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Women in World Cinema: Stories of Struggle and Resistance

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Introduction

"We tell ourselves stories in order to live."¹ This claim from Joan Didion's classic essay collection has always resonated with me—a concise, emphatic explanation of the act of storytelling. Certainly storytelling is something we all engage in, and we do so because we are creatures who crave explanation. Stories give our lives meaning, helping us adapt to our circumstances, overcome obstacles, and stimulate the imagination. They tell us who we are and who we aspire to be, giving us deep insight into humanity in all its complexity. Stories are nothing less than survival tools that all peoples use to explain their world, and global cinema can give us insight into how different cultures tell their stories.

Film itself offers a unique storytelling experience that students find tremendously engaging and that can offer them a challenging text to decode. Ironically, while film is a communication tool that stimulates student engagement, film generally receives little critical study in the secondary classroom. As a multi-sensory technology, films contain countless, carefully selected visual and auditory details to be "read" by viewers, making these powerful texts worthy of serious examination.

The focus of this unit will be on cinematic narratives that involve women struggling against cultural traditions within India, Africa, and Iran. Like non-Western literature, world cinema is unfamiliar to students. Many have never seen a film that requires them to read subtitles. Some teachers might assume that introducing foreign-language films into the curriculum would be problematic, but my limited experience suggests otherwise. Students seem *more* interested because the text gives them a focus they might not otherwise have. It seems to reinforce reading skills, while simultaneously developing their visual literacy. For better or worse, such "multi-tasking" has begun to define this generation, and this process is worth exploring openly with students themselves.

The three films for study—*Water* (Canada/India, 2005), *Finzan* (Mali, 1989), and *The Circle* (Iran, 2000)—all involve female protagonists who, in a variety of ways, challenge traditional cultural practices. Through critical analysis of each film, students will explore why particular cultural practices exist and how stories address larger social issues. The overarching goal of this unit is for students to discover the universal aspects of human nature that transcend cultural boundaries, as well as those specific cultural practices that shape a people. This process of engaged viewing and thoughtful investigation of the various "texts," will empower students to "read" how filmmakers, like writers, use rhetorical strategies and aesthetic techniques to affect

audiences. At the conclusion of the unit, students—male and female alike—should be better able to articulate their place, their experiences, their stories in a larger, global context.

Rationale

These films were selected to complement literature from or about Africa, India, and Iran. During a semester-long World Literature course, we will begin with three novel units and conclude with this film unit. Students will read Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*. Satrapi's illustrated memoir of a young Iranian girl will function as a natural transition from our examination of textual narratives to our examination of visual narratives.

Although women represent over half of the species, female protagonists seem to be featured much less often within the general English curriculum. This represents a potential gap in our understanding of human experience. I have also found that male students are more reticent to read fiction about women, whereas female students are more willing to read about men. This unit's focus on the experience of women portrayed in film is a way to bridge that intellectual gap, and move towards gender equity.

The study of world cinema advances the goal of a truly multicultural curriculum. Not only does it allow students to become more invested in our "global village," but it also affirms the cultural diversity of American society. Many students are unaware of their own ethnocentrism by which they judge other cultures. In "Coping with Multicultural Illiteracy," Gloria Ladson-Billings suggests a three-step approach to combating this. The first step involves self-examination where students consider why they lack the knowledge they do and investigate the benefits of multiple perspectives. The second step involves acquisition of knowledge through reading, observation, and discussion. The final step is activism, where students speak out against issues such as inequality and oppression.² While this unit will primarily focus on the first two steps, it is essential that students take learning outside the classroom into the "real" world to maximize their learning. At our school, we try to address this need by requiring students to complete community services projects.

This five-week unit is designed for a mixed-level World Literature class at a small alternative high school in the city of Richmond, Virginia. This unit supports the larger mission of Open High School to create students who are self-directed, independent learners. Open is a community-based, alternative, public high school, which supports a student body of no more than 200. Students—throughout the city of Richmond—apply and go through an interview process in order to be accepted. Our criteria, however, are not just academic, and a wide range of skill levels are represented. Classes are fifty minutes each, four days per week.

The student population is approximately 75% African American and 25% white. Twenty seven percent of students qualified for free or reduced lunch in the 2004-2005 school year. In the four years that they have been required to pass state standardized tests, our students have performed well, and the school is fully accredited by the Commonwealth of Virginia. Over 90% of students attend college.

Objectives

This unit is specifically designed to develop students' listening, critical thinking, active reading, and analytical writing. The unit also fulfills the Virginia Standards of Learning for Grade 10 and prepares students for the end-of-course English test, which they must pass in order to graduate. Students will be able to identify universal themes, describe cultural archetypes, and examine films from different critical perspectives. Students will also engage in various writing activities that focus on interpretation, analysis, and evaluation of ideas. Students will also participate in small-group learning activities.

The addition of this unit to my World Literature course will also expose students to a diversity of stories, storytelling techniques, and literary traditions from around the world; enhance students' understanding of our complex human family, complementing their study of world geography; and foster a global consciousness and an appreciation of human rights.

In addition, students will be able to discuss the following questions, providing evidence for their ideas:

1. How can film, like literature, be read as a text?
2. How are traditional literary techniques such as point of view, plot, theme, and character deployed in the medium of film?
3. How do technical and aesthetic choices shape a story on film?
4. How do different literary and cinematic traditions revealed in films from different countries?
5. How can a basic understanding of culture help us better understand others and ourselves?
6. How and why do filmmakers tell the stories of women struggling to resist oppression?

Strategies

Like so many English teachers, I became enamored by stories, so much so that I decided to share my love with others. But the love of stories is truly universal; all people, in all times, and in all places love a good story. We just don't necessarily agree about what makes a story good. This is, in part, because of our expectations, which are inseparable from our culture. Part of my goal is to show students how questioning their assumptions about stories—how they are told and the values they impart—can increase their appreciation of global diversity and help them better understand how their own ideas develop within a larger system. Certainly when we study other cultures through stories, we would err to assume that their ideas (and the way these ideas are communicated) are "unnatural" merely because we are less familiar with them.

