

Are We That Different from Muslims? An Analysis of the Film *Persepolis*

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INTRODUCTION

A few months ago, I was co-teaching my World Geography class. I overheard some boys talking about a girl in the class; all of these boys are Central American immigrants. The girl is an Ethiopian Muslim. She comes to school everyday with every part of her body except her hands and face covered. In Spanish, the boys said, “She’s Osama Bin Laden’s daughter.” I told them that they were being disrespectful and that they needed to stop, but I had to wonder how many other students in the class were thinking something similar. How many people in the school, community, and city of Houston think that exact same thing? How many people think that every woman wearing a covering on her head and every man wearing a turban is related to a terrorist? Additionally, I feel that the American media often portrays Middle Easterners as “bad,” but the students who made this comment have not been in the United States their entire lives. So, from where did they get the ideas? As immigrants, these boys are “different.” Within United States culture, they represent an “other.” Why would they make assumptions about someone from a different culture, when they themselves are often criticized in the United States for being from a foreign culture?

I want to create a unit that will give my students insight into Middle Eastern culture, and hopefully eliminate comments such as the aforementioned one. I want them to answer this question for themselves: *Are people from the Middle East all that different from me?* I want to use the film *Persepolis* as the focus of the unit. *Persepolis* is an animated film about a young girl named Marjane who lives in Tehran, Iran during the revolution, Iran/Iraq war, and Iran’s return to Islamic law.

I teach at Lee High School, which is very international; we have over seventy languages and our students represent over forty countries. My students are in ninth grade English, and all of them are beginning English-as-a-second-language students. These students speak no English on the first day of school and their English proficiency is on about a second or third grade level by the end of the school year.

OBJECTIVES

These objectives are drawn from the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for English 1. English 1 is for students in ninth grade.

1E. Reading/Vocabulary Development. Students understand new vocabulary and use it when reading and writing. Students are expected to use a dictionary, a glossary, or a thesaurus (printed or electronic) to determine or confirm the meanings of words and phrases, including their connotations and denotations, and their etymology.

8. Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Culture and History. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about the author's purpose in cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding. Students are expected to explain the controlling idea and specific purpose of an expository text and distinguish the most important from the less important details that support the author's

purpose.

9A. Reading/Comprehension of Informational Text/Expository Text. Students analyze, make inferences, and draw conclusions about expository text and provide evidence from text to support their understanding. Students are expected to summarize text and distinguish between a summary that captures the main ideas and elements of a text and a critique that takes a position and an opinion.

12A and B. Reading/Media Literacy. Students use comprehension skills to analyze how words, images, graphics, and sounds work together in various forms to impact meaning. Students will continue to apply earlier standards with greater depth in increasingly more complex texts. Students are expected to compare and contrast how events are presented and information is communicated by visual images (e.g., graphic art, illustrations, news photographs) versus non-visual texts and analyze how messages in media are conveyed through visual and sound techniques (e.g., editing, reaction shots, sequencing, background music).

15C. Writing/Expository and Procedural Texts. Students write expository and procedural or work-related texts to communicate ideas and information to specific audiences for specific purposes. Students are expected to write an interpretative response to an expository or a literary text (e.g., essay or review) that extends beyond a summary and literal analysis, addresses the writing skills for an analytical essay, provides evidence from the text using embedded quotations, and analyzes the aesthetic effects of an author's use of stylistic or rhetorical devices.

18A and B. Oral and Written Conventions/Handwriting, Capitalization, and Punctuation. Students write legibly and use appropriate capitalization and punctuation conventions in their compositions. Students are expected to use conventions of capitalization and use correct punctuation marks including.

19. Oral and Written Conventions/Spelling. Students spell correctly. Students are expected to spell correctly, including using various resources to determine and check correct spellings.

