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    I Must Go Home to Iran Again, by Marjane Satrapi, The New York Times
    ON WRITING PERSEPOLIS, by Marjane Satrapi, as told to Pantheon staff
    'Persepolis' paints Iran from a kid's perspective, by Christopher Theokas, USA Today

freelibrary.org/onebook
Please send any comments and feedback on this lesson plan to Larissa.Pahomov@gmail.com.
Essential Questions

The materials in this unit plan are meant to be flexible and easy to adapt to your own classroom. Through reading the book and completing any of the suggested activities, students can achieve any number of the following understandings:

- Individuals are a product of their society, but not necessarily unified with it.
- We develop our beliefs from a wide range of influences.
- Children repeat what they are told; adults use critical thinking to draw their own conclusions.

Students should be introduced to the following key questions as they begin reading, and keep them in mind as they work through the book:

How do we form our beliefs in life? Are they set in stone, or constantly changing?
What does it take to go from being a child to an adult?
How does a person survive in and make sense of conflicted world? In what ways must you change, and in what ways can you stay the same?

These questions can be applied directly to the book:

How does Marjane form her beliefs as she grows up?
When does Marjane go from being a child, to a teenager, to an adult? Why?
How do Iranians survive the repressive regime in Iran? How does Marjane survive when is sent to live in Austria?

Many of the reader response questions and suggested projects relate to these essential questions. Students are encouraged to ask these questions not only of the characters of the book, but of themselves.
Map of Iran and Region
In-Class Introduction

This lesson is designed to provide students with a one-class introduction to the book. The lesson can be used to start off a class reading of the text, or to encourage them to read it independently.

As a recipient of One Book resources, the Free Library requires that you devote one class period to introducing Persepolis to students, either using this lesson or your own plan.

Note: This lesson is partially adapted from a lesson available on the website www.ReadWriteThink.org. The original lesson is 4 days in length, and a link to the materials is provided in the Online Resources section of this guide.

Procedure:

1. Begin by asking students to respond to the following prompt, either verbally or on paper:
   
   When do we tell a story with pictures, and why?
   
   - In discussion, try to come up with as broad a list of media as possible, and then discuss the difference between reading an image and the printed word.
   - Make sure to challenge any claims that images are "simpler" and "easier" to read or create than a novel. (How long does it take to plan and make a comic book? A movie? How long does it take to set up a good photograph?)

2. Distribute Graphic Novel/Comics Terms and Concepts (included in the next pages) to students and review it—or just discuss and write on the board. For this introductory session, focus on the following terms: frame, panel, gutter, graphic weight (tonal difference, patterning, and saturated colors), and text features (captions versus speech balloons).

3. Distribute copies of the book and ask students to open to page 3, which is the first page of the story. Direct their attention to the simple lines that frame each panel. Note that gutters are consistent. At this point, life is safe and predictable with a sense of order echoed by this visual regularity. Tell students to watch for changes in the gutters as the story progresses. At what point do they note changes in the gutters? Why does the artist choose to alter the gutters at this time? What emotions do such gutter changes evoke?

4. Ask students to look carefully at the panels on this page (you might have them number the panels from 1 to 5, starting in the top left corner). How many panels are there? How are the panels the same? How do they differ? Why do they think the author made these choices?
5. Ask students to read the captions on page 3. What does the reader learn from the captions? Direct their attentions to the second panel where the author is sitting with a group of little girls all wearing veils. The caption reveals that we can see only a little bit of the author's arm. What is the significance of this caption to the other captions on this page? What is the author foreshadowing?

6. Ask students to look at the third panel that shows a number of people protesting. Ask students to read the caption and then ask them what they notice about this panel when it is compared with the other panels on the page. Why do they think it is darker? What does the darkness symbolize? What emotion is the author representing here? Is this representation effective? What does it tell them about what will happen in the book?

7. Panels 4 and 5 see the addition of various speech bubbles. Ask students what the reader learns from these bubbles. What do the children have to say about the veils? Why do students think they are saying these things? What do the pictures show students doing with their veils? Why?