In relationship to film, the cultural hegemony of Hollywood mainstream cinema needs to be challenged in the secondary classroom. World cinema has become more and more accessible, but if our students always expect color, a linear narrative, continuity editing, and CGI (computer generated imagery) effects, they may overlook the variety of aesthetic and technical options available to filmmakers—past and present. Like literature, movies "are not just about a subject but the rendition of that subject for particular reasons and to create certain meanings." ³ While this may be obvious to more sophisticated readers and viewers, the idea that art is a complex construct is not always immediately evident to students.

While all the films in this unit are representative of the non-Western world, each film carries the weight of a very different literary and cinematic tradition. The film industry of India, often known as "Bollywood," blends an entertainment sensibility with musical numbers and culturally specific references from Hindu mythology.⁴ The film *Water*, while far from a Bollywood production, does mix the serious issue of religious politics with romance and a soundtrack that is often surprisingly upbeat. It is clearly a commercial production in a way that the other films for this unit are not.

Third Cinema—referring to films produced in places like Africa and Iran—shares an interest in social and political themes, as well as a tension between tradition and modernity.⁵ For example, the phenomenon of African Cinema, which began in the 1960s, emphasizes politics, education, African history and culture. As the famous Senegalese author and filmmaker Ousmane Sembene declared, "cinema is the night school of my people."⁶ This didactic mission seems to be a primary characteristic of African Cinema as opposed to cinema of the West, where entertainment easily trumps education. *The Circle*, on the other hand, is representative of a larger Iranian *new-wave* or *neo-realist* movement in film and blends a clear rhetorical purpose with aesthetic considerations. Scenes of everyday life, a melding of fiction and documentary features, and an elliptical, ultimately circular storytelling structure, characterize new Iranian cinema.

Anticipatory Activity with Literature

Teachers should modify the structure of this unit to suit their particular objectives. Some may prefer to teach the film of a country alongside the literature of a country. This approach is fine. Instead, I will teach film as a separate unit at the end of the semester.

This will allow for a more focused discourse on the unique rhetoric of film and why it is important to develop critical viewing skills. Even though we live in a media-saturated culture, students often see film as pure entertainment that does not require critical engagement. I want to challenge this idea by helping students expand their analytical toolbox and their understanding of literacy itself.

To begin our exploration of differences in storytelling we will reflect on the three novels we have already read. Because I want students to examine how traditional literary techniques are shaped in celluloid form, we will review literary terms and the significant characteristics of each literary work. For this activity, students will be divided into groups, given markers and a large piece of construction paper, and instructed to fold it so three columns appear, each with the title of a novel: *Siddhartha*, *Things Fall Apart*, and *Persepolis*. They will be asked to create seven rows identifying and evaluating: 1) author/background; 2) historical/cultural context; 3) plot; 4) point of view; 5) stylistic devices; 6) themes; and 7) portrayal of women. These Compare/Contrast Charts will be displayed for reference throughout the unit in order to compare our analysis of literature with our analysis of film.

For example, in the first row they will be asked to identify the nationality and personal experience of the author and their possible implications for the story. For example, since *Siddhartha* was written by the German, Hermann Hesse, is his representation of the Buddha's life less authentic because of his nationality? What does it mean to be an "outsider" telling a story from another culture? Chinua Achebe was raised a Christian so are his criticisms of Christian missionaries more meaningful? Satrapi is from a wealthy family and educated in French schools. How does this shape her understanding of life in Iran? As I monitor group work, additional questions will be asked of students to help them consider the cultural context of literature, as well as the many choices available to writers.

Deepa Mehta's Water

Prior to viewing the three films, we will review the language of film analysis. Timothy Corrigan describes two traditions of the film image: the tradition of *presence* and the tradition of *textuality*.⁷ With *presence*, the viewer experiences the world of film as a recreation of reality and primarily responds from an emotional vantage point. With *textuality*, the image is viewed as a constructed image to be interpreted, both in terms of aesthetic features and semiotic codes.⁸ I am primarily interested in the *textuality* of film, but teachers should consider how, when teaching literature, we often start by asking students to provide their initial emotional responses prior to analytical inquiry. This makes sense, as analysis naturally develops from looking closely at why we respond the way we do.

We will begin analyzing film with a viewing of Deepa Mehta's *Water*, which examines female oppression, specifically the treatment of widows in India. Set in 1938, Gandhi is an influential figure in a larger resistance movement. The film offers students a visually-stunning, multi-layered narrative for critical analysis. As the title epigraph suggests, certain Hindu scriptures promote the banishment and even suicide of widows, whose sacramental marriage was thought to extend beyond death. Our discussions will be informed by excerpts from the "Laws of Manu" and the concept of *sati* or a "virtuous woman"—the name given to a widow who burns herself on the funeral pyre of her husband.

Each of the films in this unit were created in a specific sociopolitical context, and reminding students of this will help them realize that although film is ubiquitous, it is nonetheless extraordinarily powerful. For example, *Water* is the final film in Mehta's trilogy about politics. The first film, *Fire*, focused on sexual politics; the second film, *Earth*, focused on the politics of nationalism. *Water* focuses on religious politics. The events of *Water* revolve around ancient Hindu texts, and the narrative itself suggests how religion is often used to justify oppression. For example, before viewing the film, we will discuss how the Bible was used to justify slavery in Europe and America. This will help students see that we in the Western world have more in common with other cultures than we may initially think. Prior to viewing we will also discuss the political context in which the film was made. The subject of widow mistreatment caused such controversy that film sets were destroyed by angry protesters who saw the film as an attack on the Hindu religion. Because of this the production was eventually moved from India to Sri Lanka.

Additional background information will be given to students. We will talk about some of the specific filmic techniques that reflect Hollywood mainstream cinema. This is important because while *Water* was marketed as an "art film" in the United States, it primarily functions as entertainment in the Hollywood tradition. For this reason, *Water* may seem more familiar to students than the other films taken up in this unit. But unlike the other films, it does not represent an indigenous film culture.

Students will be asked to brainstorm what they consider to be characteristics of Hollywood cinema, with the example of major blockbusters they may have seen such as *Independence Day* or *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Because film terminology is less familiar, this will be an opportunity to develop our vocabulary, building on students' prior knowledge of television and film. Students will then be introduced to the terms *historical fiction*, *nostalgia*, and *melodrama*. Hollywood seems to have a fondness for nostalgia and romanticized views of the past as seen in a film like *Titanic*. This discussion will be followed by an investigation of the values that might be transmitted by particular genres. What, for example, are we learning about American culture when we watch a film like *Mission Impossible*? I find that encouraging students to discuss familiar topics is always the best place to start, giving them confidence in their own observational and analytical skills.