RATIONALE

The film *Persepolis* is good material for several reasons. 1) It is about a young person, and since my students are ninth graders, they will be able to connect with the story. 2) During part of the movie, the main character, Marjane, moves to France for a short time; she has a hard time adjusting to the new culture. All of the students are immigrants, so they will empathize with someone who has to spend time in a new country. 3) Marjane's story takes place during the revolution in Iran and during the war between Iran and Iraq. The majority of my students come from countries have experienced revolution and war; this will be another point of familiarity for them. Ultimately, after my students view *Persepolis*, I want them to see a girl who is their age and who has experienced many of the things they have experienced. The only difference is that she wears a veil. I want them to walk away knowing that women who wear veils are not necessarily terrorists or related to terrorists.

Students will watch the film clips from *Persepolis* and analyze them for how they communicate certain emotions and opinions. This unit can be used by any English teacher who teaches English Language Learners, students who need to practice analyzing media, or students who know very little about Middle Eastern culture. I am writing this unit as an English teacher, but it can be used by a social studies teacher. Additionally, teachers can use the unit to do cross-curricular activities.

It is important to teach this topic because there is a lack of knowledge about the Middle East in the United States and, in my opinion, North and South America. This area is not covered in the media unless there is conflict, and more often than not (particularly in the United States), only

Israel is described as a “good country.” The goal is for students to become better analyzers of visual information and to walk away from the unit being able to understand that there are people who are “just like them,” in Middle Eastern countries. This unit contributes to the overall curriculum because it will require students to do literary/visual analysis, which is an integral part of Texas’ English curriculum. It will also expose students to media that is not American or British.

The students will take five 90-minute periods to work through the unit. They will read a series of notes that focus on Muslims and Iran so they will have some schema. The notes will be accompanied with visuals because I teach beginning English as a Second Language. These students have been in the United States less than a year, and they read around a second or third grade level in English by the second semester of the year. Because the notes will be content heavy, the visuals will help to clear up any information they do not comprehend after reading the notes. I know that I will use KWL charts (these allow students to respond to texts before, during and after they read them), graphic organizers, manipulatives, and cooperative learning throughout the unit. The unit will also be summed up by students creating a literary analysis project called hexagonal writing.

The first lesson will include a brief overview of the unit, some background knowledge about Islam and Iran, and a KWL chart that will assess the students’ knowledge about the Middle East. The next day and a half will be focused on giving students the opportunity to watch clips from *Persepolis* and analyze them. During the next two days, students will develop literary analysis projects, and on the final half-day they will analyze and summarize their projects.

UNIT BACKGROUND

Introduction

Persepolis takes place during some of the most tumultuous years in Iran. Before students watch the film, they need to have some background information so they can comprehend what is happening. This section serves as a possible source that the teacher can use when developing the notes for the first lesson.

Persepolis

Persepolis was nominated for an Academy Award in 2008. This French-language film is animated and set in Iran. It tells the story of Marjane, a young, outspoken, strong-willed girl. It begins during the ’79 revolution in Iran when Marjane is a young child who is excited by all aspects of the revolution. As time passes she becomes a teenager during the Iraq/Iran war, which took place between 1980-88. Her parents send her to France during the war and upon her return, she finds that Iran has become a conservative country ruled by Islamic law. Through Marjane, the viewer experiences the affect of political dislocation on an individual.

Islam’s Beginnings

Islam arose in the 7th century from the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed. Mohammed was orphaned as a child and taken in by his uncle (Alsowayel). At this moment, the Arabian Peninsula did not have a central government or leader. The area was populated by tribes of nomadic people. Resources in this harsh environment were scarce. The Arabs did not have a monotheistic religion; most of them practiced animism and idol worship (Cleveland 6-7).

The Arabian Peninsula became a way of traveling from the Middle Eastern empires, like Byzantium and the Sasanian Empire, to Yemen for trade. Yemen was a settled society based on agriculture. The area was fertile and it became a transit center and an open door to people outside of the Arabian Peninsula. This was the first area in the peninsula to subscribe to monotheistic religions, specifically Christianity and Judaism. A few of the leaders in Yemen converted to these

religions, but there still was not a significant perpetuation of monotheism (Cleveland 7).