8. Give students time to read the rest of the first chapter (to page 9).

9. Now that students have an idea of the complexities present in this graphic form, take a few minutes for them to reflect on the challenges this genre represents. Encourage them to produce a free write that explores any feelings of discomfort or confusion (text-to-self connection), connects this book to a previously read text (text-to-text connection), and links the subject matter to current news and events (text-to-world connection).

10. If students are going to use a Literary Log to track their reading, have them do the first entry now.
Graphic Novel/Comics Terms and Concepts

Layout

Panel: A distinct segment of the comic, containing a combination of image and text in endless variety. Panels offer a different experience then simply reading text:

- The spatial arrangement allows an immediate juxtaposition of the present and the past.
- Unlike other visual media, transitions are instantaneous and direct but the exact timing of the reader’s experience is determined by focus and reading speed.

Frame: The lines and borders that contain the panels.

Gutter: The space between framed panels.

Bleed: An image that extends to and/or beyond the edge of the page.

Foreground: The panel closest to the viewer.

Midground: Allows centering of image by using natural resting place for vision. The artist deliberately decides to place the image where a viewer would be most likely to look first. Placing an image off-center or near the top or bottom can be used to create visual tension but using the midground permits the artist to create a more readily accepted image.

Background: Provides additional, subtextual information for the reader.

Graphic weight: A term that describes the way some images draw the eye more than others, creating a definite focus using color and shading in various ways including:

- The use of light and dark shades; dark-toned images or high-contrast images draw the eye more than light or low-contrast images do
- A pattern or repeated series of marks
- Colors that are more brilliant or deeper than others on the page

Continued
Figures

Faces: Faces can be portrayed in different ways. Some depict an actual person, like a portrait; others are iconic, which means they are representative of an idea or a group of people. Other points to observe about faces include:
  • They can be dramatic when placed against a detailed backdrop; a bright white face stands out
  • They can be drawn without much expression or detail; this is called an “open blank” and it invites the audience to imagine what the character is feeling without telling them.

Hands/Feet: The positioning of hands and feet can be used to express what is happening in the story. For example, hands that are raised with palms out suggest surprise. The wringing of hands suggests obsequiousness or discomfort. Hands over the mouth depict fear, shame, or shyness. Turned in feet may denote embarrassment, while feet with motion strokes can create the sense of panic, urgency, or speed.

Text

Captions: These are boxes containing a variety of text elements, including scene-setting, description, etc.

Speech balloons: These enclose dialogue and come from a specific speaker’s mouth; they vary in size, shape, and layout and can alternate to depict a conversation. Types of speech balloons include those holding:
  • External dialogue, which is speech between characters
  • Internal dialogue, which is a thought enclosed by a balloon that has a series of dots or bubbles going up to it

Special-effects lettering: This is a method of drawing attention to text; it often highlights onomatopoeia and reinforces the impact of words such as bang or wow.
Reader Response Questions – Book One

1 - The Veil
Why must Marjane start wearing the veil? How do she and her classmates react?

Describe Marjane’s relationship with her parents and grandmother. How do they influence her and her relationship with the changing Iranian society?

Why does Marjane want to be "the last prophet?" What would be the purpose of being "justice, love, and the wrath of God all in one?"

2 - The Bicycle
On page 10, young Marjane proclaims that "the revolution is like a bicycle. When the wheels don't turn, it falls."
What does her drawing in the next frame suggest about this idea? How have her opinions of the Iranian revolution changed from when she was a child?

Why do you think God stops visiting Marjane at the end of the chapter?

3 - The Water Cell
What’s the difference between what Marjane learns in school about the Shah's power and what her father tells her?

Why was Marjane's grandfather imprisoned? What effect did this have on his family?

4 - Persepolis
What is so funny about the "martyr" scene outside the hospital? Why doesn't Marjane get it?

5 - The Letter
Why does Mehr’s admiring neighbor reject her? Do you think Marjane’s father did the right thing by ending the crush?

6 - The Party
How does people’s behavior change in this chapter after the Shah steps down?

Why does Marjane’s mother stop her from terrorizing Ramin? Do you think she succeeds in getting her message across to Marjane?
7- The Heroes
Why were the men who come to Marjane's house imprisoned and tortured?

What effect do their stories have on Marjane?

8 - Moscow
Why does Marjane idolize her uncle Anoosh so much? Do you think she is right to do so?