Generally a Hollywood narrative includes a *linear plot* with *continuity editing* (cuts and transitions used to depict verisimilitude) and a *nondiegetic soundtrack* (sound/music that the characters do not hear but which helps propel the narrative forward). Obviously sound distinguishes film from printed text, and this difference will lead to a lesson on how sound can be used as a complement to narrative. (See Classroom Activities: Lesson 1)

We will then discuss character and point of view. With literature, readers generally identify the storyteller as either a *first-person* or *omniscient* narrator. The same is true with film, but the way perspective is established is different. With film, the camera's position tells viewers about point of view, and occasionally voice-over narration frames the story from a particular perspective. Because film seems to mimic reality, we are often unconscious of filmic point of view and how it shapes our emotional and intellectual response. Thus it is important for students to identify where the camera is located and why. They will be asked to do this throughout the screening. Often the camera presents an omniscient point of view, and often we are given a more subjective perspective from a single character. To assist with identification, students will also be given a particular character's name (selected at random) from *Water* and asked to focus on how the character is defined (through appearance, dialogue, and action). The primary characters are Chuyia, a spirited eight-year old widow; Kalyani, a young widow-turned-prostitute (the archetypal "prostitute with the heart of gold"); and Narayan, a follower of Ghandi who falls in love with Kalyani, rejecting the tradition of widow banishment and his family. Other students will follow the character development of more minor characters, who offer different perspectives on the treatment of women if not different points of view. A whole class discussion of character and point of view will follow the viewing of the film.

Also key to understanding point of view is *cinematography* which literally translates as "writing in movement"¹⁰—a good definition for framing a discussion with students on the relationship between text and image. I will pause periodically during the screening of each film to question how and why a director and/or cinematographer made particular decisions. For example, the *shot*—or non-edited, continuous stream of photographic images—is the essential component of cinematography, and an element that students should be able to identify in order to appreciate the visual composition of narrative. *Close, medium, and long shots* can evoke intimacy and specific identification at one end of the spectrum or establish distance and a relational context at the other. A cinematographer can also use *camera angle* (high, low, overhead) to create particular effects, revealing shifting points of view or even the power dynamic between different characters. Camera movement, such as a *pan, tracking, or handheld shot*, also controls how the viewer sees and thus responds. A pan moves the camera's focus from side to side, and tracking allows for shifts in point of view or continuity as the camera moves backwards, forwards, or around a subject. A handheld shot suggests a first person point of view and is often associated with documentary films, suggesting a more authentic, less contrived presentation. These terms will be in constant use throughout the unit.

Other aspects of cinematography are *color* and *contrast*. As a reminder that film does more than just represent reality, color and hue can be manipulated to create a particular atmosphere or mood that might otherwise be absent. *Water* provides a good example of the importance of color. Deep blues are used throughout, playing with the larger motif of water as a place of ritual cleansing, death, and rebirth.

A film's setting is established through *mise-en scène*, literally "placed in a scene." For the purposes of film, a *scene* can be defined as one or more shots that continue the same action in time and space. Thus *mise-enscène* includes the actors' performance, the costumes, the sets, the props, the lighting and any other element found in the image itself. The development of character and theme—fundamental to literary analysis— are an outgrowth of the relationships between different features of *mise-enscène*. Students will be

busy keeping up with the subtitles and their characters, but I will pause the film at particular moments to highlight noteworthy aspects of a scene, such as the widow's ashram and the home of Narayan's parents.

Other essential factors that contribute to the analysis of film are *editing* and *sound*. A return to Joan Didion can help us make sense of editing. As she notes, we live "by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images, by the 'ideas' with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria which is our actual experience."¹¹ Editing likewise brings "disparate images" together to form a logical pattern that viewers accept as a coherent narrative. Western viewers are most familiar with *continuity editing*, widely used in Hollywood mainstream cinema to establish verisimilitude.¹² This is the type of editing we see with *Water*. However, art, montage, and new wave cinema often use *disjunctive editing*, where the viewer is made aware of leaps in space and time. The constructed nature of narrative becomes more apparent with disjunctive editing, which can evoke particular responses through the juxtaposition of incongruent images. (This will be important when we view *Finzan*.)

Other aspects of editing will also be reviewed prior to and during the screening of *Water*. For example, *cuts* are made to move from one shot to the next. *Transitions* between cuts—*fade-ins*, *fade-outs*, *dissolves*, and *crosscutting*—help link shots and move the story forward. Transitions are often overlooked because they seem natural, when in fact it is our unconscious familiarity with the conventions of film and television that make it seem so. Transitions can help develop relationships, especially with regard to a viewer's concept of the passage of time.

While the film analysis vocabulary will be introduced to students prior to viewing *Water*, pausing the film periodically will be key to helping students identify how film can be read as a text, much like literature. Teachers should be aware that too much pausing can interrupt the narrative flow, but pausing is nonetheless a good opportunity for teachers to orally quiz students on the kind of choices the filmmaker is using and for what purpose. When I pause the film, I will also direct students to take notes on the short discussion, reinforcing their developing film vocabulary. At the end of the unit there will be an exam on this material.

As with the literature, we will have begun a Compare/Contrast Chart in order to better appreciate the differences in how stories from different cultures are told in the medium of film. Categories used to evaluate the films will be a little different, reflecting our developing knowledge. Here a chart with five columns will be created listing: 1) film, date, director, and country; 2) function of film; 3) characteristics of film; 4) politics of filmmaking; and 5) issues related to women. (See Appendix A)

The same viewing technique (pausing periodically) will be used with *Finzan*. This film's narrative may be more difficult to follow, and this has a great deal to do with our experience and expectations as Americans reared on Hollywood-style films. In other words, students must be willing to look more closely at world film to appreciate its different storytelling and cinematic traditions. As with *Water*, we will first review background information, especially in terms of geography, culture, storytelling traditions, religion, politics, and issues related to women.

Cheick Oumar Sissoko's *Finzan*

In *Finzan*, directed by Malian filmmaker, social activist, and Minister of Culture Cheick Oumar Sissoko, one woman rejects an arranged marriage and another challenges the tradition of genital mutilation. These serious topics are balanced with comic relief so that as a narrative, the film both entertains and informs. *Finzan* itself is a Bambara term for a dance celebrating great deeds or a "dance for the heroes." The "heroes" here are women resisting oppression, though the film also emphasizes the health of the larger community.