The city of Mecca became a popular place for people to travel through and then a popular place for merchants and traders. In addition to being a bustling market, Mecca was also the site of a very important animistic shrine called the Ka^cba, which was a symbol for polytheism. People made annual pilgrimages to the shrine, and during those pilgrimages the city took in a great deal of money. Those controlling the city wanted to maintain the shrine and its monetary contributions to Mecca (Cleveland 7).

The Prophet Muhammad was born around 570 AD in Mecca, and he belonged to a small clan in the tribe Quraysh. He was orphaned and his uncle, Abu Talib, who was also the leader of the clan, took custody of him. The tribe Quraysh was involved in trade, and because of this they had some ties to Mecca and the rest of Arabia (Esposito 6).

In the year 610 AD, Muhammad, said to be contemplative, began to have visions and revelations from God. The experiences terrified him and he sought comfort from his wife, Khadijah. Time passed, and it became clear that the revelations were in fact from God, and it was Muhammad's job to relay them to the public (Esposito 6). Muhammad did just that. He worked with his companions to collect all the messages in a book called the Qu'ran (sometimes Koran), which for Muslims is the word of God. The primary message of the book is that there is only one supreme God, which is Allah in Arabic. Allah wants full submission from people and gratitude for provision. As a matter of fact, the word Islam means submission. There were other calls to help the poor, and to not prioritize money. It also encouraged people to be kind to one another. All those who did not follow these commands would be judged in the afterlife (Cleveland 9-10).

While this message enlightened some, it insulted others who were either deeply connected with polytheism or to the riches that the followers of animism brought to Mecca. Many of the people of Quraysh rejected Muhammad; only a few family members became his followers along with his wife Khadijah. Initially, many of the believers were people of the lower class, such as slaves. He preached the message for about twenty years, until 632 AD when he died. Around 619, both his wife and his uncle died. The wealth and power of these two family members had been the major source of his financial and moral protection throughout his time of preaching, as his profession did not produce a profit and he had made enemies within his tribe and Mecca. Consequently, after their deaths, he began to look for protection elsewhere (Esposito 8).

By 620, Muhammad had been invited to the town of Yathrib and had gained the favor of a few people from the town that had some pagans and some Jews. Over the course of two years, many people in Yathrib began to follow the teachings of Muhammad, and he brought his followers from Mecca to Yathrib. In 622, Yathrib became Medina and Islam became the predominant religion in Medina. The religion was no longer for the poor and oppressed only, but it was for a wider population (Esposito 10).

Mecca and Medina began to battle because Muhammad wanted to see the people from Mecca convert to Islam. He decided to attack them by disrupting the caravans that traveled through Arabia to Mecca. Small armies from Medina began these raids. The people of Mecca tried to retaliate, but Muhammad's followers in Medina would always prevail. Men from neighboring cities joined the army because Muhammad had gained so much power. By 630, Muhammad led a force that was 10,000 men strong. He eventually defeated Mecca, went to the Ka^cba and destroyed all its idols. All people of Mecca were not Muslims, but Muhammad had gained many followers for Islam by his death in 632 AD (Cleveland 11-12).

After Muhammad died, his father-in-law, Abu Bakr, was his first successor. Abu Bakr, the first caliph, saw to the proliferation of Islam. He sometimes used force to spread it to other tribes. Other times, Islam was spread by non-violence. By gaining allegiance from these tribes, Bakr was

able to gain more power and defeat any of his opposers. The caliphs after him believed in the mission to spread the concepts of monotheism and righteousness, by force if necessary, to all people. The caliphs did not bother the Christians and Jews because they already prescribed to monotheistic religions. The caliphs gained a substantial amount of power, defeating the Sasanian Empire and part of the Byzantine Empire and the government of the empire was based on Islam (Esposito 13).

