



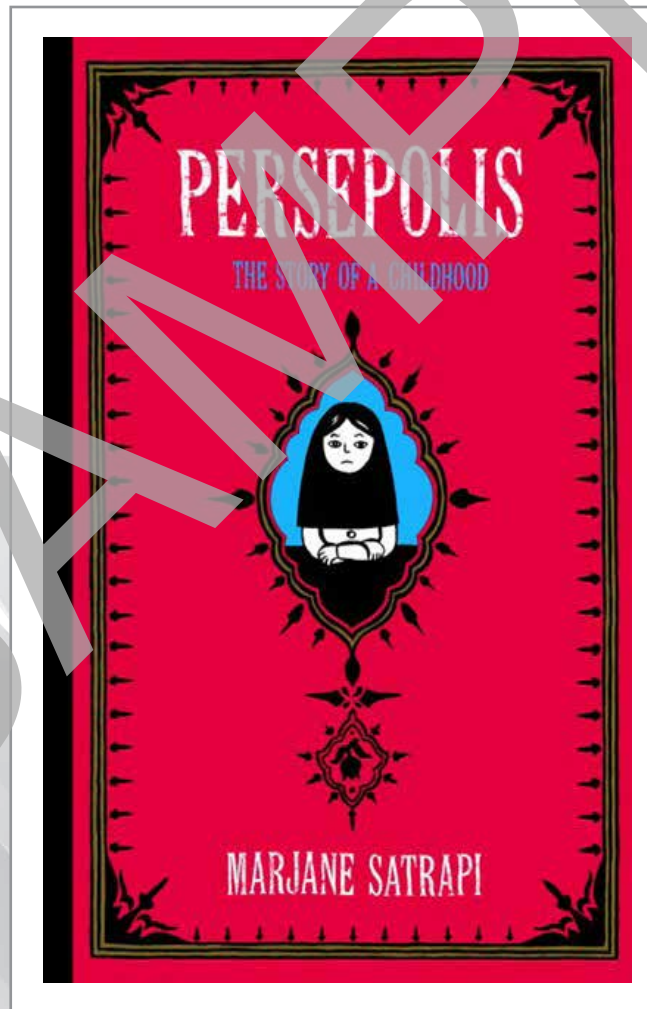
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 9-12**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# **Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood**

Marjane Satrapi



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood

Marjane Satrapi

## TEACHER GUIDE

**NOTE:**

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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## Skills and Strategies

### Thinking

Inferring, compare/contrast,  
research

### Comprehension

Predicting, summarizing,  
sequencing, cause/effect

### Literary Elements

Visuals, setting, point of view,  
theme, irony, symbolism,  
conflict, characterization

### Vocabulary

Definitions, application,  
synonyms/antonyms

### Listening/Speaking

Presentation, play, discussion

### Writing

Essay, poetry, report, letter,  
review, synopsis

### Across the Curriculum

Literature—graphic novels, book  
review; History—Persepolis,  
historical figures and  
revolutionaries, Iranian history,  
time lines; Art—photography,  
painting, collage

**Genre:** memoir; graphic novel

**Setting:** Tehran, Iran, 1978–1984

**Point of View:** first-person omniscient

**Themes:** coming of age, religion and politics, classism, war, death, love, loss, freedom

**Conflict:** person vs. society, person vs. self, person vs. person

**Style:** black-and-white pictorial retrospective

**Tone:** anxious, suspicious, distraught, naïvely hopeful, overwhelmed, poignant, reflective, loving

**Date of First Publication:** 2000

## Summary

Marjane Satrapi is a young girl growing up in Iran under the rule of the Shah, a pro-western monarch. Though Marjane attends a secular school and has progressive parents, her family actively protests the Shah's policies and overindulgent lifestyle. However, once the revolution succeeds, the new conservative Islamic government is even more difficult to bear, as many strict new policies emerge that make life difficult for anyone who does not follow a fundamentalist Islamic belief. Life changes for Marjane, and her family and friends begin to flee the country or die under mysterious circumstances. Marjane's uncle, her hero, is also executed because of his political beliefs. The family takes measures to protect itself and keep neighbors from spying on their secular lifestyle. When a war with Iraq begins, the country stands united in patriotism, but as resources become scarce and violence escalates, people begin to turn on one another. Marjane becomes resentful of the government and is expelled from school for her rebellious behavior. To protect their free-thinking daughter, Marjane's parents send her to Austria to continue her education. Marjane is heartbroken that she must leave her family behind, but she understands that it is probably the only way she will survive.

