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Viewing 'Persepolis' by Marjane Satrapi and Vincent Paronnaud

Teaching resource

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**Education Events 2007:
Teaching Resource**



Persepolis
2007/France-USA/95 mins

Synopsis:

One of the best and most distinctive animated films for grown-ups to appear in recent years, this highly accessible girl's eye view of Iran's Islamic Revolution was one of the most talked about films in this year's Cannes festival, where it shared the Jury Prize. Co-director Marjane Satrapi based the film on her four-volume series of graphic novels, based largely on her own experience growing up in 1970s and 80s Iran. Marjane, a rebellious, independent child is brought up by her intelligent, loving parents, with frequent visits from her Swiss, feisty grandmother. The family is hopeful that the end of the Shah's reign will bring new freedoms and prosperity, but the religious crack down and war with neighbouring Iraq show they couldn't be more wrong. Marjane continues to be outspoken, and much humour comes from her attempts to question the dogma of the new regime, until her parents feel that she would be safer if they send her overseas. Smart and sassy as its heroine, the film is enjoyably full of pop culture references, but doesn't shrink from showing the serious consequences of totalitarianism. The choice mostly to stick with the drawn black and white style of the source material is highly effective, and the well chosen voice cast breathes life and depth into Marjane and those around her. *Sandra Hebron*

Credits

Directors: Vincent Paronnaud, Marjane Satrapi
Writers: Vincent Paronnaud, Marjane Satrapi
Producers: Xavier Rigault, Marc-Antoine Robert

Cast:

Marjane Satrapi
Mrs Satrapi
Mr. Satrapi
Marjane's grandmother

Chiara Mastroianni
Catherine Deneuve
Simon Abkarian
Danielle Darrieux



About the Director

Marjane Satrapi is a Graphic Novelist, Illustrator and Children's book Author. *Persepolis* was released as a graphic Novel in 2000 and was semi-autobiographical look at her life.

Satrapi was sent to Vienna at the age of 14 in order to flee the Iranian Regime, but returned later to attend further study. She is the Grand-daughter of Nasser-al Din Shah, Shah of Persia from 1848 to 1896, but according to her – this is not that important! "You have to know the kings of the Qajar dynasty, they had hundreds of wives. They made thousands of kids. If you multiply these kids by generation you have, I don't know, 10-15,000 princes and princesses. There's nothing extremely special about that."

Key Topics:

Iranian Revolution, Veiling, Teenage Identity, Pop Culture, Animation, Islam, Refugee Experience

Before the Screening:

1. Research the recent history of Iran and answer the following questions:
 - a. Who was the Shah and how did he come to power?
 - b. What was the Iranian Revolution and what were its core ideals?
 - c. Who is/was the Ayatollah? Is this an individual person or a title?
 - d. What happened during the Iran/Iraq war?
 - e. Who is the current leader of Iran?
2. Keep clippings of representations of Iran in the press for one week (keep a journal entry for depictions on television). At the end of the week write a one-page summary of how you think Iran is represented in the media – would you say the representation is mostly positive or negative, why?
3. Look up the term 'Persepolis' and bear this in mind while watching the film – why do you think the author chose to call her book/film this?

Discussion Points & Essay Questions:

1. Read *Persepolis*, the graphic novel on which the film was based. Compare and contrast the book and the film, look for similarities and differences in how the same scenes were represented – how do you think the author changed the tone of events when the book was adapted for screen? Do you think that there are any major pieces missing from the film?
2. Do you think that the film you have seen will be released in cinemas? Discuss your answer
3. Marjane struggles with her feelings about 'Westernisation' – thinking of her behaviour/clothing/pop culture tastes in Europe and Iran, discuss whether Marjane fits your image of what young women behave like in each of these locations.

4. Research and describe the term 'coming of age movie'
 - a. Discuss whether you think that *Persepolis* fits this description. Refer to specific examples in the film.
 - b. Discuss whether you think that 'coming of age movies' form a film genre
5. Look up the term 'Refugee' and 'Asylum Seeker' – do you think Marjane's character in the film fits this term?
 - a. What are the legal criteria that someone has to meet to be considered a Refugee?

Activities:

1. Read Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus*, about the Holocaust. Compare and contrast how Spiegel and Satrapi use drawings and animation to depict historical events – what are some of the fundamental differences and strong similarities between the two works
 - a. Choose a current historical event and create a graphic novel to illustrate it – what artistic and content choices would you make?
 - b. Now illustrate a personal memoir – are the artistic choices you would make different depending on the content of what you are representing?
2. With reference to how Marjane described her feeling of being an 'outsider' when she moved to Vienna, conduct the following activity:

Organise the class into groups of 6 and place some 'post-it' notes and paper clips in front of them. Ask one member of each group to step out. Instruct the other groups to build the tallest freestanding structure that they can using only the post it notes and the paper clips. Ask them to begin and give them a 7 minute time frame.

- The members of the group that were asked to step out are our immigrants. (although they do not need to know this yet). Their task is simply to join a different group and offer help and advice where needed, or wanted. They are to join the groups 4 minutes after the start.
 - The point of the exercise is not actually which group builds the largest structure, but which group actually acknowledges and communicates with the 'immigrant'.
 - Discuss the exercise with the class after the task is completed.
 - To the group: What did it feel like having a person join you during the exercise? Did you include them in your ideas? Did you take on any of their ideas? Did you accept their help? What do you think this exercise proves?
 - To the 'immigrant': What did it feel like joining a group after the activity had started? What was the communication like during the activity?
3. Write a journal entry as Marjane at the start of the film when the Shah is overthrown, when she moves to Vienna, and when she returns to Tehran. How do you think her views of the world will have changed in each of these different phases of her life?
 4. Discuss the role of music in the film, how/why were certain songs used? Write a treatment for a film of your childhood and illustrate it with songs – what images will you see while each song plays?
 5. Arrange an interview with someone you know who was born outside the UK, focusing on their experiences before coming here and what made them decide to come to the UK
 - a. Record your interview on video or using an audio recording
 - b. Discuss: is your interviewees story similar or different to Marjane's in the film? Is there anything you would describe as 'universal' about experiences of migration? Is every story very different?

For Further Viewing:

Children of Heaven (Majid Majidi/Iran 1997)
The Wind Will Carry Us (Abbas Kiarostami/Iran 1995)
The Day I Became a Woman ([Marzieh Meshkini/Iran 2000](#))
Kandahar (Mohsen Makhmalbaf/Afghanistan 2001)
Osama (Siddiq Barmak/Afghanistan 2003)
Man Push Cart (Ramin Bahrani/US 2005)
The Immigrant (Charlie Chaplin/US 1917)
Bend it Like Beckham (Gurinder Chadha/UK 2002)
Coming to America (John Landis/US 1988)
El Norte (Gregory Nava/US 1983)