

That's All Folx Grand Army Episode Transcript

Katy, Erin, and Noelle:

That's All Folx.

Erin:

In that's all folx we're looking at our latest TV binges as a test lab for identifying and examining problematic social interactions.

Katy:

I'm Katy and I use she and hers as my pronouns.

Erin:

I'm Erin and my pronouns are she, hers, and hers.

Noelle:

I'm Noelle. My pronouns are she and her.

Erin:

And we are three graduate assistants at the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center, a project under the Great Lakes Equity Assistance Center. Welcome to That's All Folx.

Noelle:

Okay. So have you guys seen Grand Army at all?

Katy:

Yes.

Erin:

Of course I haven't.

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Noelle:

Erin, your Netflix algorithm must be very different from mine.

Erin:

It's like Cocomelon. That's what my Netflix algorithm is.

Katy:

Oh it's kids. It's all kids' stuff.

Erin:

And then like To All the Boys I've Loved Before, that's my algorithm.

Noelle:

Well, we have that one in common. So Grand Army came out during the pandemic and it's this show that's set in a present day, Brooklyn High School so it has these like woke Gen Z vibes to it. I liked the show because it follows five progressive teenagers, and they're trying to figure out who they are and what they stand for. So it's like a classic coming of age story, but in 2020. And so all the characters are basically...we watch them develop critical consciousness because their beliefs are challenged in ways that are realistic and I think challenged their perspectives of... their idealistic perspectives.

Noelle:

So the scene that I brought today focuses on one of the characters. Her name is Leila, and she is adopted by white parents from China and in the scene she is giving a presentation in class while other Chinese students make fun of her in Mandarin. So there is subtitles, but for the purpose of the podcast, it'll be okay. But anyway...

Leila:

There is a long history of Jews and Judaism in China. There's documentation of Jewish people in China, starting as early as the seventh century.

Student A:

[Foreign language].

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Leila:

Sorry, small communities develop throughout the Tang and Song dynasties.

Student B:

[foreign language]

Leila:

And all the way through the Qing dynasty. I'm mostly interested [in the Kaifeng Jews. They will be the main focus of my project.

Teacher:

Great. That sounds wonderful. Thank you so much, Leila. I can't wait to see your presentation. All right. Who wants to go next? Anyone?

Student B:

[foreign language]

Leila:

What?

Student B:

I always forget that you can't speak Chinese.

Student A:

You actually don't even look Chinese.

Noelle:

So do you have any initial thoughts?

Katy:

Well, I have a question I think might get us kind of started is like, Noelle, why did you pick this particular scene? Because Grand Army has so many different scenes with so many different characters that address so many different issues. Why did this, is this the scene you wanted to show us?

Noelle:

Yeah, so I chose the scene because when I was watching Grand Army, I always related most to Leila and it's because she is adopted from China and I'm adopted from South Korea. I related to her story of growing up in a white household and how that impacts your identity. You can see her throughout the show, really struggled to figure out who she is and where she belongs. And like in this clip, she wasn't Chinese enough to be accepted by her Chinese classmates, but there's other scenes where she is not, I guess, white enough, even though she is white passing as the other Chinese students pointed out.

Noelle:

It was just interesting to me because my experience growing up was opposite of hers, where she is actively trying to feel a connection and find that connection to her Chinese culture. When I was growing up, I did everything I could to reject any part of my Korean culture. Looking back, I realized now that it was my survival mechanism of navigating, going to school, and living in a very white community. I chose the same because it was just interesting to me to watch the similarities and differences of her experience and her grappling of her identity.

Katy:

Well, first of all, thanks for sharing that because I know we push each other to be more on the role and I appreciate it. So thank you. I have so many questions because I want to know... My first question to you is, which way do you think... I shouldn't say this, but I actually, I know my answer's wrong my question's wrong, so I'm not even going to ask it.

Erin:

What's your question?

Katy:

Well, as you can see which way do you think is better? To be more like Leila, is it Leila? or?