9 - The Sheep
In this chapter, a family escapes Iran hidden among a flock of sheep -- but what does it mean when we say people act like a herd of sheep? When do the people in this chapter do that?

Why does Anoosh request to see Marjane when he's in prison? How does Marjane react when she gets the news of his death?

10 - The Trip
What changes do the new fundamentalist government make in Iran? How does Marjane's family react?

How does Marjane react to the announcement that Iraq has invaded Iran? How is she dressed in the last frame of the chapter (79)?

11 - The F-14s
Why do you think Marjane thinks her father is unpatriotic for saying he won't fight in the war (81)? Do you think she is right?

In the last frame of the chapter, Pardisse says she wishes her father "were alive and in jail rather than dead and a hero." Do you think you would feel the same way in her place?

12 - The Jewels
What effect does the war have on daily life in Tehran? How do people, including Marjane's parents, act differently?

13 - The Key
What is the purpose of a "nupital chamber," and why are there so many of them in Tehran?

In this chapter, adults seek to influence the younger population of Iran in different ways. How do Marjane and her schoomates defy their teachers? And what is the significance of the "golden" key given to boys?

On the last page of the chapter (102), There are only two frames. Compare and contrast their images and their messages. (They look similar but show opposite experiences--what does this say about life and war?)
14 - The Wine
Marjane’s family enjoys having parties and drinking—what precautions do they take, and why do they continue despite the danger of being found out? Why do people seek to keep their regular routines even in dangerous times?

15 - The Cigarette
What understanding does Marjane come to about the war? Why could it have been avoided?

In the last frame, she announces that "with this first cigarette, I kissed childhood goodbye." Do you believe her? What does it take to go from being a child to an adult?

16 - The Passport
Why is the Iranian government so strict about letting people out of the country, even if they are gravely ill like uncle Taher?

Why is it ironic that his passport finally arrives on the day of his funeral?

17 - Kim Wilde
Why does American pop culture have such an influence on Marjane and kids her age? Why are she and her family willing to take such risks to have tapes, posters, and jean jackets?

18 - The Shabbat
Why does Marjane’s family decide to stay in Tehran, despite the constant threat of bombing?

How does the bombing on her street affect Marjane? Have you ever come home to a major crisis or disaster like she did? How did it change you?

19 - The Dowry
Marjane is outspoken at all times—how does this hurt her, and what decision does it lead her parents to make?

What advice does Marjane’s grandmother give her the night before she leaves? How do you think Marjane might use this advice once she is in Austria?
Reader Response Questions – Book Two

1 - The Soup
Who makes Marjane feel at home in Austria? How do they do it?

What does a person need to feel at home in a foreign place?

Tyrol
Why do you think Marjane ends up with her group of "outsider" friends? What are your impressions of them?

Compare and contrast Marjane’s friends at school with Lucia and her family in Tyrol. In what ways do they make Marjane feel better about her new life?

Pasta
What is Anarchism, and why do you think Marjane’s friends are so interested in it?

How does Marjane respond to Momo’s suggestion that she "cultivate" herself?

Why does Marjane get kicked out of the dormitory? Do you think she was justified in defending her background, or was she just being rude?

The Pill
Julie introduces Marjane to many new ideas about sex and being a woman in the western world. Which ideas does Marjane accept, and which make her feel uncomfortable?

The Vegetable
Marjane goes through many physical changes in this chapter—both voluntary and involuntary. How do they think they affect her? How have your physical changes affected you over your lifetime?

Marjane says that her life in Austria felt like “playing a game by somebody else’s rules.” What does she mean by this? Does she have to play by “somebody else’s rules” to survive in her new home, or not?

The Horse
Marjane’s mom lies to her about her missing gold pendant. What do you think really happened to the jewelry?

How do you think Marjane and her mother’s relationship have changed since Marjane left Iran? Do you think they are closer or more distant now that they live in different countries?
Hide and Seek
There is an actual hide and seek game in this chapter, but what other meanings might this title have for Marjane? What is she seeking and/or hiding from?

Marjane proclaims Markus “the first great love of [my] life” (65) but their relationship has its own challenges and troubles. Do you think Markus is a good boyfriend to Marjane? What happens in the chapter that supports your opinion?