The opening shots of animals caring for their young, establishes the discourse of the film: women are of central importance to the community at large. A male goat also pursues a female goat around a pole to which they are both tethered. Students will be asked what this image might signify. Perhaps it is foreshadowing. If so Sissoko, may be commenting on the subordination of women to men and how sex/gender create certain power dynamics that are then reflected in a society's cultural traditions.

Animal scenes repeat themselves throughout the film, perhaps as a reminder that the film is less about individual women, than all women who propagate our species. The film also contains an epigraph from the 1980 Copenhagen Women's Conference: "Women are 50 per cent of the world's population, do about two thirds of its work, receive barely 10 per cent of its income and own less than 1 per cent of its property."¹³ (This epigraph will need to be translated for students, as subtitles are not provided for the French.) While these statistics may be outdated, it is clear that *Finzan* is overtly political.

In *Finzan*, along with other African films, the oral storytelling tradition is of critical importance. Here two women are the focus of the narrative, but the film begins and ends with the story of Nanyuma. The director, Cheick Oumar Sissoko, applies this elliptical technique "to show how oral tradition enables her to narrate her story" ¹⁴ as seen in her powerful final plea for the emancipation of all women.

The world comes from our wombs. It mistreats us. We give life, and we're not allowed to live. We produce the food crops, and others eat without us. We create wealth, and it is used against us. We women are like birds with no branch to perch on. There's no hope. All that's left is we must stand up and tie our belts. The progress of our society is linked to our emancipation.

Finzan's subject matter clearly follows in the edifying tradition mentioned earlier, exposing the subjugation of African women and functioning as a political call-to-action. The compelling narrative then becomes a teaching tool to "implicitly urge women to take responsibility for their own lives and to reject destructive traditions."¹⁵

African films are noteworthy in their use of the oral tradition, where multiple stories may be told not, in chronological order, but "like layers of music and song"¹⁰ reminiscent of griot storytelling. Western audiences unfamiliar with the importance of oral tradition might dismiss the film as somewhat disjointed because the narrative also follows the story of Fili, with no clear resolution except in the final words spoken by Nanyuma. Thus, students will need to adjust their expectations of a single protagonist driving the film's action and practice more receptive reading strategies.

As with *Things Fall Apart*, proverbs are used by characters to communicate certain ideas. The use of such figurative language is particular to African culture and reflects the rhythms of speech that are so central to the oral storytelling tradition. One proverb to be discussed is that of the porcupine and the mole. When the chief speaks to a group of women who complain about their lack of political voice he says, "You mean that I have become the mole and you the porcupine?" A woman responds

No, you are not the mole at all, because if there is someone who works, it is us. Whether it rains or the wind blows, it is we who are working. All the time, all the time, all the time. And when it comes to making decisions this will never be us either. It is you. Consequently, if there is a mole, it is certainly not you.

This refers to the idea that the porcupine represents the chief of state and the mole represents the people. And according to Sissoko, in Bambara the porcupine is also called Bala.¹⁶ Sissoko is playing with language in

that the stupid, cowardly, and (in his own way) powerful Bala is the film's clown, who forces one of the women to marry him.

A cultural allusion will also be discussed at length. In the film a woman says "That is the fault of the old bald woman," referring to the issue of genital mutilation. According to Sissoko, in Bambara mythology the earth was first represented as an old bald woman. She had sexual relations with a tree. The tree then had sexual relations with girls. The old bald woman became jealous and began to terrorize young boys and girls. From this time on, boys and girls were circumcised.¹⁷ This story reveals how cultural traditions begin and how they persist. After all, the chief and the village excisioner both provide no other rationale for the practice except it is "at the very base of our tradition," and "Because it must be done, and every girl must pass through that in order to become a woman." One of the themes present in both *Finzan* and *Water* is the idea that the persistence of tradition serves certain members of society at the expense of others. We will also examine this concept as it applies to many of our own cultural traditions. (For more information see Appendix B: Plot Description of *Finzan*)

Students will be given a handout with a list of the different characters and some of their identifying characteristics. This is so they can more easily follow the narrative. Instead of a primary focus on characters as with *Water*, students will be asked to follow one of three topics: 1) setting; 2) values; and 3) conflicts. (See Classroom Activities: Lesson 2) This will be in addition to the periodic pauses where I will check for understanding, quiz students on stylistic choices, and reinforce background material.

Jafar Panahi's The Circle

Iranian cinema is one of the most exciting cinematic movements of recent decades. Realistic depictions of women have, however, been restricted due to fundamentalist interpretations of Islam.¹⁸ The popular female director Tahmineh Milani, (once arrested and faced the death penalty for her work), has said that government guidelines require a positive presentation of women, with stereotypical depictions of devout Islamic women or caring mothers. Close-up shots have even been forbidden because they can reveal misery as much as happiness.¹⁹

It is then no surprise that Jafar Panahi's award-winning film, *The Circle*, has been banned in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The subject is women and the oppressive restrictions placed on them. The portrayal of women is far from stereotypical, and close-ups are frequently used to show the anguish of the women. While much is left out of the narrative, it is a daring attempt to show audiences the coping strategies of women victimized by patriarchal authority. Abortion, prostitution, and marriage are just a few of the issues that Panahi deals with. In an interview Panahi said "not only in Iran but all over the world, people live in circles of restrictions. Depending on geographical, political, and economic conditions, these circles are larger or smaller, but regardless of size, people strive to enlarge their circles."²⁰ Students will be asked to reflect on this quote in an informal writing exercise. (For more information see Appendix C: Descriptive Commentary on *The Circle*.)

Students will continue developing the Compare/Contrast Chart with *The Circle*.

After fully viewing the film in its entirety, students will be led through a second "close reading," of selected scenes. I will also lead students through a structural analysis of *The Circle* by drawing a circle on the board and tracing the development of the circular narrative. This will show how Panahi's aesthetic and technical choices create a unique storytelling experience. (See Classroom Activities: Lesson 3)

The following questions will be also be asked of students, who will respond orally and in writing:

1. What are your initial impressions of this film?
2. How is this film different from the others? Be specific.
3. How would you characterize the different women?
4. How do the women respond differently to their situations?
5. How are the police portrayed?
6. How does the *mise-en scène* support the theme?
7. How does pacing affect the tone?
8. What kind of camera shots are used and why?
9. How and why does Panahi play with the circle metaphor?
10. When and why is color/contrast consciously used?