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Noelle:

I understand your question. I think it's interesting and this makes me think a lot about code switching and I don't think that there's a right way to do it. And you, especially being from a marginalized identity, I don't think anyone can blame anyone for doing what they have to do to survive the moment and whether or not, I mean, there's obviously critiques there with. For me personally, the way I navigated life for a long time, upheld whiteness as a standard and centered whiteness. Now I realize that and can work to undo that thought process. But at the same time, I don't think it's fair to critique that way of living in that moment, because I think it would have been much harder if I didn't do that, if I didn't assimilate to the culture that I was in at the time.

Erin:

Yeah. I think that I'm just pausing and not even knowing what to say, just because I'm having such a reaction to the word survival. I think of the work it takes to undo and unlearn, the way I've been socialized in whiteness and white supremacy. But if I wanted to wake up tomorrow and just not do that work, I could because the system in the country works for me. But obviously I can't imagine what it's like to have to make that decision of... Because of my race or ethnicity, which is very obvious for individuals to see. So I'm either othered and treated as an outsider, but like preserve my culture and my identity or I assimilate as a means of survival.

Noelle:

I guess recently, I felt guilty for rejecting parts of myself and my culture, but at the same time, that's a tall ask of someone trying to navigate the system that's always trying to put them down.

Erin:

That's what I always appreciate in our professional learning is just the reminders that are brought up of, this really is white people's work to do because in terms of race, but people with the dominant identities, it's their work to do and undo and really seeing that being in a world and in a country and in a community that values the lived experiences of all people really benefits everyone. But it's just coming up against that. It's just how to keep people with dominant identities keep that in the forefront of their brain, like doing it differently, benefits you for the long haul. It might be hard and uncomfortable and challenging right now. And it would be really easy for you to give up and just say, nah, or go back to the ways of doing things that have always benefited you individually. But collectively to do it differently benefits not only you, but everyone.

Katy:

Erin, I think that's kind of, when I watch this clip and then I'm listening to Noelle speak, obviously, and I think of like a school and the fact that had Noelle, maybe done some things differently like Leila did in the scene in her school, like how would she have been treated, most likely bullied and harassed. And our schools, are we creating safe spaces in schools now? I don't know if we are, and I think that goes back to what Erin, you were just saying about keeping this in the forefront because it's easier to slide back into, I don't have time to deal with this. You know, somebody else can deal with this. I think this scene, I just have so many questions about, and I know the show so those girls kind of continue to harass and bully Leila. And I would like to know, I don't think it really addresses why they do it.

Noelle:

I think the reason that it happens is, I don't know, I can't say I necessarily experienced this as a white person, but I feel like there's this dynamic that happens across marginalized groups where the girls who are Chinese and speaking Mandarin, they, I would think and assume, probably feel othered compared up against whiteness and white dominant society. And so their way of kind of reclaiming their power and subconsciously working through that is to then bully and pick on another, the character of Leila, because she's Chinese, but she's not Chinese enough so they can assert power over her. And yeah, I don't know, those are my thoughts.

Katy:

Okay. Well, I think we have two main teacher takeaways and the first one being assimilation because, assimilation makes problematic assumptions invisible. I think as a teacher, I would want to be aware of the ways in which I'm encouraging assimilation in my classroom without knowing it.

Katy:

I think the second teacher takeaway should be on colorism because if I put myself in the Grand Army scene as that teacher and I happened to over here, the encounter between Leila and the other two girls, I think my immediate reaction would have been to talk to the two girls about how that's not right, they're being mean, they need to be more inclusive instead of taking a step back and thinking about how the trauma that they've incurred in their lives. And maybe that they need to engage with that and talk with someone about that. Probably as a teacher, I would have jotted down a little note, send counselor note about what happened in class and have them talk to someone and really kind of address the issues because ultimately, like we've said, trauma manifests itself in different ways and that's something as teachers we want to be aware of.

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Transcript of Grand Army Episode



Noelle:

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