



## Discussion Guide

This guide is designed for small classes, community meetings, and private screenings of *Hafu - the mixed-race experience in Japan*. It is meant to facilitate deeper discussion of the film's themes and broader applicability. Viewers should be encouraged to reflect on how these stories and issues resonate or relate to their own lives, whether or not they are considered multiethnic; perhaps they may know someone who is mixed or have had similar experiences being "mixed" or feeling "in-between" identities. Please use these questions and sample answers as a reference while encouraging participants to come up with their own ideas.

**What does *hafu* mean? What does *da-buru* mean? How do these terms make you feel? Why do you think you feel this way?**

**Why are these terms important? Why is it important for individuals to create terms which express identity?**

- Self-expression is important for giving individuals the ability to express themselves in ways that are appropriate for their experiences and perspectives.
- "Our perspective": It is crucial to understand issues from the perspective of those who may feel conflicted or out of place rather than attempt to define these experiences for them.
- Creating terms that are publicly visible and collectively relevant can be empowering.

**How are these terms important for understanding our changing world and communities?**

- Institutions, communities, and cultural practices are created around the idea Japanese identity is homogenous, unchanging, and exclusive. However, this is not the case as many *hafu* individuals and individuals of non-Japanese ancestry (*zainichi* Koreans, residents from other nations) are important members of society but express themselves differently.
- As more and more immigrants come to Japan, communities across the country will become more diverse. Recent changes to immigration laws and residency policies will make these issues more common and relevant in the near future. It is important to anticipate these changes and welcome this change.
- Demographics and population compositions are changing around the world.
- Commonality of problems: gender, multiculturalism, class are relatable topics.

**Do you think these issues of identity are unique to Japan? Which do you think are exclusive? How are they relevant for other countries or cultures? Think about**

### whether these ideas are important for your own community.

- In Japan:
  - Physical appearance and the idea of “homogeneity” (all the same); visibility.
  - Race tied to citizenship and nationality.
- In US:
  - Idea of “melting pot” and many cultures... people may still feel forced to choose “one identity” (Black, White, Asian).
- Key: unique variables for every country, community, space.

### Why is *identity* so important for “daily life”? Based on what you have seen in the film, what goes into constructing individual and “mainstream” identities? How do these two forces resonate and conflict? Why do you think that is?

- Identity is part of cultural practices, citizenship, and distribution of resources.
- Individuals are pushed to “be” something as part of group inclusion, especially in Japanese culture which tends to be group oriented.
- “Mainstream” views cannot fully account for the complexity of individual experiences.

### How do the backgrounds of each character (country of origin, location, gender, occupation) effect how they engage with their Japanese identity?

- Ex: Sophia as a temporary resident sees her “Japaneseness” more as an object to be understood rather than an enduring daily challenge.
- Despite his name and citizenship, David’s phenotype and appearance as African predisposes individuals to treat him as an outsider with potentially lasting effects.
- The history behind Fusae’s Korean and Japanese history complicated her interactions with peers or strangers.

### How do these stories represent healing processes? Is this expression necessary for identity formation?

- Each character finds their own way of reconciliation, either by creating their own community, coming to terms with their difference, accepting a certain view of themselves, or finding advantageous aspects of their hybridity. This affirms the importance of valuing individual and alternative perspectives
- These stories make us think about the meaning of “success” when it comes to identity, adaptability, social acclimation, and community membership.

### Do you think multiethnic perspectives are important for general discussions of identity? Do these mixed narratives complicate the idea of “phenotype” (skin color, outward appearance) tied to cultural, ethnic, or national identities? Why or why not?

### Why are *hafu* stories important for understanding “visible” forms of identity as opposed to less visible ones (religion, cultural values, political beliefs)?

- Example of issues by character ~ tie to main question
- Ed: creating a community and space for those who have none, citizenship and race, “social citizenship,” accepting all parts as a whole.
- David: Race as tied to culture, phenotype, investment in a community, “feeling Japanese.”
- Alex/Family: language and communication as a sign of “acceptance,” school as a site of identity development, private vs. public conditioning of ethnic identity.
- Fusae: surrendered identity, hiding, pressure to hide, denial of self.
- Sophia: “proving” a part of one self, acquisition of cultural traits (language), display and

assertion of an identity.

**While this film is very in-depth, it cannot speak for all *hafus* in Japan, nor can it fully capture the complexity of these trans-national experiences. However, is it possible to talk about these individuals as an “imagined” collective group with shared experiences of misunderstanding, discrimination and belonging to multiple cultures/ identities?**

- Can relate as “marginal people” (stereotypes, beliefs, categorizations).
- Experience as evidence – common feelings and views of feeling “in-between,” beyond ethnicity and race.
- “Alternative perspectives” are vital for critiquing issues that may be overlooked.
- Follow up question: do these discussions de-center or re-center (make more or less central) the importance of race in the discussion of identity? Do these stories make us consider other factors (culture, kinship)?

**What can we do to fix these issues? How can we approach these problems and offer solutions at the individual, communal, and societal level?**

- Relate these issues to our own lives, see how they are related to “mainstream” cultural practices and institutional actions that may discriminate against those who are “in-between.”
- Critique the “monoracial ‘frame of mind,’” understand that identity is flexible, fluid, and not fixed.
- Educate and encourage others to self-reflect upon these dynamics
- Look at these issues beyond just “mixed” identity from both mixed and non-mixed perspectives.