The third caliph was murdered because people felt that he favored his own family members for positions of power. The following caliph was Ali ibn Abi Talib (ibn means “the son of).” He was the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad. The third caliph’s supporters opposed Ali’s appointment. One important individual from this group was Aishah, who was said to have been Muhammad’s favorite of his fourteen wives. Aishah and her followers were defeated by supporters of Ali. This battle marked a significant split in Islam: the one between the Shiites, who were followers of Ali and believed that all caliphs need to be blood relatives of Muhammad, and the Sunni, who supported Aishah and believed that caliphs did not need to be blood relatives of Muhammad (Esposito 15-16).

Iran Becomes Islamic

Islam first came to Iran in the 630s. After Muhammad died in 632, his followers became passionate about proliferating Islam, and it was during this time that Islam spread to Iran. At that time, Iran was not an established country, but more of a region, part of the Sassanid Empire (224-651 A.D.). The primary religions in the area were Zoroastrianism (a monotheistic religion), Christianity, and Judaism. Islamists in the area tolerated these religions as long as they paid a tax.

Hundreds of years passed, and in the 1500s a leader by the name of Esma’il conquered the region of Iran by the time he was fourteen and quickly established Shiite Islam as the religion of the region. He was so harsh that he denounced past Sunni leaders. He wanted to firmly plant Shiite Islam into the culture of Iran. Shiism is the sect of Islam that believes that rulers must be direct descendants of Muhammad (Axworthy 131). His rule marked the moment when Iran became Shiite as opposed to Sunni, and the country has remained Shiite for the past five hundred years.

During World War 1, Iran was mostly Islamic; however, the people of Iran were not mobilized. The country basically consisted of many tribes that were spread apart. After World War 1, the British decided that they wanted to nationalize the country, partly to protect their stake in the oil there. During World War I, the Russians, Ottomans, the Jangali movement (a group of native Iranians who desired to remain independent), and the British controlled parts of the country and fought one another to maintain control. The British were ultimately victorious and gained a great deal of control and influence in Iran, particularly with regard to the oil reserves located in the country (Axworthy 216-217).

In 1919, the British offered Iran money, infrastructure development, and security in return for the British maintaining a great deal of control in the area. The Shah, Ahmad Shah, signed the agreement in August of 1919. However, when the people of Iran found out that the deal had been made, many of them were opposed to it. Leading politicians fought the agreement until it was brought down in 1920 (Axworthy 220).

After the British realized that it would be difficult for them to gain significant power in Iran, they appointed Reza Khan as a leader in Iran. Reza Khan became the commander of the army and eventually ousted the sitting Shah. At this point, the tribes of Iran were in need of a leader who would bring about stability and move the region toward modernity. Reza Khan wanted to stabilize state revenue, strengthen the military, and take control of all of Iran’s land (Axworthy 222). He wanted there to be one central power, rather than many tribes ruling specific regions.

The British supported Reza Khan being in power and he became shah in 1925 (Axworthy 224). His goal was to model the country of Iran after Turkey under Kemal Ataturk. He wanted a secular government backed by a strong military (Axworthy 226). At this point in time, Islam was not the law in Iran. The leader of the country did not want it that way. Additionally, while there were people who supported Reza Khan, there were probably as many who did not. Oftentimes, there is an idea that the people of a country support everything their leader supports, but this was not the case at this point or at any point in Iran.

Reza Khan did strengthen the country. He solidified the infrastructure, strengthened the education system, modernized the region, and proliferated the military. However, as this was happening, people in Iran were growing more and more skeptical of Reza Khan, primarily because of his disinterest in sharing power (Axworthy 226). Ironically, as the people became better and better educated through schools that Reza Khan sought to strengthen, they asked more and more questions about his effectiveness as a leader of the country.

Iran went from being a strictly Islamic state under Esma'il to being a secular country under Reza Khan. These changes reveal a country that was evolving politically, socially, and economically, much like many western countries. Although the western countries did this much earlier in history, they did follow similar patterns of strict rule and movement to more secular rule.

Iran's Revolution

In the 1970s, Iran had become an established country. It had maintained its language of Farsi rather than changing to the Arabic language as many Islamic countries had. Additionally, French, as a result of colonialism in the Middle East, was a popular European language. It was not a conservative Islamic country. However, things quickly shifted. Iran's revolution began in the late 1970s and was primarily fueled by the Persian people's desire for sovereignty.