Final Unit Evaluation

A comprehensive final exam will be given on all the material covered. If available, still photographs of scenes from films will be used on the exam so that students can apply their understanding of film analysis to visual images. A final, multi-draft essay will also be required, and films will be re-screened during lunch for those students who would like an additional viewing. Students will be given a choice of topics to include:

1. Using your new knowledge of how to analyze film, write an essay explaining at least five choices of one of the three directors.
2. Using the Compare/Contrast Chart, compare and contrast two of the films using specific details from the films as support.
3. Discuss the various ways that women struggle and resist oppression in the three films.
4. Discuss the importance of studying world cinema, providing specific details from the films, your notes, and class discussions.

Classroom Activities

Lesson 1: Exploring a Film's Soundtrack

Objective: To show students how sound is an important element in film. The lesson will demonstrate how a soundtrack can 1) create a particular emotional response and 2) complement the dramatic narrative as it unfolds. Students will be able to use their imagination and writing skills to generate a well-developed response.

Procedure: Prior to viewing *Water*, we will discuss non-diegetic sound and the purposes mentioned above. Students will be asked to brainstorm a list of memorable soundtracks and discuss them in terms of purpose. Sound clips from Spielberg's *Jaws* and Hitchcock's *Psycho* will be used as familiar examples of how sound works to enhance the drama and create emotional resonance with an audience.

Mainstream films have traditionally been scored using classical music from the West. With *Water*, traditional Indian instruments (the sitar, flute, and santoor) are used along with violins and percussion, creating a unique and moving soundtrack. Using three tracks ("House of Widows," "Chiyua Explores," and "Walk into River")

students will freewrite on each for 10 minutes. Students will be instructed to consider 1) how they feel; 2) what might be happening in the narrative; and 3) what might be suggested about a character. As always with freewriting, students will be told to write quickly, not letting their pens leave the paper, and not stopping to judge their responses. They will also be instructed to focus more on generating ideas and less on spelling, grammar, or occasionally diverging from the topic.

Evaluation: There are no right or wrong answers with this lesson. Grades will be based on completion of the activity, and students will be asked to share their findings with the larger class.

Lesson 2: Examining Culture through Film

Objective: To provide a basic understanding of cultural anthropology and how it can be applied to film.

Procedure: Prior to viewing *Finzan*, provide students with a character list, plot synopsis, and background on the Bambara culture of Mali. Review a map of Africa, and test them on their prior knowledge of the region. Provide notes defining and exploring the following terms: culture, social order/organization, kinship, tradition, custom/ritual, and ethnocentrism. Next divide class into three groups, assigning each group a different focus: 1) setting; 2) values; and 3) conflicts. Give each group a set of questions to consider while viewing the film and encourage notetaking when we pause to add to our Compare/Contrast Chart. After viewing the film, have groups discuss questions and report findings to whole class for discussion.

Setting

1. What do you notice about the way people live within their space? How do you think the setting influences cultural practices?
2. What different settings are represented? Describe how people live, work, and play within various settings.
3. How does film help capture the setting?

Values

1. What do the Bambara people value and why? Consider personal qualities of individuals, as well as the values of the larger society. Who benefits from the current value system? Who suffers?
2. What traditions, customs, or rituals are practiced? What values do they reflect? How do these practices help the society? How do they hurt the society?
3. Discuss a tradition, custom, or ritual currently practiced in the United States. What values are reflected? How do these practices help the society? How do they hurt the society?

Conflicts

1. Discuss the various conflicts in the film?
2. What do the conflicts threaten?
3. How are these conflicts resolved?

Evaluation: Written work will be turned in. Students will receive a completion grade if they remain on task. They will be required to demonstrate an understanding of culture on the final exam.

Lesson 3: Graphic Analysis of Film

Objective: To demonstrate how film narratives are structured and to identify the choices made by a

filmmaker.

Procedure: Draw a circle on the board or a large piece of construction paper. Write character names (as they appear in the film) around the perimeter of the circle, moving clockwise. Draw arrows to indicate movement in time. Questions will be asked of students to uncover the structure and tensions within the film. The top of the circle will read Solmaz Gholami followed by the three women (Moedah, Arezou, and Nargess), Pari, Monir, Ehlam, Nayerah, and Mojgan. I underline the four primary characters in terms of point of view. I also indicate tensions within the circle between prison/marriage; innocent/experience, smoking forbidden/permitted; abortion/abandonment, more/less resistance, and more/less camera motion. Tensions are indicated with arrows between characters/ideas/techniques. While this is only one way to critically examine the film's structure, guiding students through this exercise will help them appreciate the analytical process in itself.

Evaluation: Concepts related to the analysis of film are to be applied on the final unit exam and final essay assignment.

Appendices

Appendix A: Compare/Contrast Chart

(table 06.01.04.01 available in print form)

Appendix B: Plot Description of Finzan

Nanyuma is the central character. Her husband has just died, but unlike her co-wives she does not mourn for a man she never cared for. We see this visually in a scene where the husband's shrouded body is flanked on both sides by two of his mourning wives, while Nanyuma recedes in the background. The tradition of multiple wives will be discussed in light of current discussions of how marriage is defined in the United States. (Throughout human history, polygamy has been a common practice challenging the "traditional" notion that marriage is, and has always been, between one man and one woman.)