How do some Austrians make Marjane feel like an outsider? Why do you think they act this way towards her?

The Croissant
Some of Marjane’s friends are very concerned about the new conservative, “Nazi-like” politicians in Austria. Why doesn’t Marjane seem to share their anger?

What are some of the ways Marjane and Markus grow apart during this chapter?

The Veil
Why does Marjane end up on the streets? Do you think it’s a situation she could have avoided?

Why does Marjane request that her parents never ask about the three months she went missing? Do you think this was the right thing to do?

Look at the last frame in the chapter. What do you think Marjane’s attitude is about going back to Iran? Make a prediction about how life will go for her after she returns.

The Return
How have Marjane’s parents changed since she left Iran? What is their attitude towards the Iran-Iraq war, and why?

Marjane’s father complains that the West supplied both sides of the war with weapons and supplies. Why do you think that they did this?

At the end of the chapter, Marjane decides never to tell her parents about her "misadventures" in Europe. Do you think she made the right choice? What about the fact that she eventually wrote this book?

The Joke
What do you think of Kia’s condition? Does he seem "almost dead" or not?

What is the lesson that Marjane learns from visiting Kia? Do you agree with her analysis of the situation? Can you imagine living like Kia does?
Skiing
What are Marjane’s motivations for attempting to commit suicide?

How serious do you think Marjane was about trying to kill herself?

Do you think her attempted suicide was necessary for her to take control of her life, or could she have achieved it another way?

The Exam
Why are Marjane and Reza so interested in each other when they first meet? Do you think these interests will lead to a successful relationship?

What do you think of the "ideological exam" that Marjane has to take? If you were in her place, would you have done the same thing?

The Makeup
What does Marjane do to avoid being picked up by the police? How do Reza and her Grandmother react to this? Why do you think they have opposite reactions?

The Convocation
What are some of the ways Marjane and her female friends show off their individuality, despite their restrictive clothing?

The Socks
In this chapter, Marjane states that "fear has always been the driving force behind all dictators' repression." In what ways are young people in Iran repressed, and how do they rebel against this repression?

The Wedding
At the end of the dinner with Marjane’s father, Marjane tells us that she and Reza end up getting divorced. Why do you think she chose to tell us this fact before the wedding even takes place?

Why does the marriage break down as soon as Marjane and Reza move in together?

The Satellite
What are the different ways that Marjane and her family get news and information? What sources do they trust, and what are they critical of?

Why do Marjane and her father fight? What conclusion does Marjane come to afterwards?
The End
How does Marjane’s family react to her eventual separation and divorce from Reza? What does this show about their politics and character?

Why does Marjane finally decide to leave Iran? Do you think she will follow her mothers instructions and never return?

Literary Log Prompts

Students can use one or more of these prompts as a way to keep a log their reading. This can be used as preparation for class, or as a way for students to keep track of their independent reading. Logs could be anything from a few notes to a few paragraphs. Worksheets for these logs are provided in the packet.

Marjane's Beliefs
For each reading assignment, log any new "big idea" she encounters, including where/who it comes from, and what affect it has on her.

Character Log
For each reading assignment log one (or more) of the new characters that is introduced to the story. Describe them briefly. What does Marjane learn from her interaction with them?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Idea</th>
<th>Where/who is it from?</th>
<th>How does it affect her?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Literary Log: Marjane’s Beliefs

Name: ________________________________
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and description of new character</th>
<th>What does Marjane learn from them?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. obligatory (3)
   “Then came 1980: The year it became **obligatory** to wear the veil at school.”

2. decadence (4)
   “All bilingual schools must be closed down. They are symbols of capitalism. Of **decadence**.”

3. avant-garde (6)
   “Deep down I was very religious, but as a family we were very modern and **avant-garde**.”

4. fanatics (15)
   “The Shah said that a group of religious **fanatics** perpetrated the massacre.”

5. degenerate (18)
   “My parents demonstrated every day. Things started to **degenerate**. The army shot at them.”

6. frivolities (28)
   “All of the country’s money went into ridiculous celebrations of the 2500 years of dynasty and other **frivolities**... all of this to impress heads of state, the population couldn’t have cared less.”