By the 1960s a great deal of oil had been found in Iran. The per capita income increased by 1000% between the 1960s and late 1970s. The number of children in primary school more than doubled and the number of hospital beds did in fact double. There was a lot of money, but Tehran, the capital of Iran, was a city that contained the richest of the rich and the poorest of the poor (Axworthy 251-253). The Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, was out of touch with the people of Iran. This Shah held luxurious parties and flew around in helicopters, while the poor in Iran starved. He was not supported by the lower class for this reason. The upper class did not support him because his secularization of the country led to them losing the roles they traditionally held in an Islamic society. The middle class felt alienated because the Shah abused their human rights (Axworthy 259). The tension from these disagreements built and built until it led to protests that criticized the Shah and his form of government. Some of the protests became violent and people were killed (Axworthy 261).

It must be clear that Iranians were not primarily revolting because they necessarily wanted a conservative, Islamic government. However, they did want stability and progress, which they did not feel they were getting from the Shah. Their interaction with the Shah typically entailed them seeing him drinking champagne with political leaders or flying from place to place in his helicopter. The people did not feel that they had a ruler who could pull them forward, and they associated their ruler with the British-friendly, secular government that Iran had possessed for the past fifty-nine years.

The protests grew and intensified. There were large protests on September 8, 1978 in many cities in Iran. After these protests, the number of people killed in the protests increased dramatically. In December, 135 people died during a protest in the city of Qazvin when tanks drove over them. The country was a mess. The Shah had lost the support of U.S. President Jimmy

Carter, was hated by many, was sick with cancer, and the people were constantly revolting. He decided to leave the country (Axworthy 262-263). Iran needed a strong leader who would restore confidence in the government and order to the country. To many, the Ayatollah Khomeini provided a viable alternative to the Shah.

Ayatollah Khomeini came back to Iran from exile on February 1, 1979. Khomeini had supported the revolution from afar and saw the Shah's exit from office as the perfect time for him to come into Iran, take power, and restore the country. "He was the focal point of the hopes of a whole nation" (Axworthy 265). The Ayatollah was also a member of the clergy, so he supported Islam and Islamic law.

The Ayatollah did not waste any time. By the end of March, he held a vote in which 97% of Iranian citizens agreed to having an Islamic Republic. He went so far as to execute members of the previous regime. By the fall, a constitution had been drafted. This constitution gave the ultimate power in the government to the Ayatollah (Axworthy 270-271).

In the film *Persepolis*, little Marjane views the revolution through child's eyes. She cannot be any older than six when her parents talk to her about the revolution and the Shah who was put into power, but never should have been put into power. She is intrigued by the bravery of the people in the revolution who fight for the rights of the people and support getting rid of the Shah, even though this revolution ultimately leads to her internal conflict of deciding whether she is a conformist or a life-long revolutionary. When the students see Marjane and understand the background of Iran's revolution, they will see people who are pushing for a life that is beneficial to them, not people who want to terrorize others.

Iran/Iraq War and the Return to Islamic Conservatism

Once the Ayatollah came into power, there was no tolerance for behavior that was not in line with the Qu'ran. Like other revolutions, this one followed a familiar pattern, a reign of terror. Where people had once freely held parties where they drank alcohol and the women wore mini-skirts, now parties such as these were illegal. Women needed to be covered from head to toe in conservative clothes, and alcohol was not allowed. Prayer was to happen five times a day, no questions asked. Women could not be out without being accompanied by a man. These laws were reinforced by Hezbollah, the support militia that the Ayatollah hired to police the streets. There were some citizens who supported the new laws and the new way of life, but others in Iran wanted the progress that the Ayatollah brought to the country without the strict Islamic rules and regulations. However, rather than fighting, the Iranians went along with the changes.

