, a team of Syrian writers, journalists, programmers and designers living in the country and abroad explore the Syrian struggle and diverse forms of resistance.
Background and History

**THE GUARDIAN: “ARAB SPRING: AN INTERACTIVE TIMELINE OF MIDDLE EAST PROTESTS”**

This timeline of the events of the Arab Spring uprisings and government responses includes events in Syria.

**INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY ACTION NETWORK**

This background brief on the effects of Islamic extremism on women was developed in response to Arab Spring events.

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE: SYRIA**
http://www.state.gov/p/nea/cl/sy/

This government website offers an overview of U.S.-Syrian relations, including a set of links to additional information on Syria.

Data and Statistics

**UNHCR GLOBAL FOCUS: SYRIA SITUATION**
reporting.unhcr.org/node/12

The latest policy briefs and regional updates on the situation in Syria are available from the U.N. Refugee Agency.

**UNHCR SYRIA REGIONAL REFUGEE RESPONSE**
http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php

This site is maintained and regularly updated by the U.N. Refugee Agency. Statistics include total persons of concern and registered Syrian refugees.
HOW TO BUY THE FILM

To order The War Show, go to http://thewarshow.com

Produced by American Documentary, Inc., POV is public television’s premier showcase for nonfiction films. The series airs Mondays at 10 p.m. on PBS from June to September, with primetime specials during the year. Since 1988, POV has been the home for the world’s boldest contemporary filmmakers, celebrating intriguing personal stories that spark conversation and inspire action. Always an innovator, POV discovers fresh new voices and creates interactive experiences that shine a light on social issues and elevate the art of storytelling. With our documentary broadcasts, original online programming and dynamic community engagement campaigns, we are committed to supporting films that capture the imagination and present diverse perspectives.

POV films have won 36 Emmy® Awards, 19 George Foster Peabody Awards, 12 Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards, three Academy Awards®, the first-ever George Polk Documentary Film Award and the Prix Italia. The POV series has been honored with a Special News & Documentary Emmy Award for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking, three IDA Awards for Best Curated Series and the National Association of Latino Independent Producers Award for Corporate Commitment to Diversity. More information is available at www.pbs.org/pov.

POV Digital www.pbs.org/pov

Since 1994, POV Digital has driven new storytelling initiatives and interactive production for POV. The department created PBS’s first program website and its first web-based documentary (POV’s Borders) and has won major awards, including a Webbby Award (and six nominations) and an Online News Association Award. POV Digital continues to explore the future of independent nonfiction media through its digital productions and the POV Hackathon lab, where media makers and technologists collaborate to reinvent storytelling forms. @povdocs on Twitter.

POV Community Engagement and Education

POV’s Community Engagement and Education team works with educators, community organizations and PBS stations to present more than 650 free screenings every year. In addition, we distribute free discussion guides and standards-aligned lesson plans for each of our films. With our community partners, we inspire dialogue around the most important social issues of our time.

American Documentary, Inc. www.amdoc.org

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation.

Major funding for POV is provided by PBS, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and National Endowment for the Arts. Additional funding comes from Nancy Blachman and David desJardins, Bertha Foundation, The Fledgling Fund, Marguerite Casey Foundation, Ettinger Foundation, New York State Council on the Arts, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, Ann Tenenbaum and Thomas H. Lee, and public television viewers. POV is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KQED San Francisco, WGBH Boston and THIRTEEN in association with WNET.ORG.

You can follow us on Twitter @POVengage for the latest news from POV Community Engagement & Education.

Front cover: Lulu protesting.
Credit: Courtesy of BOND/360