## About the Author

Marjane Satrapi was born in Rasht, Iran on November 22, 1969. She grew up in a family suspicious of the powerful ruler of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, known more commonly as the "Shah." Her family was also suspicious of the fundamentalist Islamic revolutionaries who took control of Iran, and the Satrapi family demonstrated against both groups. Marjane witnessed many of the demonstrations and saw firsthand the brutal results of armed revolution and religious persecution. Meanwhile, she attended the Lycée Français, where she received a dual-language education which eventually helped her escape Iran when her parents sent her to Austria to continue her schooling. They wanted to send her away from the violence in Iran, and they were fearful her rebellious streak would eventually land her in jail or worse. She returned to Iran as an adult and eventually settled in Paris, France, where she became an illustrator and turned her memoirs into the graphic novel *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*. *Persepolis* won the Angoulême Coup de Coeur Award, received great critical acclaim, and was eventually adapted into an animated film of the same name. The French-language film won the Special Jury Prize at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival. The English version was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Animated Feature in 2008. Marjane Satrapi has also written the graphic novels *Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return*, *Embroideries*, and *Chicken with Plums*, children's books such as *Monsters Are Afraid of the Moon*, and articles for the *New York Post* and *New York Times*. Aside from writing and illustrating, Marjane Satrapi is also involved in new films based on her books and is still actively advocating political and social change for Iran.

## The Veil–Persepolis

When the Islamic Revolution takes hold of Iran and removes the Shah from power, many changes come to Marjane’s life. She must now wear a veil in public and at school. Many schools are closed, and any sign of the “decadence” of capitalism is banned. Marjane does not know how to feel about the veil, but her parents, afraid and offended by the new regime’s changes, demonstrate regularly. Marjane has many conversations with God, and she thinks she will be the next prophet, but she hides this idea from her parents. Her parents buy her books to enlighten her about Iran’s situation, and Marjane’s worldview becomes less spiritually-oriented as she becomes more politically aware. Marjane learns from her parents how Reza rose to power and imprisoned her grandfather. From her grandmother she learns how Reza’s son, the Shah, wasted Iran’s resources and brought it to the brink of revolution.

| Vocabulary  |  |
|-------------|--|
| obligatory  |  |
| decadence   |  |
| avant-garde |  |
| imperialism |  |
| degenerate  |  |
| putsch      |  |
| entourage   |  |
| rheumatism  |  |
| splendor    |  |
| frivolities |  |

### Discussion Questions

1. Based on the images in “The Veil,” what can you tell about Marjane’s feelings about the veil? In your opinion, what does the veil represent? *(Answers will vary. The expressions on the students’ faces seem to suggest that they do not enjoy wearing the veils. Until this point, their learning environment was a French non-religious school, so it is hard for them to adjust to wearing the veil. The image of the children playing with the veils shows that they may not fully comprehend the seriousness of the situation or the veil’s meaning. The veil is a symbol of oppression and the new regime’s fundamentalist beliefs that women must cover their hair and faces. It shows the distinct change from living in an “open” society to living in a “closed” society.)*
2. What does Marjane think of her religion and God, and why does she want to be a prophet? *(Marjane is naturally “very religious” deep inside even though her family is not, so she is confused about how to feel about the veil. She prides herself on having a close relationship with God, and they have discussions every night. Marjane often tells God that she will be the next and “last” prophet, even though all previous prophets have been men. God agrees, saying that she is His “last and...best choice” [p. 3] and “celestial light.” Marjane wants to be the prophet because she is disturbed by the injustices she notices around her. For example, the Satrapis lead a privileged life, Marjane’s grandmother’s knees ache, and the Satrapis’ maid is not allowed to eat with the family. Marjane wants to be “justice, love and the wrath of God all in one” [p. 9].)*
3. Examine the images at the bottom of pages 10 and 11 of the book. What does each symbolize? *(Answers will vary. The image on page 10 references Marjane’s statement that a “...revolution is like a bicycle. When the wheels don’t turn, it falls” [p. 10]. The statement means that the revolution must keep moving forward to succeed. The image shows many bodies piled up on a bicycle with only four sets of pedals. This may symbolize the chaotic nature of the movement. In other words, many people want to contribute to the common good, but they are not united in this aim and there simply is not room for everyone’s ideas. Also, some of the people appear to be dead. This may be a reference to the fact that many people must die in order to keep the revolution moving, a dark side that Marjane overlooks. The image at the bottom of page 11 shows the many groups who have influenced Iran’s politics and people, and it symbolizes the constant influence other nations and people attempt to exert on Iran. It shows that Iranians have always had to deal with outsiders and explains why Iranians feel the need to “take back” their country.)*

