PERSEPOLIS
THE STORY OF A CHILDHOOD
BY MARJANE SATRAPI

UNIT GUIDE
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IHS LITERATURE AND THE ARTS
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NAME:
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Why are we reading *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi?

*Persepolis* is a graphic autobiography written by Marjane Satrapi, an Iranian-born French graphic novelist that depicts her childhood up to her early adult years in Iran during and after the Islamic Revolution. The title is a reference to the ancient capital of the Persian Empire, Persepolis. *Persepolis* was originally published in French in four parts in 2000–2003 and in English translation in two parts in 2003 and 2004.

In powerful black-and-white comic strip images, Satrapi tells the story of her life in Tehran from ages six to fourteen, years that saw the overthrow of the Shah’s regime, the triumph of the Islamic Revolution, and the devastating effects of war with Iraq. The intelligent and outspoken only child of committed Marxists and the great-granddaughter of one of Iran’s last emperors, Marjane bears witness to a childhood uniquely entwined with the history of her country.

Persepolis paints an unforgettable portrait of daily life in Iran and of the bewildering contradictions between home life and public life. Marjane’s child’s-eye view of dethroned emperors, state-sanctioned whippings, and heroes of the revolution allows us to learn as she does the history of this fascinating country and of her own extraordinary family. Intensely personal, profoundly political, and wholly original, Persepolis is at once a story of growing up and a reminder of the human cost of war and political repression. It shows how we carry on, with laughter and tears, in the face of absurdity. And, finally, it introduces us to an irresistible little girl with whom we cannot help but fall in love.
Why are we reading it?

- This graphic novel will help you learn the geographical, political, historical as well as social aspects of Iranian life and Iran's relationship with America.
- The human rights abuses that were perpetrated by the CIA, Shah, and members of the Islamic Revolution.
- This graphic novel provides an opportunity to imagine other ways of seeing and living. It is literature with the power to influence politics and real human events as it prompts individuals to reevaluate their worldview.

Essential Questions examined in this novel:

- What are the benefits and boundaries of a culture?
- How is our understanding of society and culture constructed?
- How are stereotypes constructed and deconstructed?
- How are children and young adults affected by a cultural revolution?
- How do cultures radicalize people?
- Are graphic novels literature worthy of study in the classroom?

Awards

A New York Times Notable Book

Best Book for Young Adults 2004

A Time Magazine “Best Comix of the Year”

A San Francisco Chronicle and Los Angeles Times Best-seller

Marjane Satrapi was born in Rasht, Iran. She now lives in Paris, where she is a regular contributor to magazines and newspapers throughout the world, including the New Yorker and the New York Times. She is the author of Persepolis, Persepolis 2, Embroideries, Chicken with Plums, and several children’s books. She cowrote and codirected the animated feature film version of Persepolis, which was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Animated Feature.
**Persepolis Mini Research Assignment and Jigsaw Activity**

Soon we will begin reading the graphic novel *Persepolis*, the story of a teenage girl in Iran during the Islamic Revolution in the mid 1970s. In order to completely appreciate her story, we need to learn more about Iran and its society, culture, and institutions during that time period.

**Directions:** You will be responsible for researching one of the topics below. You will teach a small group of your peers about what you learned, so make sure you thoroughly understand what you’ve researched to be able to explain it to others! Please make a PP slide of your research and cite your sources. (25pts)

**The Shah of Iran**
(please find the answers to the following: When and how did the Shah of Iran (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi) come to power? What was the US’s role in him becoming Shah? What kind of government did the Shah lead? When and how did the Shah lose power? What role did Islamic fundamentalists play? Who took over after he lost power? What relation did his exile have to the Iranian hostage crisis?)

**Islam**
(please find the answers to the following: What are some of the major beliefs of the religion of Islam? How do Islamic beliefs compare to those of other major world religions? Who is Islam's main religious figure? Why? What is the main Muslim text? What was the role of Islamic fundamentalists in the overthrow of the Shah of Iran?)

