

# Slingshot Hip Hop: Discussion Questions and Resources

*Slingshot Hip Hop*, the documentary film about the Palestinian Hip Hop movement directed by Jackie Reem Salloum, premiered in 2008. The film is central to PEP's curriculum, and we have used various clips from it to:

- a. introduce Palestine as a whole to an unfamiliar audience.
- b. provide accessible and moving depictions of conditions in Palestinian refugee camps as well as the life of Palestinians living within the state of Israel.
- c. draw connections with other struggles (for racial and economic equality in the United States, for example).
- d. explore hip hop as a transnational medium of creativity and resistance.

One of the film's central themes is that Palestinians themselves are using music and media to break down barriers--physical, social, and geographical--between one another. This goes to the heart of PEP's belief in the power of organized, cultural resistance led from below, as well as the importance of building relationships and sharing knowledge between social movements.

The following are supplemental resources and discussion questions which we hope one day can be expanded into a full scale study guide to accompany viewing of the film.

You can purchase the film on the website of *Slingshot Hip Hop*:

<http://www.slingshothiphop.com/>

## Supplemental Resources

***These are resources you may use in introductory lessons (before showing the film) or for self-education as you prepare to show the film.***

Interview with Jackie Reem Salloum, the film's director, with *Left Turn Magazine*, on the process of making *Slingshot*. Published August 15th, 2008:

<http://www.leftturn.org/chronicling-story-greater-palestines-rappers>

Article in *VIBE* magazine featuring interviews with rappers in the film, including Tamer and Suheil al-Nafar and Muhammad al-Farra. Published March 2008: access it [here](#).

An interactive timeline that provides information on the key movers, music and moments in the history of hip hop thus far:

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/hiphop/timeline.htm>

Educational resources offered by the producers of the documentary *Beyond Beats and Rhymes*, providing tools for exploring the complex and multi-layered issues within hip hop and taking into account the larger cultural context:

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/hiphop/issues.htm>

## Showing the film

There are several ways you could do this. Here are some of our recommendations:

- If the viewers are very comfortable reading English subtitles and have more familiarity with the history of Palestine, you may choose to show the entire film, saving discussion for the end. It can be a very powerful and emotionally impactful experience for those who can watch and read simultaneously comfortably.
- We often choose to show the film in segments, with facilitated reflection after each one. (Later in this document you will find a summary of each of the film's 18 scenes, and brief descriptions of the themes it raises.) Here are some options for dividing the film up:

**Show the beginning of the film.** After the narrator tells a brief history of Palestine while the viewer watches an animated, shifting map, there is a short scene in which DAM raps a capella. At the end of their rap, we turn it off and facilitate reflection on that first segment.

**Show the film in two segments.** You can stop after Chapter 9, a scene in which the viewer learns about the challenges faced by the rappers in Gaza. Before the film moves on to introduce new characters, you can reflect on what you've learned so far about Palestinians living within Palestine 48 and the Gaza Strip.

**Show the film in several segments.** Below you will find sample discussion questions for several of the significant scenes in the film. You may choose to pause after each chapter to check in with the viewers. Or you may choose to pause occasionally throughout the film at these suggested points or others. You should assess how engaged your viewers are and how familiar they are with the issues the film raises.

## Sample Discussion Questions

**Chapter 2: Lyd.** This scene reveals the difficult conditions faced by many Palestinians living within Israel.

*What are the causes of these conditions?*

*What are the similarities and differences between Lyd and the communities we live in?*

**Chapter 3: Map.** (This scene can also be accessed online [here](#).) This scene narrates recent Palestinian history and the creation of the State of Israel. Use these suggested questions to solidify viewers' shared understanding of the major issues at play.

*Based on the map animation that you saw, how would you summarize what's going on in Palestine?*

*What happened in 1948?*

*What happened to the refugees from 1948?*

*What happened to the narrator's family?*

*How does the narrator describe "living in a Jewish state"?*

*Who are the '67 Palestinians?*

**Chapter 8: Gaza.** Mohammed al-Farra, of the group Palestinian Rapperz (PR), describes how

they started rapping in Gaza in this scene.