7. cadaver (31)
   “People came out carrying the body of a young man... then there was another **cadaver**, an old man carried out on a stretcher.”

8. sentiment (43)
   “Politics and **sentiment** don’t mix.”

9. subversive (47)
   “Crime: wrote **subversive** articles in the Keyhan.”

10. cyanide (51)
    “He always had **cyanide** on him in case he was arrested, but he was taken by surprise and unfortunately he never had a chance to use it...”

11. dialectic (53)
    “Now that the revolution was finally over once and for all, I abandoned the **dialectic** materialism of my comic strips.”

12. shunned (58)
    “You know what it is like to be an unmarried mother in this country. You will be **shunned**.”

13. proletariat (62)
    “The **proletariat** shall rule! It’s inevitable!”

14. imperialists (73)
    “Better to have no students at all than to educate future **imperialists**.”

15. regime (75)
    “You showed your opposition to the **regime** by letting a few strands of hair show.”

16. console (86)
    “At recess, I tried to **console** her...”

17. nuptial (94)
    “According to Shiite tradition, when an unmarried man dies, a **nuptial** chamber is built for him.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Word(s)</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Sentence(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>carnage</td>
<td>(101)</td>
<td>“It’s nuts! They hypnotize them and just toss them into battle. Absolute <strong>carnage</strong>.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>vintner</td>
<td>(106)</td>
<td>“My uncle was the <strong>vintner</strong>. He had a genuine wine-making lab in his basement.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>belligerent</td>
<td>(115)</td>
<td>“The walls were suddenly covered with <strong>belligerent</strong> slogans.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>systematically</td>
<td>(117)</td>
<td>“Those who opposed the regime were <strong>systematically</strong> arrested… and executed together.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>veritable</td>
<td>(122)</td>
<td>“The Germans sell chemical weapons to Iran and Iraq. The wounded are then sent to Germany to be treated. <strong>Veritable</strong> guinea pigs.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>asylum</td>
<td>(123)</td>
<td>“I made him a fake passport and he sought political <strong>asylum</strong> in Sweden.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>euphoria</td>
<td>(138)</td>
<td>“We were in the midst of shopping <strong>euphoria</strong>, when suddenly…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>discreet</td>
<td>(142)</td>
<td>“When we walked past the Baba-Levy’s house, which was completely destroyed, I could feel that she was <strong>discreetly</strong> pulling me away.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>Sentence</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. trivial (156)</td>
<td>“While people were dying in our country, she was talking to me about trivial things.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. habitual (157)</td>
<td>“I heard that in the course of one of their habitual quarrels.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. caricatures (165)</td>
<td>“Then I began to draw caricatures of the teachers.”</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. rudimentary (172)</td>
<td>“My German was rudimentary, theirs unusual.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. refectory (176)</td>
<td>“I went downstairs with my pot to watch TV in the refectory.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. volition (179)</td>
<td>“Explaining to them that, humiliated to have been caught red-handed stealing a fruit yogurt, I had decided to leave the boarding house of my own volition.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. insolent (180)</td>
<td>“And the sisters who found me insolent... they should have seen Julie.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. lackey (191)</td>
<td>“My relationship with the school’s lackeys didn’t please my friends much.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. assimilate (193)</td>
<td>“The harder I tried to assimilate, the more I had the feeling that I was distancing myself from my culture, betraying my parents and my origins, that I was playing a game by somebody else’s rules...”</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Baccalaureate (223)</td>
<td>“It was the end of my last year. I was going to take the French baccalaureate.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Banal (241)</td>
<td>“...and it’s a banal story of love that almost carried me away.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Mediocre (244)</td>
<td>“The shame of having become a mediocre nihilist.”</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Nihilist (244)</td>
<td>“The shame of having become a mediocre nihilist.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Disillusioned (252)</td>
<td>“I would never have thought that I would one day hear my mother sound so disillusioned.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Anecdote (257)</td>
<td>“Next to my father’s distressing report, my Viennese misadventures seemed like little anecdotes of no importance.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Tyrannical (289)</td>
<td>“Most families are traditionalists. They are as tyrannical as the state.”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 17. | intransigence (294)  
I had forgotten her extreme **intransigence**. |
| 18. | perspicacity (295)  
“Faced with the **perspicacity** of my girlfriends, I had no choice but to admit the truth.” |
| 19. | discernment (295)  
“Such **discernment**!” |
| 20. | Discreet (302)  
“Our struggle was more **discreet**.” |
| 21. | Semblance (304)  
“To find a **semblance** of equilibrium, we partied almost every night…” |
| 22. | Propaganda (322)  
“Since when have you trusted our media? Their objective consists of making anti-western **propaganda**.” |
| 23. | Cynicism (322)  
“I hate just as much the **cynicism** of the allies who call themselves “liberators” while they’re there for oil.” |
| 24. | Itinerant (332)  
“The **itinerant** cigarette seller, even beggars in the street, all made it clear they’d like to sleep with her.” |
| 25. | Insinuate (335)  
“At that, they started to yell, saying that I was **insinuating** that bearded men were sissies.” |
Suggested Assessments