## Supplementary Activities

1. Select one image from this section that you feel represents either A) an important point in Marjane's development as a person, B) a major theme of *Persepolis*, or C) a key event in this section. Be sure to explain your choice with supporting details and educated reasoning. Repeat this activity after each section.
2. Use the Word Map on page 24 of this guide to find information about six vocabulary words from this section.
3. Select one of the following people, create a time line that shows the major events of his life, and write a one-page summary of his achievements: Dr. Hossein Fatemi, René Descartes, Karl Marx, Mahatma Gandhi, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Reza Shah Pahlavi, or Cyrus the Great.

## The Letter–Moscow

Marjane learns about the differences between the social classes, and it even affects her home life. The Satrapis' maid, Mehri, and a neighbor are in love with each other. Marjane helps Mehri write love letters. However, when the neighbor learns that Mehri is not Marjane's sister and is in fact a maid, he abruptly ends the relationship. This news devastates both Mehri and Marjane and exemplifies the harsh reality of the class structure in Iran. Meanwhile, the demonstrations grow deadlier, and the Shah attempts to move toward democracy but fails. The Shah steps down, and the people rejoice. Political prisoners are released, and they tell gruesome stories about the torture they suffered in prison. Marjane sees these prisoners as heroes, and the greatest hero of all, her Uncle Anoosh, also returns. The two of them become very close as he shares his life story with her.

### Discussion Questions

1. Who is Ali Ashraf Darvishian, and what does Marjane learn from him? (*He is Marjane's favorite author, "a kind of local Charles Dickens" [p. 33]. He writes stories about children in Iran who are forced to work and struggle to survive under Iran's social class system. Reading these stories, Marjane understands why she feels so awkward when riding in her father's Cadillac. She belongs to a higher class than others she knows, and her family even has a maid. Reading Darvishian's books, Marjane gains a clearer understanding of how the social classes divide and hurt Iranians.*)
2. Who is Mehri, and how does Marjane become close to her? How does Iran's social structure affect Mehri's life? What is hypocritical about Marjane's parents' behavior toward Mehri? (*Mehri is the Satrapis' maid. She tells Marjane scary stories and plays games with her, basically acting like an older sister. When*

*Mehri falls in love with a neighbor boy named Hossein, Marjane helps her write love letters because Mehri cannot read or write. Because of this trust and because Mehri has always been like a sister, the two girls become close. When Mehri's real sister hears of this love affair, she becomes jealous and tells others about what is happening. Hossein thinks Mehri is Marjane's older sister, but when he discovers that Mehri is a maid, he refuses to see her anymore because she is of a lower social class. Marjane's parents keep Mehri at arm's length even though she has been living with them for many years. Both are complicit in the chain of events that leads to Hossein's breakup with Mehri. Publicly they protest the social class system, but privately they enable it.)*

### Vocabulary

clandestine  
jackals  
effigy  
phenomena  
euphoria  
subversive  
conviction  
irretrievable  
diabolical  
exile

## Rainstorming

**Directions:** When the Shah steps down from power, many events follow that affect Marjane's life. In each level below, write an event from the book caused by the cloud above. Continue this activity for two more levels beyond the clouds on the page.

