



Persepolis: Repairing Misrepresentation and Misconception of Iran

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In her introduction to the twentieth anniversary edition of *Persepolis*, Marjane Satrapi reflects on how she “was certain the need for her book would fade over time.”¹ However, when I consider recent current events, such as the Israel-Iran war and the United States’ subsequent involvement, I am convinced that I must read Satrapi’s graphic memoir with my students. Western news media tells us a narrative of Iran that might evoke fear, anger, or pity through excessive negative representation and a sense of “otherness.” Satrapi’s story of growing up through the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war educates readers on the history of the revolution that ended 2,500 years of monarchy and turned Iran into the Islamic Republic that it is today. Her use of the graphic narrative genre and her brutally honest perspective invite readers in and foster connections of common humanity. While Satrapi urges us to realize that we are “one race—the human race,”⁵⁵ she challenges us to also go deeper than looking for our own qualities in others and to pause, sit, listen to, and understand the stories, cultures, desires, and histories that make us different. *Persepolis* is the best history text on Iran I’ve ever read, but as they read, students will have questions about how these events happened and how they impact current news coverage on Iran. This unit, designed for a Grade 11 IBDP Literature course, is guided by the question, “Can graphic narratives reveal the truth more effectively than other, more realistic media?” Students will learn to ask questions about the media and texts they encounter and become seekers of truth that look for a fuller understanding of issues through multiple perspectives. Students will begin the unit with a critical look at representation of Iran in Western media and then embark on a critical reading of *Persepolis* that will help them build a more complete, truthful understanding of Iran’s complicated history. Students will demonstrate their understanding in a summative project that challenges them to consider a topic related to Iranian culture or history from multiple perspectives, reflect on the causes and effects of these different perspectives, and connect this thinking to an issue in their own lives. This unit could be adapted for Grades 9-12 English Language Arts courses or possibly for a world history or elective course.

¹ Marjane Satrapi, *The Complete Persepolis* (2000; repr., St. Albert, Ab: Sapl, 2013).

(Developed for IBDP English Literature, grade 11; recommended for English Language Arts, World History, and Literature Electives, grades 9-12)

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