

Have you ever been stereotyped?

- *All the characters in “Children of Abraham” express frustration at having their faith or identity stereotyped.*
- *We interviewed the play’s young authors about the experiences that lay behind these scenes.*
- *Their responses show perplexity, dismay, and anger, but they also offer optimistic and realistic suggestions as to how stereotypes can be curbed.*



Stereotype: n.

- **A preconceived and oversimplified notion about some aspect of reality, particularly people or social groups**
- **exaggerated and biased generalizations**
- **a standardized mental picture that represents an oversimplified opinion, or uncritical judgment**

- People can be stereotyped for their ethnic group, race, national origin, sex, age, physical or mental ability, sexual orientation, or social class—or any characteristic.
- Religion is yet another category for which people can be stereotyped and discriminated against. In strengthening their own bonds within their faith community, members may view other religions with suspicion and fear.
- Stereotypes come from **prejudices**, when people “pre-judge” others.
- Even when the prejudices are positive, they reduce individuals to categories or stereotypes.
- When they are turned into negative action, they result in **discrimination**, a denial of justice.

How do you respond to the stories of stereotyping in the play?

- *The stories in the play are not fictional; the young people who authored it faced these stereotypes firsthand or were close to people who had.*



Interviewing some of the authors helped us better understand the reality behind the play.

Stories of indignity:

“A cousin of mine was wearing Middle Eastern clothes and got on a plane. Someone made assumptions about him and shouted, ‘He’s got a bomb.’ He was asked to leave the plane, even though there was no evidence of this. It was a shock, something you don’t necessarily expect when you’re living in America, the land of the free.”

--Sofia



Stories of false assumptions:

“People assume that because I am a Zionist, I don’t believe in a Palestinian state or that Palestinians have a right to statehood. I believe in a state for the Jews, but I want people to understand that you can support Israel without thinking Palestinians don’t have rights.”

--Miriam

Stories of being marginalized:

“The whole issue of ‘biracial kids aren’t really Black’ is something that has been thrown in my face a lot. I’m not your modern definition of interracial, but I have light skin and know stupid people who believe that the lighter you are the less Black you are.”

--Nicole

“People think all Christians want to convert everyone and that we look down on everyone else’s religion. They caricature our religion as negative and close-minded. It’s true that it’s a Christian’s job to bring people to Christ and that we do believe it is the only way to salvation, but doesn’t everyone want to share their religion if they think it will bring you peace?”

--Jasmine

Where do stereotypes come from?

Not only had the youth experienced some of the stories firsthand; they also offered insight into why they might have encountered these stereotypes.



“My story from the play was the one about 9-11. I think stereotyping happens out of ignorance and non-tolerance of other humans. In the past people always assumed I was anti-US and non-patriotic which is not true.”

--Abe

“When people don’t understand one religion, have never met an individual of a certain religion, or never had any contact with a religion, they tend to believe stories about people of that religion more easily. As a Jew, I have sometimes been accused of being cheap or hoarding my money. Though this is partially true in my case (I like to think of myself as a person who doesn’t waste money,) it is definitely not true for many Jews that I have met.”

--Gal

Where do stereotypes come from?

“I think stereotypes come from people’s **homes**
or from the **media**, such as ‘black people love
fried chicken, are thugs, and are not very smart.’”

Adam

How have you stereotyped others?



When the play's young authors came together to share their stories, a powerful understanding emerged. They not only found empathy for the ways they had been stereotyped, but realized that they and their families had stereotyped other groups and individuals as well. This was the first step in confronting the use of stereotypes.

“We were talking about the Palestine-Israel issue, and a girl spoke about a rally where there was anti-Israeli talk and she thought, are they bashing me? It never occurred to me that the rallies could be hurting someone like that so much. If I grow up opposing Israelis in the conflict, then I’m going to wind up opposing a lot of people who have good intentions but are put in that whole circle of people. Now I’m more careful about the things I get involved with because I don’t know the impact it might have on different people.”