1. Write a comparison of Satrapi’s graphic novel and her words-only writing—compare and contrast the final chapter of her book with her article "I must go home to Iran again" (included in the Print Resources section.) These two pieces deal with similar topics, but how are they conveyed differently? What effect does each have on the reader?

2. Create a "graphic novel" chapter of your own past. Students may use the provided blank comic book pages, or create their own. This project could also be done in pairs, with one writer and one drawer.

3. Marjane reveals a great deal about herself and her family in her book. Imagine you’re one of her family members—mother, father, or Grandmother—and you’ve just read it for the first time. Write a letter to Marjane. What would you say? How would you react? Be sure to stay in character and use details from the book.

4. Choose one page of the graphic novel and "translate" it into a regular novel -- turn everything that’s on the page into a words-only story. Then, write a comparison of original and your own version. Each are conveying the same message, but how are they doing it differently?

5. Read the USA Today review of Persepolis (included in the Print Resources section) and write a response. Do you agree or disagree with their statements?
Online Resources

Pictures Tell the Story: Improving Comprehension With Persepolis
http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=1102
"In this lesson, students examine the art and craft of the graphic novel Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi and assess the impact of visual elements on their comprehension of the beginning of the story. The goal of the lesson is to get students started so that they can successfully read and analyze the rest of the book. Additionally, students explore the recent history of the Middle East as presented by Satrapi."
   Good for: introduction, visual arts, language arts

Gaining Background for the Graphic Novel Persepolis: A WebQuest on Iran
http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=1063
"This lesson includes a WebQuest in which students research relevant and reliable information in groups, and a technology-enhanced presentation that allows them to share the information with their classmates."
   Good for: introduction, social studies

Storyboarding Revolution
http://www.gcass.org/node/140
"Students will translate their knowledge into a new context create a storyboard based on one important event of a revolution. Students will compose a historical narrative from a particular perspective of someone living during that particular revolution."
   Good for: visual arts, social studies

Iran Issues
"In this lesson, students read an article exploring U.S.-Iran relations on the anniversary of the 30th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, research the events of that period, and write historical fiction based on photographs of Iran then and now."
   Good for: introduction, social studies
PARIS — Six years ago, I went to listen to a man, whom I will not name, in a café in Paris.

He said it had been 24 years since he had been back to Iran, that he had to leave right after the revolution of 1979 for political reasons.

He talked of many things, and he ended by saying: “Once you leave your homeland, you can live anywhere, but I refuse to die anywhere other than Iran — or else my life will have had no meaning.”

His statement touched me very deeply. I’ve thought about what he said, not just understanding him intellectually but feeling his meaning with all my heart. I, too, was convinced that I must die nowhere other than in my country, Iran, or else my life will also be meaningless.

At the time I heard this man speak, it had already been four years since I had been home.

Yes, I call Iran home because no matter how long I live in France, and despite the fact that I feel also French after all these years, to me the word “home” has only one meaning: Iran.

I suppose it’s that way for everyone: Home is the place where one is born and raised.

No matter how much I am in love with Paris and its indescribable beauty, Tehran with all its ugliness will in my eyes forever be the “bride” of all cities around the world.

It’s a question of geography, of the smell of the rain, of the things we know without ever having to think why we know them.

It’s a question of the Alborz Mountains protecting my town. Where are they? Who will protect me now?