Instead of finding liberation, the village chief decides that, according to tradition, Nanyuma must marry her brother-in-law, Bala—a buffoonish character adapted from Malian street theater. While students may not immediately recognize this archetypal clown, they will respond to his antics and the scatological humor. Sissoko has said that Bala also "represents power, oppression, and leadership"²¹ in Mali. Bala's gun is his symbol of power and Sissoko was "attempting to show the cultural belief that weapons give power to a few people who rule Mali."²²

Nanyuma's son, aware of his mother's plight, attempts to frighten the cowardly Bala by imitating a prophetic spirit who informs him that the evening will bring him flatulence and diarrhea. The prophecy is fulfilled when the son and his friends lace Bala's drink with a potent herb that keeps him occupied and Nanyuma momentarily safe. Nanyuma twice escapes but is brought back to the village, eventually tied up like an animal, and forced to wed Bala. Her resistance, however, continues. She spits at the judge and defends herself from Bala with a knife when he tries to rape her. The village chief, who has endorsed this marriage talks about "evil and clever women" possessing Bala and making him an idiot. But many of the women of the village clearly sympathize with Nanyuma's predicament, urging the chief to reconsider his decision. It is

Nanyuma's daughter who asks her grandmother "Are women human beings or slaves?" Nanyuma's own mother (who is herself banished) can offer nothing except "Leave me alone." In fact we see multiple women who handle their situation differently, some accepting it with quiet resignation, others speaking out, presumably for the first time.

As Nanyuma's personal crisis plays out, so too does the social crisis involving the district commissioner who demands the village provide millet at a fixed price. Because of a drought, there is no grain, and the chief rejects the authority of the commissioner. Nanyuma escapes from Bala, but is soon returned only to escape again. It is clear that for the chief and the villagers, Nanyuma's breaking with tradition is the greater crisis, threatening the stability of society. The custom of widow inheritance—which previously bound the community together—now threatens to break the community apart, especially because resistance to the custom is a direct challenge to male supremacy.

For not providing the millet, the chief is arrested. But in an act of solidarity, the community demands his release. A soldier reminds the district commissioner that "the bambaras are dangerous. They rarely rebel against authority. But once they get started they don't stop." This provides an interesting paradox, as we see different abuses of power and different responses.

Nanyuma escapes, seeking help from her other brother-in-law in the city. He not only rejects her plea, but returns her and his niece Fili to the village so Fili won't become "a whore." It is later revealed that Fili has not been "excised." While Fili tries to educate some of the village women about how city women are mobilized against the traditional practice, even Nanyuma exclaims "We have to take it off because its dirty!" The women are divided on excision, but some appeal to the Chief who argues that "excision is at the very base of our tradition," as if this is an argument. The women, who also believe Nanyuma should gain her freedom and be allowed to choose her own husband, tell the Chief that if he doesn't reconsider Nanyuma's case, they will not sleep with their husbands—a strategy reminiscent of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*.

Nanyuma eventually advises Fili to run away, arguing that villagers are led "by a blind obedience to tradition." Before Fili can escape however, she is forced to undergo the procedure at the hands of other women who tell her "You'll become a woman." Fili cries "I'm already a woman," but it's too late and her screams tell us her fate. We see how women themselves are often culpable in perpetuating harmful traditions.

Interestingly Nanyuma's young son and his male friends recognize the injustice imposed upon women, swearing not on their mothers' heads but on their fathers', exclaiming that "Our fathers are messed up!" So while Fili loses her battle and Nanyuma escapes to an unknown future, there seems to be hope for future generations.

Appendix C: Descriptive Commentary on The Circle

The film begins with a black screen and no image. We, the audience, hear only the diegetic sound of a moaning woman while other female voices simultaneously talk over her cries. The title credits appear, but there are no subtitles to translate the Farsi. As a viewer we are already disoriented and uncomfortable as we listen to an unidentifiable struggle. The director, Jafar Panahi, uses this technique to immediately place the viewer in what becomes the dark world of chadors—the traditional garment worn by Muslim women, which are prominently featured throughout the film. We then hear a baby cry, see the first subtitles, "It's a girl!" and then the full frame turns from black to white. This dramatic opening sets the stage for a dramatic film about multiple women whose lives intersect as they struggle under a repressive Iranian regime.

A square gradually comes into focus in the middle of the white frame, and a woman's head—veiled in white—appears as she slides the window open. Obviously she is a nurse, and she calls out a woman's name: Solmaz Gholami. This is the first woman we are introduced to and, while we never see her, her fate is revealed at the end of the film, giving us a circular narrative. The title, *The Circle*, reveals both a stylistic and thematic device used by Panahi to show us women struggling and women resisting different forms of oppression. A circle of restrictions follow these women, and while their particular situations are vague, we know that they are contained within the circle, which does not allow for escape, only continuation.

A woman in a black chador appears. The camera is behind her so we see only her dark triangular shape. The contrast between the nurse—whose head is framed in the square window—and the woman in black (who we learn is Solmaz's mother) is startling and suggests the barriers that even exist between women themselves. We discover that the ultrasound promised a boy and Solmaz's in-laws, on learning that a girl has been delivered, will demand a divorce.

The long take establishes a slow pace contrasting to a more frantic pace that is about to begin. With an increase in speed, we seem to also see an increase in the women's resistance. The mother greets the female in-laws, lies to them about the birth, and continues down a circular staircase. We overhear the in-laws receiving the bad news, and we then see another woman—presumably Solmaz's sister—who receives the news from her mother. In a technique that Panahi will use throughout the film, the camera then follows *this* woman as she continues moving down the circular stairway. She walks outside to a phone booth, asks another woman for change, then disappears. The camera, however, stays with the new woman and her two companions, who themselves form a circle.

The three women's agitation is apparent even if we don't know the cause. Moedah leaves to sell a gold chain, and a man walks by the other women, announcing "You two alone?" The implications of his seemingly benign question are grave because women should not be alone on the street. The fierce Arezou becomes enraged and follows after the man. The camera momentarily stays with the young and comparatively innocent Nargess, and we see her panic as she is left alone. The camera turns to Arezou and we see her angrily confronting the man, chasing after him and yelling. Clearly she is a woman used to defending herself. We then learn that Moedah has been arrested and a tracking shot is used to show Nargess and Arezou running towards their friend. The indifferent sounds of modern Tehran surround the women, actually heightening the sense of the women's isolation, as they hide behind a car, furtively watching their friend. The fear of the women is palpable. The unsteady frame of a handheld camera accentuates the erratic scene and helps us identify directly with the point of view of women on the run.

We are given the first close-up of Nargess' face, and we see the hint of a black eye. This fact is never explained, and Panahi knows it doesn't need to be—abuse is perhaps not uncommon. It becomes clear that the women are avoiding the police. They bring out their black chadors and cover themselves. Another tracking shot shows them running in the opposite direction, and as audiences members we become caught up in the intensity of the drama.