--Sofia

“I’m being honest. I thought all Muslims were abusive because Allah told them to be, Jews killed Christians, Christians were crazy, and Hinduism was weird. Those WERE my beliefs, but with maturity comes growth. I decided to drop my impression of what was not and began to search for what was really true.”

--Nicole



“I thought all Jews were very strict in every part of their religion. I thought they were really distant. Now I know that other Jewish teens are just like me: they like to have fun, go out, and see movies. I also noticed that they were not really that different except they had a different religion.”

--Adam

What can you do to curb the use of stereotyping?

- *After the youth began to dialogue with one another, they became much more open. They also described other ways to curb stereotyping through their experiences with the Children of Abraham project and in everyday life.*



“At a conference, we were given an assignment to make a drawing that meant something to you. This girl drew an Israeli flag and put an “X” through it. I got really offended, because I was standing right next to her. I wasn’t able to express how I felt at the time, but we did end up talking afterwards, and I think she was happy to hear my opinion, happy that I was able to tell her that it’s not necessarily like that. It’s important for groups to talk to one another, to develop trust and friendships and understanding.”

--Miriam



“The play addresses many **assumptions** and **generalizations** such as these that are harming our society today. We all have to learn to realize that just because someone is **different** from ourselves **does not mean** that that person is **wrong, immoral, or evil.**”

-- Gal

“With the Children of Abraham project, we visited two mosques, a synagogue, participated in a Catholic liturgy, and went to a Baptist Church. It held such a **WOW** factor and made me want to know more.” --Nicole



“I’d rather people ask me what the hijab is about than just look at me. I don’t mind the questions. Hijab has come to be translated as scarf, but it’s really a covering of your whole; you have to be modest in your speech and in your interactions with people. My whole approach is not to tell someone, this is what I believe, but to use my actions and personality to show that I am a good person. Things that you do everyday can have an effect on people.”

--Sofia

“The only way to **change** this is to
educate people, a long and **difficult** process.

It’s **possible** one person at a time or
rather **one audience at a time.”**

--Abe

Some things to *THINK* about:

During the performance you will feel *challenged*, *emotional*, and *inquisitive*. Here are some questions to think about while watching the performance this evening...

you will have a chance to voice some of them during the *discussion* time, as well as on a *survey* following the performance.

What did you *LEARN*?

What *SURPRISED* you?

What *MOVED* you?

What made you *ANGRY*?

What do you **WISH** you would have **SEEN**?

Was your **FAITH TRADITION** represented
ACCURATELY?

Would you be interested in continuing this
INTERFAITH DIALOUGE?

If you were to ask a member of another **FAITH** a
QUESTION, what would it be?

...and about the **slideshow**...

Did you find the *POWERPOINT* modules
HELPFUL?

What parts of them were you ***MOST***
INTERESTED in?

What did you find most ***INFORMATIVE***?

Was there anything you would ***CHANGE***?

Was there anything that ***SUPRISED*** you or
TAUGHT you something ***NEW***?

There will be cards given out at the conclusion of the performance where you will have the chance to share some of your answers with us.

Thank you and

Enjoy the Show!

- Many thanks to the authors who gave their time and insight to the interviews for this module. We hope that they and their play will provoke you to think about your own experiences and about ways to curb stereotyping.
- Interviewees: Sofia Begg, Gal Ben-Josef, Abe Dakhlallah, Adam Harris, Nicole Haskins, Miriam Liebman, Jasmine Way
- Module by Josephine Tsai and Emma Gibbs, University of Michigan Arts of Citizenship Program
- Sources: Facing History and Ourselves Resource Book. Brookline: Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation, Inc., 1994.
- Middle East Resources: “Portraying the Arabs: Prejudices and Stereotypes.” Cambridge: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University, 1991.
- Photos: Pluralism Project, University of Michigan Dearborn; other photos: Brenda Rosenberg and Josephine Tsai