

Iraqi and American relationships in *Lost*

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Lost debuted in 2004 on ABC, which is about a mysterious island. It depicts plane crash survivors who become stranded on a very unusual island in the south Pacific. The survivors include a doctor, Jack, a now freed prisoner, Kate, a one hit wonder rock star, Charlie, an Iraqi military vet, Sayid, and a mysterious man named Locke who was in a wheelchair when he was on the plane, but is able to walk on the island. At first the main goal is survival, but they soon realize that it was far more than mere chance that brought them together, and each of them has a purpose that will help them unlock the island's secrets. The plane was travelling from Sydney to Los Angeles, so each character has distinct cultural backgrounds, which leads to conflicts between them.

Many characters are American, and one of the characters is from Iraq. Sayid Jarrah (played by Naveen Andrews) was in the military in Iraq, during the Gulf War. Many Iraqi's have a negative perception that surrounds them because of recent wars and cultural tensions. I learned to appreciate and value different cultures by seeing his interactions among characters from the United States, particularly Sawyer (played by Josh Holloway), who is a southern "bad boy" and con artist. Sayid and Sawyer argue and get into a fight on the second day on the island, even though Sayid is trying to help by using his military training to fix a radio.

There are stereotypes that the viewer sees when watching *Lost*, but soon the viewer learns that each character is complex and connected through various events in their life. Sayid has many layers to him, which the viewer learns through watching his back story. You need to watch each episode in order to fully understand why Sayid is not a stereotypical Iraqi soldier. He tortured and killed out of necessity, but he also has been searching for his love Nadia, and when he finally is reunited with her, she is murdered. Then he must kill again.

In today's environment with the war in Iraq and stereotypes existing, I do not think that an American would go out of their way to befriend an Iraqi such as Sayid. I believe people would continue to perceive a relationship between an Iraqi and an American in a negative manner after watching *Lost*, but they would think more about where the Iraqi is coming from after watching this show.

During this time of war with Iraq, people in the United States generally do not like Iraqis. That may be a stereotype, but it is my overall perception. Since Saddam Hussein has been captured and killed some Americans may feel more at ease around Iraqis. The creators and producers of *Lost* show how a stereotypical Iraqi or southern con artist is more multi-faceted than thought at first glance through Sayid and Sawyer's characters.

I never watched *Lost* the first season, but I started watching a few episodes soon after the DVD came out of the first season and I was instantly hooked. The suspense and storyline is exciting and suspenseful. The creators of *Lost* said a reason for the success of "Lost" is that they draw from powerful influences, including cultural differences to tell a story. They use a story structure associated with movie suspense master Alfred Hitchcock: the audience knows things the characters do not. This combined with cultural conflicts makes it an exciting and entertaining show. The characters have to live with themselves and their pasts while stuck on an island which is not deserted. It includes members of Dharma Initiative, the "others" (or hostiles), a polar bear, strange black smoke, and other inhabitants. There are many cultural conflicts that the survivors of the plane crash experience with each other and with other inhabitants of the island.

References

Abrams, J.J. (Creator/Executive Producer), Lindelof, D. (Creator/Executive Producer), and Lieber, J. (Creator/Executive Producer). (2004). *Lost* [Television Series]. Hawaii: ABC Studios.