**Society in Iran (Pre-Islamic Revolution)**
(please find the answers to the following: What religions were represented in the Pre-Islamic Revolution population of Iran? What was the role of women in Iranian society? Describe the Pre-Islamic Revolution education system in Iran, including higher education (universities) for most of the population? What was the Pre-Islamic Revolution family structure in Iran?)

**Society in Iran (Post-Islamic Revolution)**
(please find the answers to the following: What religions are currently represented in the population of Iran? What is the current role of women in society? Describe the current education system in Iran, including higher education (universities) for most of the population? What is the current family structure in Iran?)

**Culture in Iran (Pre-Islamic Revolution)**
(please find the answers to the following: PRE-ISLAMIC REVOLUTION TIME PERIOD ONLY: Discuss what kind of art was popular in Iran. Describe some major Iranian movies, including their plots and directors from that time period. Describe what were some of the most popular kinds of Iranian music. What kinds of sports were popular in Iran? Who participated and who observed? Describe Iranian cuisine. What kinds of dishes were popular? What were considered delicacies?)

**Culture in Iran (Post-Islamic Revolution)**
(please find the answers to the following: POST-ISLAMIC REVOLUTION TIME PERIOD ONLY: Discuss what kind of art is popular in Iran. Describe some current major Iranian movies, including their plots and directors. Describe what are some of the most popular kinds of Iranian music. What kinds of sports are popular in Iran? Who participates and who observes? Describe Iranian cuisine. What kinds of dishes are popular? What are considered delicacies?)
Jigsaw Notes (25pts)

Research Topic                                      Notes

The Shah of Iran

Islam

Society in Iran (Pre-Islamic Revolution)
Society in Iran (Post-Islamic Revolution)

Culture in Iran (Pre-Islamic Revolution)

Culture in Iran (Post-Islamic Revolution)
Persepolis Study Guide (57 pts)

Directions: please answer the following questions in detail (3 pts per question)

Find sets of pages that address the initial reasons for the Islamic Revolution. Label the pages here (                  ). What was the Revolution about? What group(s) of people overthrew the Shah, and why?

Then, find sets of pages that show the breakdown or disintegration of the revolution: label the pages here (                  ). What different groups did the revolution split into? What did the different groups want? Who won out, and why (according to the characters in the story)?

Why did Marji and her parents at first support the Iranian revolution against the Western-backed Shah and why did they change their minds and eventually not support it?
Iranians are not Arabs and do not speak Arabic (they speak Farsi). Look at pages 79 and 84 and explain how one of these pages has a reference to the long-running hostility between Persia and the Arabian Peninsula. Then, look for other important historical issues or moments that the work represents. Please find a few and explain what struck you about these panels.

Then, discuss: what emotion is attached to these historical issues or moments for Marjane, the protagonist and narrator of the novel?

Does the emotion that she shows match the emotion that the novel is creating for the audience in these moments (that is, does the tone match the mood), or is the author creating an ironic voice or response of the narrator to any of them?

In an Associated Press interview, Satrapi said, “The only thing I hope is that people will read my book and see that this abstract thing, this Axis of Evil, is made up of individuals with lives and hopes.” And in her introduction to Persepolis, she explains that she wrote this book to show that Iran is not only a country of “fundamentalism, fanaticism, and terrorism.” How does Satrapi go about challenging this myth?
How does *Persepolis* dispel or confirm your views on Iran?

In what ways does reading this book deepen your understanding and knowledge of Iran?

“In spite of everything, kids were trying to look hip, even under risk of arrest” (112). What small acts of rebellion does the author explore in *Persepolis*?

How did the citizens of Iran circumvent and defy the rules imposed on them and attempt to live ordinary lives despite revolution and war?

In what ways is Satrapi just a normal young person?

*The New York Times* hails *Persepolis* as “the latest and one of the most delectable examples of a booming postmodern genre: autobiography by comic book.” Why do you think this genre is so popular?
Why did Satrapi choose this format in which to tell her story?

What does the visual aspect add that a conventional memoir lacks?