It’s a question of the unbearable smell of pollution, a smell I know so well.

It’s a question of knowing that the blue of the sky is not the same everywhere, nor does the sun shine the same way in every place.
It’s a question of wanting to be able to walk under my own blue sky, of wanting my own sunshine to caress my back.

At the time I heard that man speak it had already been four years since I had been home. Today it has been more than 10 years. To be precise, 10 years, six months and three days.

During all that time, I believed I would live a few more decades without ever being able to walk in my mountains. But 18 days ago, June 12, 2009, something happened, something I never believed I would see in my lifetime: Iranians, crowding into an extremely tiny space of democracy, usually left just large enough for them to vote for a president whom the Guardian Council had already approved, truly voted.

The question much of the media asked before the election was: “Are Iranians ready for democracy?”

“YES!” came the answer, loud and oh, so clear.

With a voter turnout of 85 percent, they started to dream that change was possible.

They started to believe “Yes they can,” too.

It’s likely needless to remind you that this was not the first time Iranians showed how much they love freedom. Look only at the 20th century: They launched the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 (the first in Asia); nationalized the oil industry in 1951 (the first Middle Eastern country to do so); mounted the revolution of 1979; and engineered the student revolt of 1999. Which brings us to now, and that deafening cry for democracy.

Almost 20 years ago, when I started studying art in Tehran, the very idea of “politics” was so frightening that we didn’t even dare think about it. To talk about it? Beyond belief!

To demonstrate in the streets against the president? Surreal!

Criticize the supreme leader? Apocalyptic!

Shouting “Down with Khamenei”? Death!

Death, torture and prison are part of daily life for the youth of Iran. They are not like us, my friends and I at their age; they are not scared. They are not what we were.

They hold hands and scream: “Don’t be afraid! Don’t be afraid! We are together!”

They understand that no one will give them their rights; they must go get them.
They understand that unlike the generation before them — my generation, for whom the dream was to leave Iran — the real dream is not to leave Iran but to fight for it, to free it, to love it and to reconstruct it.

They hold hands and scream: “We will fight! We will die! But we won’t be humiliated!”

They went out knowing that going to each demonstration meant signing their death warrants.

Today I read somewhere that “the velvet revolution” of Iran became the “velvet coup,” with a little note of irony, but let me tell you something: This generation, with its hopes, dreams, anger and revolt, has forever changed the course of history. Nothing is going to be the same.

From now on, nobody will judge Iranians by their so-called elected president.

From now on, Iranians are fearless. They have regained their self-confidence.

Despite all the dangers they said NO!

And I’m convinced this is just the beginning.

From now on, I will always say: Once you leave your homeland, you can live anywhere. But I refuse to only die in Iran. I will one day live in Iran... or else my life will have had no meaning.

MARJANE SATRAPI is a writer and filmmaker whose works include the book and film “Persepolis.” Her most recent graphic novel is “Chicken With Plums.”
ON WRITING PERSEPOLIS
By Marjane Satrapi, as told to Pantheon staff

http://www.randomhouse.com/pantheon/graphicnovels/satrapi2.html

Chances are that if you are an American you know very little about the 1979 Iranian Revolution. "This revolution was normal, and it had to happen," says Marjane Satrapi, author of Persepolis, a totally unique memoir about growing up in Iran after the Shah left power. "Unfortunately, it happened in a country where people were very traditional, and other countries only saw the religious fanatics who made their response public." In her graphic novel, Satrapi, shows readers that these images do not make up the whole story about Iran. Here, she talks freely about what it was like to tell this story with both words and pictures, and why she is so proud of the result.

Why I Wrote Persepolis

From the time I came to France in 1994, I was always telling stories about life in Iran to my friends. We'd see pieces about Iran on television, but they didn't represent my experience at all. I had to keep saying, "No, it's not like that there." I've been justifying why it isn't negative to be Iranian for almost twenty years. How strange when it isn't something I did or chose to be?

After I finished university, there were nine of us, all artists and friends, working in a studio together. That group finally said, "Do something with your stories." They introduced me to graphic novelists. Spiegelman was first. And when I read him, I thought "Jesus Christ, it's possible to tell a story and make a point this way." It was amazing.

