

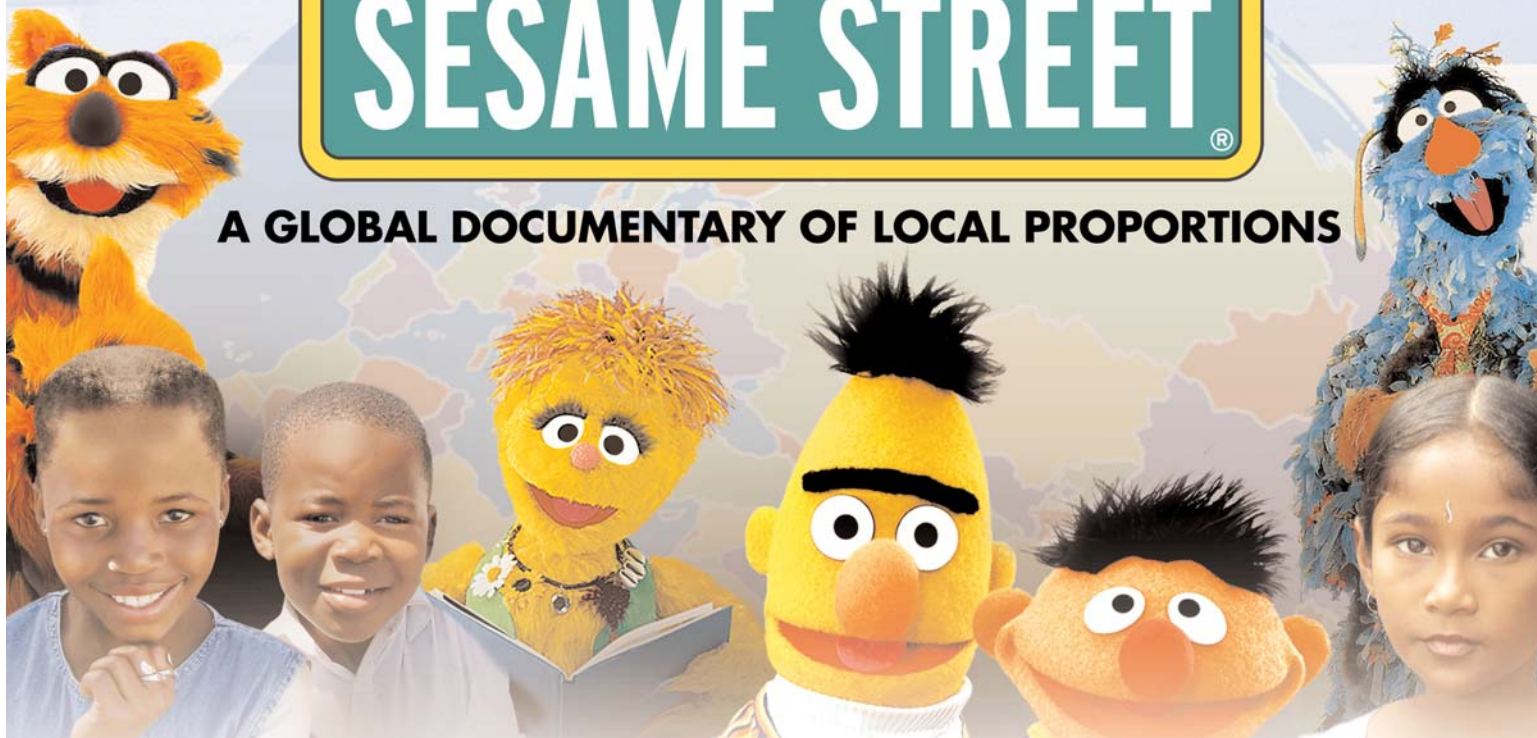
DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO

123

SESAME STREET®

A GLOBAL DOCUMENTARY OF LOCAL PROPORTIONS



A FILM BY

LINDA GOLDSTEIN KNOWLTON

AND LINDA HAWKINS COSTIGAN

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO SESAME STREET reminds us that social change can come from the most unlikely sources, including a team of Muppets. We follow three producers from the Sesame Street Workshop to Bangladesh, Kosovo and South Africa where they localize the world's most-watched children's television program with indigenous songs, puppets and curricula.



INDEPENDENT LENS 



FROM THE FILMMAKERS

We began this project because we were fascinated that Sesame Street, something we grew up with which is so inherently American, is being re-created around the world to reflect each country's own cultures and needs.

In this complicated world that has become so full of distrust, we were inspired that Sesame Workshop tackled some of the biggest issues including HIV/AIDS, post conflict resolution and death for 3-6 year olds, trying to give children an alternate way of thinking about the reality in which they live.