*What were they trying to accomplish?*

*What other rappers would they like to meet most? Why?*

**Chapter 9: Check Point.** This scene shows a trip from Khan Yunis to Gaza City.

*What about living in Gaza makes it like ‘a big prison’ as Mohammed al-Farra puts it?*

*Where does Kan’aan want to go and why?*

**Chapter 14: Bus Ride.** In this scene, the viewer accompanies the rapper Mahmoud Shalabi on a bus ride.

*How does he describe being treated by Israelis?*

*How does he respond to this treatment?*

*Why did he speak Hebrew with his Palestinian friends years ago, and what does he do now?*

**Chapter 16: Abeer.** One of the most prominent female voices featured, she changes over the course of the film. At 54:55 she describes deciding ‘not to perform.’

*Why does she make that decision?*

*What happens when she gets other chances to get on stage?*

**Overview:** Throughout *Slingshot Hip Hop* the viewer gets to know the parents of several Palestinian rappers (Tamer Nafar, Mohammed al-Farra, Safaa of Arapeyet.)

*What role do the rappers’ families play in their work and life?*

*Palestinian Hip Hop artists make reference to Hip Hop that started in the United States throughout the film. What did they do with that influence? What lessons can present-day US-based hip hop artists draw from the Palestinian Hip Hop movement?*

*In what ways is Slingshot Hip Hop itself an example of cultural resistance and organizing?*

*What can it teach activists about art and social change?*

## **Scene Summaries**

1. **Intro** - This segment is an introduction to the cast of Palestinian hip hop artists--we see them in action in brief concert clips, and see the rap group DAM interviewed by Chuck D of Public Enemy in New York City. This beginning clip is an excellent way to facilitate thinking about the connections between Palestinians and communities of color in the U.S., as well as exploring the origin of hip hop and how powerful it can be as a tool for social change and communication.

2. **Lyd** - This scene offers a brief introduction to DAM's musical and literary influences as well as the role that their living conditions in a ghetto of Lyd, a Palestinian town within Israel, has played in shaping their lyrics and vision for their music. This scene is helpful in drawing parallels between the original context of hip hop--poverty and racism experienced by black and Latino communities in the U.S.--and offering viewers very clear images and explanations of how Palestinian communities are controlled and discriminated against by government policies in Israel.

3. **Map** – This segment includes an engaging map animation, with narration summarizing the last 60 plus years of the colonization of Palestine and the development of the state of Israel. The segment concludes with a hopeful and empowering a capella rap, offering DAM's philosophy of resistance and strength while facing this history.

4. **Rap Star** – This segment includes early clips of Tamer Nafar's first attempts to rap (in English), offering along with humor, an understanding of why Tupac Shakur and other rappers resonated with Tamer, given his concern about poverty, violence, and drugs in his own community. This chapter transitions into an important moment in DAM's politicization: the 2nd intifada (the Palestinian uprising of 2000).

5. **Meen Erhabe** – This chapter follows the process of DAM recording their first protest song (Meen Erhabe, "Who's the Terrorist?") and shooting the video of this song that first put them on the map. This chapter includes the rappers reflecting on the anger and frustration that led to this song and the family members articulating their hope and support for their sons' work. This chapter challenges the often racist western critiques of Arab culture as restrictive or fundamentalist, by showing the supportiveness and openness of the mothers and fathers of these young rappers. This chapter also shows the response to Meen Erhabe from the many Palestinian youth for whom this song has become an anthem of sorts.

6. **Mahmoud** – This chapter introduces the viewers to the rapper Mahmoud Shalabi who gives a brief tour of another Palestinian city within Israel: Akka. He describes the anger, alienation, and self-destructiveness experienced by Palestinian youth who lack resources and live in an anti-Arab society.