Seizing the opportunity provided by the instability in Iran, Saddam Hussein attacked, starting the Iran/Iraq war. This war lasted from 1980-1988 (Axworthy 282). Hussein might have attacked in order to gain power, land, or oil; there is no way to be certain. Iran fought back. The Ayatollah began recruiting boys as young as twelve to become soldiers in the war against Iraq. The war was also used by Iran to strengthen and unify the country. People felt that they were working together to protect their country, way of government, and land (Axworthy 273). The United Nations called for a ceasefire in July 1988 and Iran agreed.

After and during the war, Iran became more and more Islamic. Judges were required to be competent in Islamic law. Iran began to set itself apart as a "good Muslim country." Iran wanted to break its ties to the US and other western countries and become more independent. The best way for the government to do this was to make the government and the society more Islamic.

This explains why the people of Iran side with Islamic law, not necessarily to terrorize the US, but to gain independence. When the country was close to the British, it had a leader that the people hated; however, once Iran became Islamic, it began to develop its own identity apart from the west. That identity came at the cost of freedom as Americans know it, but it was a price that

the Iranians were willing to pay.

Women and Islam

The role that women play in Islam is often misunderstood by non-Muslims. Some Muslim women cover their entire body, while others wear tight skirts. The women in Saudi Arabia wear tent-like coats, while some women in Iran wear light scarves that let their bleached hair show. The Qu'ran addressed women's dress:

Nour 24:31 And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O ye Believers! turn ye all together towards Allah, that ye may attain Bliss (*IslamiCity*).

This passage shows that the Qu'ran asks women to be modest. It asks them to cover themselves in such a way that it not tempting to men, because within Islam, purity and righteousness are required.

Imran 3:57 "As to those who believe and work righteousness, Allah will pay them (in full) their reward; but Allah loveth not those who do wrong" (*IslamiCity*).

The woman's covering her head and body is an attempt to bring these passages to fruition. However, the female act of covering either the head, the face, or the entire body, begs the question: why do women have to cover and men do not? Furthermore, why do some Islamic women cover and others do not? The answer is that interpretation also plays a huge role in attire. Islamic women who live in countries that do not require them to be veiled choose whether or not they are going to wear veils. In the United States, some Muslim women cover themselves, while others wear no cover at all. However, countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran require women to cover. Why? Because in these states, the Qu'ran is the law. In courts, people are judged according to the word of God which is the Qu'ran. This being the case, the clerics have power, because they interpret the Qu'ran, similarly to the way that the Pope interprets the Bible for many Catholics. The clerics of Iran interpret the Qu'ran as saying that women must dress modestly, and this results in the Persian women dressing very conservatively, many of them covering from head to toe.

The veils that women wear in Iran are less connected to their being terrorists or connected to a terrorist's regime and more connected to their living in a country that demands that all people follow the word of God, the Qu'ran, and the passage from Nour 23:31 states that women must dress so as to not tempt men outside of their family. In Iran, this is interpreted as meaning that women must completely cover themselves.

Although these women do cover, which makes them very different from women in the United States, they have performed actions very similar to those of the women in the west. At the beginning of the twentieth century women in Iran were expected to live quietly, dress conservatively, marry the man their family told them to marry, answer to their husbands and mothers-in law, and adhere to the rules of a society that was strictly segregated by sex (Afkhani 110-111). The twentieth century brought about changes for women in Iran. In the mid-twentieth century, women fought for the right to vote through the Women's Organization of Iran (WOI). This organization primarily functioned through volunteers. It worked during the 1950s for Iranian women to gain the right to vote in 1963. Some members of the clergy violently opposed this

change; however, the government fought against them and the law eventually stood firm (Afkhami 114). Women in the United States had a fight similar to this in the early twentieth century when they gained their right to vote in 1920.

Additionally, women in Iran are heavily affected by American culture and standards of beauty. Women in Iran are limited in terms of making fashion statements due to the fact that they are mostly covered, with the exception of their faces. In 2000, it was en vogue for women in Iran to get plastic surgery, particularly surgeries that restructured the nose. The women used their new noses as fashion statements. Women also rebelled by dyeing their hair and allowing their bangs to peak out from their scarves. One woman said, referring to her nose job, “I don’t want to have any faults in my face. I’d like to look beautiful, like Marilyn Monroe.” Not only does this woman want to be beautiful, like women in all cultures, but also she actually wants to look more like a woman who has a stereotypically western appearance (Sciolino).