What specific pages establish an emotional atmosphere through the images that is more powerful than written words could create? Describe the atmosphere that the images create.

“Every situation has an opportunity for laughs” (97). How does Satrapi add comic relief? Which scene made you laugh the most?

How are her comical scenes relevant to the story as a whole?

What are some examples of how the ordinary citizens of Iran enjoyed life despite the oppressive regime?
Persepolis Analytical Essay
(51 pts)

The purpose of this assignment is for each student to structure a formal, academic essay. This involves writing a thesis that makes an argument. This is NOT a book report or a summary of the novel Persepolis. Understand the given writing prompt, craft an argumentative thesis, then SUPPORT it with examples from the text and with thoughtful analysis.

A typed rough draft of your 5 paragraph essay will due by__________________________. You must bring a printed version to class. Please save your rough draft on a Google doc so that we may make edits in class. Your final will be submitted to Turnitin.com.

No late rough drafts will be accepted. You must complete the rough draft to submit a final draft for credit.

Writing Prompt

How does Marjane Satrapi and her family navigate the fundamentalist post revolutionary Iranian culture?

(Be SPECIFIC and craft an argument).

Here are some questions to get you thinking about how you might answer this prompt:

• How does Marjane and her family adjust to the fundamentalist regime?
• How do the roles of social class in Iranian society personally affect Marjane and what does she learn about herself and her family?
• How does the educational system in post-revolutionary Iran difficult for Marjane and how does Marjane react to this new system?
• How do Marjane and her family react to the new conservative roles of women in Iranian society?
• How does the influence from Marjane’s family contribute to her rebellious nature in the post revolutionary Iranian culture?
Letter Five

IHS Global Literature and the Arts / Lisa Joye

Letter Due Date:

Directions: You will write a series of letters throughout our literature course. The audience will change, each prompt will be different, but the intention will always be consistent. These letters will be a record of your thoughts, feelings, perspective and growth throughout your sophomore year. Each letter is a safe place to let your unique voice be heard. Your letter must be hand written.

Please label your letter as such:
Your Name
Date (Month, Day, Year)

Dear Me,

Please include four paragraphs in your letter

In paragraph one, write about a time where you felt that you wanted to rebel, but didn’t. Ultimately, why did you NOT rebel?

In the second paragraph write about a time where you actually rebelled. What did you want to stand up for or stand up against? What was making you angry, upset, and adventurous or inspired you to take a leap of rebellion? Ultimately, why DID you rebel?

In the third paragraph describe a time when you experienced someone else experiment with rebellion. What is it that they wanted to change or explore? Was their rebellion successful? What was the consequence of their rebellion?

For the fourth paragraph, from your own experiences and the experiences of others, do you feel more inclined to rebel or more inclined to follow the rules? Why? Discuss what the overall consequences of rebellion in your experience.

End your letter with some sort of salutation...(yours truly, sincerely, be well, with great respect, etc.) and then sign your name.
Literature and the Arts
Persepolis Unit

Final Grade Sheet
Self Reflection / Parent Feedback

Name________________________________________________

Date___________________________________Section________________________________________

Final Scores

_____/50 points for Mini Research project and Jigsaw Notes
_____/57 points for Persepolis Study Guide
_____/51 pts for Analytical Essay
_____/10 pts for Letter Five
_____/10 pts for Self Reflection / Parent Feedback

_____/ 178 Final Score

Student Self Reflection: (5 points)
List 2 things that you enjoyed about the unit and explain why you enjoyed it.

1. 
2. 

Which part of the unit did you put the most effort into? How did you feel about the end result?

What are some new things that you learned about yourself in this unit? (think about time management, organization, speaking in front of your peers, writing skills, learning about other cultures, analyzing Literature)
Parent / Guardian Feedback: (5 points)

In which areas did you see your child grow (reading, writing, research, critical thinking, time management, engagement in the class, etc.)

Additional feedback:

Parent / Guardian Signature_______________________________________ Date_________

Parent / Guardian printed name_________________________________________________