7. **Camp Return** – In this chapter, DAM visits a program run by a Palestinian youth center in Lyd and uses rap to imagine a different future for Palestine and its youth--empowering the students to celebrate who they are and claim their identities, a difficult thing to do living within Israel as young Palestinians.

8. **Gaza** – In this scene, Mohammed al-Farra of the Gaza rap group PR is interviewed on a local radio show. We hear about the severe restrictions of movement in Gaza and meet the rest of the PR crew. It is also another important example of Palestinian responses to hip hop within their communities.

9. **Check Point** – This scene offers a vivid portrayal of what it's like to wait hours and hours at a check point to travel 15 miles in Gaza. It is a useful scene to explore the daily challenges of the Israeli military occupation.

10. **West Bank** – In this chapter, DAM and Mahmoud Shalabi perform in a Palestinian refugee camp in the occupied West Bank (which is an illegal act for them as Palestinians living within Israel). After a young man in the camp had been shot by Israeli soldiers, DAM guides a process of healing through art, and works with his friends to write and perform a song about him. Two of the youth DAM worked with are imprisoned two months later and talk to DAM on the phone about their experience of abuse in prison. The chapter ends with powerful images of the

Apartheid Wall and the frustration and powerlessness that DAM can feel in the face of such a powerful, oppressive system.

11. **Khan Yunis** – In this scene, one of the main rappers in Gaza, Mohammed al-Farra, hears his father's story as a political musician. As this scene shows more of the limitations on travel in Gaza, we see DAM beginning to tour the world and gain popularity, defying the isolation that silence enforced on Palestinians.

12. **Album** – This chapter describes the challenges faced by DAM as they struggled to finish their first album. We see their excitement but also the frustration of having no resources and little access to recording studios.

13. **Arapeyat** – This chapter introduces the first female Palestinian rappers Safaa and Nahwa and describes how they broke into the rap scene and began performing. This chapter is an important commentary on gender in Palestinian society, as it includes scenes of the parents of these young women supporting and encouraging their growth as hip hop artists.

14. **Bus Ride** - This scene is a concrete example of the racial profiling and anti-Arab culture of Israeli society. While riding on a bus, the rapper from Akka, Mahmoud, describes and demonstrates how he and other Palestinians are treated as “other.” Off the bus he is stopped and interrogated by the police for speaking Arabic.

15. **Born Here** – This chapter shows the young, female hip hop singer Abeer working with DAM as they shoot a video directed by the Israeli-Palestinian film-maker Juliano Mer Khamis. The viewers see the whole Lyd community taking part in the filming process and the presence of Israeli police.

16. **Abeer** –In this chapter, Abeer struggles to take part in a concert when conservative family members want to stop her from performing more publicly because she is a young woman. This chapter is useful for discussing the challenges and limitations placed around women in many different cultures and countries. When compared to the scenes featuring Arapeyat, viewers can develop a more complex understanding of the way gender operates in Palestinian society.

17. **Gaza Show** – In this chapter, PR (the Gaza rap crew) performs in Gaza for their first time and is seen (on video) by the rappers in Lyd and Akka. It is a moving depiction of the love and mutual support between the Palestinian rappers in Israel and in Gaza, directly contradicting the divisiveness the system of occupation is designed to instigate. However, as the rappers attempt to physically cross the barriers erected between them, the Gaza group PR is blocked by Israeli authorities after working for weeks to get permission to travel to Ramallah in the West Bank to meet and perform with DAM. This scene offers viewers an intimate experience of the resources and energy that it takes for Palestinians to attempt to connect and the pain and frustration they feel when consistently blocked in their efforts.

18. **Connection** – The beginning of the film states that this is a story about young Palestinians breaking down the walls that separate them. The film is meant to educate people about the

oppression and displacement experienced by Palestinians through the lens of the positive action they are taking to resist and transform their conditions. Thus the end of this film is an important moment of boundary breaking and victory--PR finally manages to get out of Gaza briefly and the viewer gets to experience the emotion and power of their first meeting with their fellow Palestinian rappers whom they have only communicated with virtually.