In the film *Persepolis*, the character Marjane shows the changes that women’s dress went through during the late 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s. We see her walking through the streets of Tehran as a child wearing no covering at all. As she gets older and the government becomes more and more closely aligned with the Qu’ran, she has to cover more and more of her body when she is walking in the street. However, it is obvious that she is not a terrorist, but a young woman following the rules and regulations of her country’s government.

Conclusion

Although there are obvious differences between Iran and the United States, the people of Iran share a lot of similarities with people from non-Islamic countries. The people led a revolution that resulted in a dramatically different government. The country experienced times of ultra-conservatism and liberality. The country has fought a war against another country that wanted to gain control of it. There is no reason for Americans to look at people in Iran as terrorists or assume that a woman whose entire body is concealed by a black cloak is Osama bin Laden’s daughter. Although the people of Iran, Muslims, and individuals in the Middle East are different from us in many ways, they are not that different.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson One

Time: 90 minutes

Objectives: 1E, 8, and 9A

Materials: 1/2 to 3/4 page notes about Islam

3-4 pictures about Islam

1/2 to 3/4 page notes about Iran

3-4 pictures about Iran

Printed KWL charts

1 large piece of white butcher paper that will be a large KWL chart

Bilingual dictionaries for students to use if necessary

Procedures and Activities:

If possible, have some Persian music playing when students enter the class. Have the large KWL chart already posted in the front of the class.

Explain to students that over the next several days the class will be discussing Islam and the

culture of Iran, which is a country that is majority Muslim. Tell the students that they will analyze a movie called *Persepolis* during the unit, and at the end they will create a presentation about what parts with which they identify.

Give students the KWL chart. This is a chart that has three columns. In the first column, students write what they “Know” about a subject. In the second column, they write questions expressing what they “Want to Know” about a subject. Finally, once they have learned new content, they write what they have “Learned” in the final column. Instruct students to focus on the K column. Tell the write everything they know about the religion Islam. Give students up to three minutes to write in the K column. Next, tell them to write what they know about Muslims, the people who follow Islam. Give students up to three minutes to write their response. Finally, tell students to write what they know about the country Iran. Give students up to three minutes to write their responses.

Discuss what students have written in their K columns. As students tell the class facts that they know, write the facts in the K column of the large KWL chart.

Tell students to now focus on the W column. Look back at the information they have about Islam, Muslims, and Iran, and write at least five questions in this column. They can write questions about one or all three of the subjects. Give students up to 5 minutes to do this.

Ask several students to share their questions with the class and write the questions in the W section of the large KWL chart.

Use the pictures about Islam and the notes to give students background information about the subject. Students can use any note-taking strategy you choose as long as they are exposed to and understand the basics of Islam. Be sure to include within the notes, specific information about why Muslim women wear scarves.

Use the pictures about Iran and the notes to give students background information about the subject. Students can use any note-taking strategy you choose as long as they are exposed to and understand the basics of Iran. Be sure to include information about the countries revolution and the war between Iran and Iraq.

Have students return to the KWL chart. Now they will focus on the L column. Tell students to write at least five things they have learned from the notes and pictures. Give students up to five minutes to write.

Ask students to share what they learned and write it on the large KWL chart. Post the KWL chart in the room, so you can refer to it throughout the unit.

Tell students that tomorrow they will start viewing the film.

Assessment

Use the students’ responses in the L column of the KWL chart to determine if they comprehend the information about Islam and Iran.

Lesson Two

Time: 135 minutes

Objectives: 12A and B

Materials: *Persepolis* DVD

Graphic organizer with three sections and the following headings:

What action and events do I see?

How are these actions and events similar to my life?

How are these actions and events different from my life?

