



## CORNERSTONE 2016 RESOURCE

### Spin It: Engaging with Israel [Short Version]

<b>AUTHOR:</b>	Erica Goldman
<b>SUMMARY:</b>	Short stories by Etgar Keret and Sayed Kashua are used to examine issues of identity and belonging in modern Israel - <i>Submitted by Erica Goldman</i>
<b>TOPICS:</b>	Identity, Israel Programming, Storytelling
<b>LEARNING OBJECTIVE:</b>	Participants will be exposed to issues of identity and belonging by reading short stories by two famous Israelis, one Jewish and one Arab. They'll get a chance to explore what is universal and what is particular about these two narrative voices, and to engage with Israel through modern literature.
<b>AUDIENCE:</b>	Appropriate for participants of high school age and above; ok with groups of any size but smaller (5-15) is probably ideal.
<b>LENGTH:</b>	20-40 Minutes
<b>APPENDIXES:</b>	Spin It Israel Handouts-shorter.docx
<b>MATERIALS:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitators need 1 copy of Background-Info-Kashua-Keret for themselves</li> <li>• 1 copy for each participant of "Spin It Israel Handouts-shorter.docx"</li> </ul>
<b>SETTING:</b>	Chairs in a circle

#### Session Description:

0. Seat participants in a circle and ask them to introduce themselves by saying their names and answering the question, "If you had super powers, what would you do?" This exercise should not take too long; participants should be encouraged not to think too long and hard about their answers and to say whatever they think of first. Don't answer questions about "which super power" or how many... let participants make those decisions.

Ask if anyone has heard of Etgar Keret or Sayed Kashua, and if so, what they know about them, if anything. If they haven't heard of them or don't know anything, that's fine; don't spend a lot of time on background. Tell them: they are both famous Israeli writers, particularly well-known for writing short stories. Etgar Keret is a Jewish Israeli, Sayed Kashua is an Arab Israeli. You can talk more about them later if participants are interested, or give them information about where they can learn more biographical information.

1. Pass out copies of Sayed Kashua's story "Superman and Me". Before reading it, ask participants to be on the lookout for things that seem distinctly Israeli, Arab, Jewish, Muslim, or applicable to other typical categorizations about it, and what about it seems like it could be universal, applied even to themselves. Read the story – method is open: if facilitator can do a good dramatic job reading it, consider asking participants just to listen and not read along; if facilitator prefers, they can ask participants to take turns reading aloud.

Return to the prompts: ask participants what they noticed that was distinctly Israeli, etc about the story. Discuss what's universal and what's particular in this story - what is universal and what is not universal about the problems that Arab Superman encounters? What internal problems do you imagine Jewish Superman might have? What do you think about the problem of the uniform being embarrassing – for

## CORNERSTONE 2016 RESOURCE

whom might that problem apply? When have you encountered a situation in which internal conflicts within a group made it seem impossible to do good for the group as a whole? Where and when has that happened in camp? What religious themes do you see in this story?

### Notes for the Facilitator:

- Aryeh Eldad is referred to at the end of the story. Eldad is an extreme right-wing Israeli politician who believes that the State of Israel will never have peace with the Arabs, and who has said, "When I wake up in the morning, I divide the day into two parts. In the first part of the day, I try to prevent the creation of a Palestinian state. It is not a full-time job, so in the second part of the day, I try to prevent corruption."
- The phrase "There is no God but Allah" is the first half of the Islamic declaration of faith (known as the shahada), which is on the flag of Hamas, used in the Gaza Strip along with the Palestinian flag.

2. Distribute and read "Pastrami" by Etgar Keret and discuss the same issues of distinctiveness and universality. Might the narrator in Superman have played Pastrami with his son earlier that day? How do you feel about Lev's concerns (that the rocket is too far away for him to get a piece and only his friend gets one, and that there might not be any more sirens)? What, if anything, would need to be changed about this story for it to be believable that Kashua wrote it and not Keret? Is this story somehow "more Israeli" or "less Israeli" than Superman was? In what way? What religious themes do you see in this story?

Discuss similarities and differences between the two texts. What would the characters in "Pastrami" do, if they found they had super powers? Would they run into the same problems as Arab Superman? What is the primary emotion expressed by each story? Do the stories ultimately evince hope or hopelessness?

Bigger picture: discuss using literature as a medium for learning about Israel and for engaging with a culture. What specific background knowledge is necessary to understand the details of each story, and how does the picture painted in each evoke different aspects of Israel today? How could you use a short story as a jumping-off point for teaching history, culture, politics, etc? In what ways can stories evince empathy in the reader and create a welcoming environment for learning about those things?

\*\*\*\*

If there's time, share more biographical information about the two authors and explain that they are friends. Refer to the "Background-Info-Kashua-Keret" document and let participants know how they can find the exchange between the two when Kashua left for Illinois, if they are interested.

### Additional Notes for Bringing it Back to Camp:

Either or both of these stories could be used as induction to a program that asks participants to write their own Israeli stories in the style of either of the writers or their own styles. They can also be used in conjunction with a reading and discussion of the correspondence between the two authors (referred to in this session but not engaged as sources).

### APPENDIXES:



## CORNERSTONE 2016 RESOURCE

SPIN IT ISRAEL HANDOUTS-SHORTER.DOCX