Moedah is gone. So too the gold chain and the money the women were counting on. "Then how will we get to Raziliq?" asks Nargess. Arezou says she will find a way. As she makes a phone call, the camera focuses on Nargess who looks towards the sky, a car made ready for a wedding, and perhaps the bridegroom who she smiles at. Her innocence is again highlighted with her soft smile and offers a contrast to Arezou's harsh facial features and more aggressive demeanor. Arezou asks a shopkeeper for a cigarette and is informed that she can't smoke in public. Smoking becomes a motif throughout the film, emphasizing even the small restrictions

placed on women.

As they leave to find another friend, Pari, the wedding car is seen again. This aspect of *mise-en scène* is fascinating. Perhaps it implies the importance of marriage and the only real status of women as wives. Nargess' interest may also highlight her more romantic ideas about the world, also revealed in her upward gaze. This is also implied with the camera's continual focus on her face as she observes the world around her. She clearly lacks the experience of her friend Arezou, who does not share the cinematic point of view. Nargess' idealism is further suggested when she looks at a landscape painting (a Van Gogh reproduction and perhaps a symbol of liberal Western values) and believes it to be Raziliq, where the women are trying to escape to. She describes Raziliq as "a paradise" where "We'd finally see the end of our troubles."

It becomes more apparent that the women are indeed hiding from the police. From Nargess' point of view, we see a corrupt policeman take newspapers from a newsstand with an heir of absolute authority, and the tension continues to build. Arezou leads Nargess more than once, clearly taking on a motherly role to the more innocent and cherubic young girl. Arezou has a plan, directing Nargess to wait for her as she ascends a staircase and follows the circular path of a rotunda as Nargess looks up from below. The camera remains focused on Nargess as she takes in her busy surroundings, which are dominated by the hustle and bustle of men at work. She turns in complete circles three times, as if she is trying to fully understand her restrictive environment. Her gaze follows traditional street musicians but then lands on a police car. Tyranny, it seems, is everywhere and ready to interrupt the small pleasure of music that Nargess registers with her smile.

When Arezou returns to the street with Nargess, she returns with money. And while it's never stated, we know how she got it—sacrificing her body to help her younger friend. She will not go to Raziliq, explaining that she fears more rejection: "Two years in prison and no one came to see me." We also learn that she has a son but is unsure whether he is even alive. She says to Nargess, "I couldn't handle seeing that your paradise might not exist."

Nargess reluctantly takes the money for the bus, and we next see her at the station. But in order to get a ticket, she must travel with a male companion or have a student identification. Women cannot travel alone. The man relents, but police are everywhere—in a shop and in front of the bus. Nargess flees to an upper level. We again see the circular motif of a rotunda as Nargess runs with her chador flying behind her. She misses her bus, and instead begins a search for Pari, another woman, who along with Arezou and presumably Moedah, was just released from prison. When she finds Pari's home, Pari's father calls Nargess "a tramp" and insists that prison is where she and Pari belong. Nargess leaves in defeat, her back to the camera, which then follows two men—Pari's brothers on a moped—who have learned of their sister's release from prison. They are outraged by their sister and seem to want vengeance. But Pari manages to escape, and the point of view shifts.

The anxious grimace of Pari tells us her story is a tragic one. It is at this point that we learn that she, along with the other women, have actually escaped from prison. Indeed, the circle of women is large. When she visits her friend Monir inside a cinema ticket booth (which looks ominously like the women are behind prison bars) we hear how Monir's husband took a second wife while she was imprisoned. When Monir was released after four years, her own daughter was afraid of her, hiding behind the second wife for comfort. Tragedy abounds. As Pari seeks out another former female prisoner, Elham, we learn that Pari's imprisonment was related to her relationship with a man who was eventually executed. Men too are subject to the autocratic government.

When Pari finds the hospital where Elham now works, she must have a chador to enter—another restriction

placed on women. Elham, a nurse at the hospital, carries the secret of her imprisonment from her doctor husband. When Pari confides in her that she is pregnant and needs an abortion, Elham does not give her the help she needs. To be unmarried and pregnant is scandalous, but Elham is too frightening of losing her new legitimate status. As the camera follows Pari around the hospital, we overhear a conversation about a female suicide and the disgrace that will befall the family.

Panahi boldly takes every opportunity to emphasize the harsh reality of being a female in Iran.

When Pari tries to smoke within the hospital and is told this too is restricted, she says "I feel like it," with great disdain. The separation of the two women is made apparent in the framed composition with Elham, in white, sitting with her back to the camera, and Pari, in black, sitting diagonally from her, face towards the camera. The harsh, straight lines of the bench and lockers are a repeated stylistic element used by Panahi within the *mise-en scène*.

When Pari leaves the hospital in disgust, two police officers descend on her at a phone booth. One asks her to make a call to a woman. From the conversation it is apparent that this is a married woman and that the policeman is himself breaking the law, instructing the other officer to watch for patrol cars. Again, the restrictions on freedom affect everyone, not just women.

Pari moves away and throws up. While the camera still gives us Pari's point of view, Panahi is about to continue the elliptical movement of the narrative. Pari see a mother and daughter on the street and returns a doll the child has dropped. Costuming becomes important here. The small child wears a bright red hat, complimenting the girl's red bag. All of a sudden the lack of color in this film becomes obvious. Pari attempts to find lodging in a guest house around the corner, but an officer stands at the registration. When Pari walks back outside, the girl is alone. Pari notices the mother on the other side of the street hiding behind a row of cars, watching the situation. Pari approaches her, and the first thing the anxious single mother Nayereh asks for is a cigarette. The women, crouching in the dark shadows, begin to smoke but neither has a match. Again, we see Panahi using the small act of smoking as a means of emphasizing the oppressive environment. We discover that it is Nayereh's intention that a family take her child in, "somewhere that holds a future for her." We also learn this is not the first attempt at abandoning her daughter. Interestingly there is a wedding taking place across the street, a constant reminder that a woman is nothing without a husband. The flashing lights of a police car which pick up the girl, send Pari fleeing into the night. The camera now remains with Nayereh.

Nayereh is a defeated woman. A very long take and the slower tracking of her movement down the dark street, seems to emphasize this. We hear a car pull up near her and a male voice asks if she wants a ride. But the camera remains with Nayereh as she contemplates getting in a strange man's car, with obvious implications. Her chador—a form of self-protection as much as repression—falls off her head as she climbs into the vehicle. A police roadblock requires them to stop, and we then learn that the driver is a policeman who has set Nayereh up, assuming her to be a prostitute. A long shot shows us a similar situation across the street, and the final woman in the circle is introduced.