Sesame Street was born in the 1960's-against the backdrop of the Civil Rights movement. It was the first time a mixed race cast, including African Americans, Hispanics and Whites, were seen together in an urban environment on an American children's TV program. Other countries' "streets" are *still* being born of a specific political/cultural agenda.

We chose three primary countries to focus on in the film: Bangladesh, Kosovo, and South Africa. In Kosovo, the show was being created around the issue of mutual respect and understanding. That was interesting to us because they were using the model of an Israeli/Palestinian/Jordanian co-production that aired with mixed results. We chose South Africa because their street was dedicated to acceptance AND the destigmatization of people with HIV/AIDS, which is probably the most pressing issue facing that country today. And we selected Bangladesh for two reasons: We thought it was interesting that their "street" was about being inclusive: wealthy and non-wealthy, men and women, educated and uneducated. Bangladesh was also at the beginning of their project, and the chance to document the *entire* process of a co-production was a great opportunity.

Shooting this film was an incredible opportunity to step into different cultures and meet people who are trying to change the world through television. At times it was difficult. Logistics, resources and language differences complicated production and the communication whether by telephone or Internet in Bangladesh or Kosovo was intermittent at best. In both countries, politics played an enormous part in our filming schedules. While we were in Bangladesh there was a grenade attack killing over one hundred people and in Kosovo there were extensive riots in March of 2004.

We were surprised at how complex and difficult it is to make *Sesame Street*. It is truly an amazing process that combines research, production and outreach. However, what was most surprising was how seriously people take *Sesame Street* in the countries we documented. They see it as a vehicle to a better future...that if they change their children, then they'll change their future.

We could be making this film for the rest of our lives - Sesame continues to make co-productions in over 26 countries, including shows in Indonesia, India and to respond to the recent crisis--PSA's in Lebanon and Israel. However, we had to trust that the story we're telling gives the scope to speak for all of Sesame's work around the world.

Linda Hawkins Costigan
Linda Goldstein Knowlton

THE FILM

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO SESAME STREET takes viewers behind the scenes as producers of the iconic American children's series work with writers, artists, educators, and researchers in Bangladesh, Kosovo, and South Africa to create indigenous versions of the program. The teams encounter a variety of stumbling blocks as they navigate obstacles ranging from political violence and government red-tape, to weather, financing and ethnic conflict.

The application of the Sesame Workshop approach to local issues in each country provides viewers with unique insights about cross-cultural communication, global understanding, and universal values. The documentary also speaks to the power of television. It serves as a reminder that social change can come from the most unlikely sources, including a team of Muppets.

Selected Production Team Members

Bangladesh

Nadine Zylstra - Producer
 Sean Love - Project Manager
 Mustafa Manwar - Chief Creative Advisor
 Saidul Haque Juise - Set Designer
 Sara Zakar - Nayantara Productions CEO and Project Director
 Fuad Chowdry - Executive Producer

Kosovo

Barbara (Basia) Nikonorow - Producer
 Fatos Berisha - Albanian Director
 Vjosa Berisha - Albanian Producer
 Marija Orlic - Serbian Content Director
 Elizabeth Nisbet - Research Director

South Africa

Naila Farouky - Producer
 Indra De Lanerolle - Executive Producer
 Robert Knezevich - Project Manager
 Lesley Nkosi - Researcher



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Sesame Street was first broadcast in the United States in 1969. The series was born of the simple, yet revolutionary, notion that it was possible to use some of the techniques that made television commercially successful to help better prepare millions of educationally disadvantaged children for school. More than 1,000 studies have been conducted to assess this media experiment, with most indicating that *Sesame Street* is, indeed, an effective educational tool.

One reason for *Sesame Street's* success is its unique production process. Known as the Sesame Workshop Model, the method integrates research and curriculum with creativity and production expertise. Because research shows that children benefit more when they watch with adults, the program was also the first to self-consciously create educational content that would appeal to both preschoolers and the grown-ups who care for them. In addition, Sesame Workshop, the non-profit company that makes *Sesame Street*, extends the program's benefit beyond broadcast by creating educational outreach materials and campaigns.

The Sesame Workshop has shared its unique production model with partners in more than 20 nations, always taking care to help local partners create characters, sets, and content that capture the flavor of local culture and meet the specific needs of each country's children and the adults who care for them.

THINKING MORE DEEPLY

General

- Which scenes from the film did you find most powerful and why?
- What new insight or piece of information did you learn from this film? How might that newfound knowledge influence your thinking or actions?