Procedures activities:

Show students clips from *Persepolis* that highlight the following topics: 1) Marjane being a young child and interacting with other children and adults around her. 2) Marjane becoming a teenager. 3) Marjane's family's involvement in the Iranian revolution. 4) The Iran/Iraq war. 5) Marjane going to France and trying to fit in. 6) Marjane having to wear conservative dress in Iran

Have students respond the three questions on the graphic organizer after each clip. If students are eager to discuss their answers, allow them to discuss. Emphasize to students that they are seeing someone who is from a culture different from theirs, but there are many similarities between her life and theirs.

Assessment

Check the notes that the students write on their graphic organizer as they are watching and analyzing the film. Make sure that they are in fact analyzing the film in their answers and not just writing summaries.

Lesson Three

Time: 180 minutes

Objectives: 15C, 18A and B, and 19

Materials: Equilateral triangles of different colors. You need enough of these for each student to have six triangles. The triangles should be at least six different colors. Each side of the triangles should be six to eight inches. You can print the triangles two to a page and have student cut them.

scissors	bilingual dictionaries for all students	tape
thesauruses	standard English dictionaries	

Procedures activities

Ask students what they thought of *Persepolis*. Ask them what they thought of the main character and her life.

Tell students to find triangles of six different colors. Tell them to cut out the triangles and put any extras they have back so others can use them.

Tell students to write the following titles along one inside edge of each triangle; these are the titles of the triangles: 1) Summary, 2) My Opinion, 3) Similar Movie, 4) Similar Experiences in My Life, 5) Theme, and 6) Major Conflict.

Tell students to focus on the first triangle. On it, they are to write a summary of the film under the title. Give students five to ten minutes to complete their summaries.

Now, students will focus on the second triangle. Tell them to write an evaluation of the movie. Did they think it was a good or bad film? Why do think one or the other? Give students five to ten minutes to complete the paragraph in this triangle.

Tell students to take out the third triangle. They need to think of a film that is similar to *Persepolis* and they need to write at least three similarities between the two films. Give students ten to fifteen minutes to write their answers in complete sentences.

In the fourth triangle, tell students to think of something that happened in the movie that also happened in their life. Tell them to write a short paragraph about that event in their lives and connect it to the film. Give students ten to fifteen minutes to complete the paragraph.

For the fifth triangle, tell students to think about what lesson they think people are supposed to learn from the film. Have them write two to three sentences. Give the students ten to fifteen minutes to write.

Finally, tell students to think about the film and figure out the most important conflict in the film. Have them write that conflict in the last triangle with one to two sentences. Give students ten to fifteen minutes to write the primary conflict.

Give students ten minutes to go back and check all their answers. Tell them that they can complete any answers that they did not finish.

Allow students to spend twenty to thirty minutes checking spelling and punctuation in their answers. Tell students that their answers will be posted and they need to have as few grammatical errors as possible. Also encourage students to make sure that all sentences have verbs and nouns. Second Language Learners have a tendency to forget to include nouns in their sentences. Encourage them to use thesauruses and dictionaries if necessary.

Tell students to spend the last few minutes of the class taping their triangles together so that all the titles are facing outward. After they tape all the triangles together, they should form a hexagon that has the titles of the triangles just inside the perimeter.

Tell students to clean their space and turn in their hexagons.

Assessment

Read the students' hexagons to determine their ability to analyze media.

Lesson Four

Time: 45 minutes

Objectives: 9A

Materials: completed hexagons

Procedures activities

Place the hexagons around the room on desks

Separate students into six small groups. Each group will walk around the room and read a specific section of all the hexagons. For example, one group will walk around the room and this group will read all the sections about the major conflict. Another group will only read the "my opinion" sections.

After students have finished reading, ask them to discuss with their group what ideas were most common in their particular section.

Tell each group to present to the class what ideas and comments were most common in their assigned section of the hexagons.

Assessment

The group presentations to the class will give you an idea of how well students comprehended the information in their sections and how well they can summarize information that they read.

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