Mojgan is an unapologetic prostitute. Covered with make-up and chewing gum, she does not pretend she is anything but a single woman who needs to pay the bills. She is already resigned to her fate, which is of course, prison. As a group of men fight about the situation, we see Nayereh escape from the car she's been waiting in. This is seen from Mojgan's clearly jaded perspective. Ironically, another wedding car pulls up long enough for Mojgan to glare at it ambiguously. The man she was with is let go, but Mojgan is taken away to prison in a wagon. The camera is then immobile, focused on Mojgan—a major contrast to the fast-paced tracking of Nargess. When Mojgan attempts to smoke she's told it is not permitted. But when a male prisoner

convinces a guard to light up, the restriction is lifted—a clear double standard for women. Mojgan's character, who seems brazen and self-possessed, seems resigned to her position and is perhaps no longer trying to escape the circle.

The square window to the hospital delivery room, which began the film, is now the window to a prison cell where Mojgan is taken. The camera pans around in a complete circle, where we see the shadows of bars from the windows. It is then that we see Nargess, Arezou, and Pari, among other women, in the darkness. The narrative has come full circle, returning to a time before the three women escaped. The guard outside answers a call—an inquiry about Solmaz Gholami, the woman who gave birth to a girl and began the story. Apparently Solmaz has given birth in a maternity ward of a prison and has been transferred to another ward. The achronological sequence suggests that the circle is indeed inescapable. To be born a girl in Iran is to be a prisoner. The camera returns to the square window, which dramatically shuts and the screen fades to black.

Notes

1. Joan Didion, *The White Album* (New York: Noonday P, 1979), 11.
2. Gloria Ladson-Billings. "Coping with Multicultural Illiteracy: A Teacher Education Response." *Social Education* 55.3 (1991), 186-187.
3. Timothy Corrigan. *A Short Guide to Writing About Film* (New York: Longman, 1998), 20.
4. Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White. *The Film Experience: An Introduction* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2004), 375.
5. Corrigan, *The Film Experience*, 377.
6. Frank Nwachukwu Ukadike. "African Cinema." *World Cinema: Critical Approaches*. eds. John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 187.
7. Corrigan, *The Film Experience*, 101.
8. Ibid.
9. Ainslie T. Embree, ed., *The Hindu Tradition* (New York: Vintage, 1972), 98.
10. Corrigan, *The Film Experience*, 77.
11. Didion, 11.
12. Corrigan, *The Film Experience*, 125.
13. Josef Gugler. *African Film: Re-Imagining a Continent*. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2003), 161.
14. Frank Nwachukwu Ukadike. *Questioning African Cinema: Conversations with Filmmakers* (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2002), 187.
15. Suzanne H. MacRae. "The Mature and Older Women of African Film." *African Cinema: Post-Colonial and Feminist Readings*. ed. Kenneth W. Harrow (Trenton: African World Press, 1999)

16. Ukadike, *Questioning*, 187.

17. Ukadike, *Questioning*, 190.

18. Jamsheed Akrami, "From Passivity to Awakening: Images of Women in Iranian Films." *The Circle*, DVD. Directed by Jafar Panahi. 2000 (New York: Winstar TV & Video, 2001)

19. Ibid.

20. Jafar Panahi, interviewed by Jamsheed Akrami, 2000. *The Circle: Special Features*, DVD, directed by Jafar Panahi, 2000 (New York: Winstar TV & Video, 2001)

21. Ukadike, *Questioning*, 187.

22. Ibid.

Filmography

The Circle, DVD. Directed by Jafar Panahi. 2000; New York: Winstar TV & Video, 2001. Follows the interconnected lives of multiple Iranian women living in an oppressive society. Widely available.

Finzan. VHS. Directed by Cheick Oumar Sissoko. 1989; San Francisco: California Newsreel, 1989. A film dealing with oppressive marriage customs and genital mutilation in a Malian village. The lives of two women and a community are depicted with a mixture of tragedy and comedy. Most universities should have a copy of this important African film.

Water. DVD. Directed Deepa Mehta. 2005; Canada: Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2005. A film set in 1930s India, portraying the inhumane treatment of widows sanctioned by religion. Widely available.

Resources

Teacher Resources

Corrigan, Timothy and Patricia White. *The Film Experience*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2004. An accessible textbook providing the foundational ideas involved in film studies.

Dabashi, Hamid. *Close Up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present and Future*. London: Verso, 2001. A comprehensive examination of the history of Iranian cinema, filmmakers, gender, and globalization.

D"nmez-Colin, Gönül. *Women, Islam, and Cinema*. London: Reaktion Books, 2004.

A slim, accessible book, providing a broad view of representations of women in Islamic societies.

Harrow, Kenneth W. ed. *African Cinema: Post-Colonial and Feminist Readings*. Trenton: African World Press, 1999. A good collection

of essays on the many African films that explore imperialism and gender.

Hill, John and Pamela Church Gibson, eds. *World Cinema: Critical Approaches*. Oxford UP, 2000. A general reference on how to discuss, teach, and critically analyze world cinema.

Krueger, Ellen and Mary T. Christel. *Seeing & Believing: How to Teach Media Literacy in the English Classroom*. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 2001. A guide to teaching all forms of media to students in a K-12 setting.

Saltzman, Devyani and Deepa Mehta. *Shooting Water: A Memoir of Second Chances, Family, and Filmmaking*. New York: Newmarket, 2006. A recent memoir by the director's daughter. Details the tumultuous four-year process of making the film after Hindu fundamentalists shut down production.

Student Resources

Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Anchor, 1959. The tragic story of Okonkwo and the transformation of an Ibo village in Nigeria. A popular novel with students.

Corrigan, Timothy. *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*. New York: Longman, 2003. An excellent guide to the most common ways to effectively write about film.

Hesse, Hermann, *Siddhartha*. New York, Bantam, 1951. The story of the Buddha and his spiritual journey in India.

Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis: A Story of a Childhood*. Paris: Pantheon, 2003. A visually rich graphic memoir about the author as she comes of age during the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Poignant, funny, and informative. Good for struggling and more engaged readers.

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