Cross-Cultural Understanding and the Sesame Workshop Model

- *Sesame Street* co-creator, Joan Ganz Cooney, summarizes the program's goal by saying, "Our producers are like old-fashioned missionaries...it's not religion that they're spreading, but it is learning and tolerance and love and mutual respect..." As you watch the film, list some of the values that the *Sesame Street* teams are trying to convey. Which of these values do you consider universal? Which are specific to a particular culture or place? Which core messages are essential and on which would you be willing to compromise in order to meet local needs?
- Describe your general reaction to the program clips you see. How do they make you feel? Can you identify the specific things that generated those emotions?
- Sesame Workshop begins with assumptions about children's rights, including the right to education. What other rights do you think children have? What might you do to help guarantee those rights?
- In making decisions about characters, both real and puppet, how do producers avoid stereotyping? For example, to avoid associations with particular races, Muppets tend to be colors that people aren't. Is color enough? What other issues must be addressed?
- Co-production practices such as _____ are highlighted in the film. In your view, which practices are most successful in helping Sesame Workshop avoid the perception of U.S. cultural imperialism?
- At several points, issues of language arise. Why is language important? What is its relationship to cultural preservation and expression?
- How can a television program like *Sesame Street* improve understanding, especially between groups in conflict? How would you describe the power of television? What are its limitations?

Local Issues

- If you were one of the producers in charge of determining program content for Kosovo, would you have agreed to have separate signs in each language or insisted that the sign be unified? How would you incorporate the concepts of empathy and common ground while still respecting the judgments of local producers who believe that the population is not yet ready to see a series that blends Albanian and Serbian cultures?
- Why did some on the South African team believe that it was important to address AIDS? Why would that decision have been difficult for U.S. producers? If you had been part of the production team, would you have supported the decision to create a Muppet with HIV? Why or why not?



THINKING MORE DEEPLY

Together with other audience members, brainstorm actions that you might take as an individual and that people might do as a group. If you need help getting started, you might begin your list with these suggestions:

- Facilitate children meeting peers from different cultural, ethnic, religious, and/or geographic backgrounds.
- Create a list of the kinds of values you want to see reinforced in children's television programs. Share your list with those who run the broadcast and cable channels in your community.
- Locate an organization working for children's rights and find out how you can help.
- Together with your child, pick a country or culture to study. Learn everything you can about your choice. Make special note about what you learn about yourself or the United States by looking closely at another culture.
- Offer to host an international exchange student and/or help your child start a pen pal correspondence with a peer from another country (using one of the school-based pen pal services to ensure safety).

Ask the audience to commit to pursue one item from the brainstorm list before they leave your event.

For additional outreach ideas, visit itvs.org, the website of the Independent Television Service. For local information, check the website of your PBS station.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ACTION

To Start

participate.net/sesamestreet - The website of Participant Productions, the distributors for The World According to Sesame Street, includes information about the film as well as online opportunities to discuss it.

SesameWorkshop.org - The website of Sesame Street's producers includes background information on both the company and the series.

pbskids.org/sesame - This website for kids includes great information about Sesame Street as well as games that can help extend the learning.

Cross-cultural Understanding

cecp.air.org/cultural/default.htm - The website of the Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice provides a brief, helpful overview of "cultural competence."

peacecorps.gov/www/bridges/ - The Peace Corps offers educational materials to help Americans learn to interact respectfully with other cultures.

Children and Media

pbs.org/parents - The PBS Parents website includes a wealth of general information about children and media, and media literacy, as well as program-specific information.

unicef.org/magic/index.html - This special youth media project of the United Nations includes links to the text of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, which includes statements about media.

Children and Development

www.savethechildren.net - The website of the International Save the Children Alliance, working in over 110 countries to ensure children's rights to food, shelter, health care, education and freedom from violence, abuse and exploitation.

www.unesco.org/education - The website of the United Nations' specialized agency for education, working to improve education worldwide.

www.globalfundforchildren.org - The website of the Global Fund for Children, working to advance the dignity of children and youth around the world through grantmaking programs and global media ventures.

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO SESAME STREET WILL AIR NATIONALLY ON THE EMMY AWARD-WINNING PBS SERIES *INDEPENDENT LENS* ON TUESDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2006 AT 9:00 PM. CHECK LOCAL LISTINGS.

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ITVS COMMUNITY is the national community engagement program of the Independent Television Service. ITVS Community works to leverage the unique and timely content of Emmy Award-winning PBS series *Independent Lens* to build stronger connections among leading organizations, local communities, and public television stations around key social issues and create more opportunities for civic engagement and positive social change. To find out more about ITVS COMMUNITY, visit www.itvs.org/outreach.