Writing a Graphic Novel is Like Making a Movie

People always ask me, "Why didn't you write a book?" But that's what Persepolis is. To me, a book is pages related to something that has a cover. Graphic novels are not traditional literature, but that does not mean they are second-rate. Images are a way of writing. When you have the talent to be able to write and to draw it seems a shame to choose one. I think it's better to do both.

We learn about the world through images all the time. In the cinema we do it, but to make a film you need sponsors and money and 10,000 people to work with you. With a graphic novel, all you need is yourself and your editor.

Of course, you have to have a very visual vision of the world. You have to perceive life with images otherwise it doesn't work. Some artists are more into sound; they make music. The point is that you have to know what you want to say, and find the best way of saying it. It's hard to say how Persepolis evolved once I started writing. I had to learn how to write it as a graphic novel by doing.

What I Wanted to Say
I’m a pacifist. I believe there are ways to solve the world’s problems. Instead of putting all this money to create arms, I think countries should invest in scholarships for kids to study abroad. Perhaps they could become good and knowledgeable professors in their own countries. You need time for that kind of change though.

I have been brought up open-minded. If I didn’t know any people from other countries, I’d think everyone was evil based on news stories. But I know a lot of people, and know that there is no such thing as stark good and evil. Isn’t it possible there is the same amount of evil everywhere?

If people are given the chance to experience life in more than one country, they will hate a little less. It’s not a miracle potion, but little by little you can solve problems in the basement of a country, not on the surface. That is why I wanted people in other countries to read Persepolis, to see that I grew up just like other children.

It’s so rewarding to see people at my book signings who never read graphic novels. They say that when they read mine they became more interested. If it opens these people’s eyes not to believe what they hear, I feel successful.

**You Have to Think Freely to Know What to Write**

My parents were very proud when they read Persepolis. If I criticize them once in a while, it’s because it’s the truth, and they laugh. My father always says, "It is only an idiot who never changes his mind." My parents accept that times change, and they are not right anymore. They’ve taught me that you can make mistakes.

They were extremely open-minded about what I said and they were demanding. I’m also tender with them because they were magnificent parents. They gave me the most important thing -- the freedom of thinking and deciding for myself. The best present anyone can receive is not being formatted because the world or a religion wants you to be.
Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi, an Iranian artist living in Paris, is a memoir of growing up in Iran during the 1979 revolution that deposed the shah. With the recent publication of two other Iranian memoirs, Funny in Farsi by Firoozeh Dumas and Reading Lolita in Tehran by Azar Nafisi, Persepolis offers readers another link to understanding a country whose politics is gaining attention in the American media.

Satrapi presents her story as a graphic novel—a book-length comic book—and the stark drawings owe much to Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize-winning Maus, which chronicled his father's experiences at Auschwitz. Although Satrapi is able to convey a wide range of emotions, the simplicity of the artwork lacks the texture of Maus, thus keeping Persepolis from rising above a child's point of view.

But the simple lines and shapes of Satrapi's drawings lend poignancy to the story. The fact that she is able to portray such a vast range of emotions with a few simple strokes of a pen is impressive. That she does this consistently for 153 pages is a mighty achievement.

The dialogue seems somewhat stilted, as when a fundamentalist protester remarks to Satrapi's more liberal mother: "What was more important, to fight against the satanic influence of Western imperialists or to obstinately hold on to a personal preference that created divisions among the ranks of the revolutionaries?" But Satrapi defends her writing style: "In those days, people really talked that way. One had a feeling, in revolutionary and intellectual circles, that they spoke from a script, playing characters from an Islamized version of a Soviet novel."

Persepolis covers Satrapi's story from when she was 6, living in Tehran with her intellectual parents, to when she was 14 and had to flee to Vienna to continue her education. At its strongest, it's an inspiring coming-of-age story.

Illuminating the similarities between the Western and Islamic worlds is what Satrapi does best. In both worlds, kids grow up and rebel against their parents and society. They try to shape their own identities. The only difference between a girl growing up in the USA and a girl growing up in Iran is that in Iran, rebellious behavior we take for granted could lead to jail time—if not worse.

Satrapi tried to live in a world that was falling apart, a world that she understood better than her parents imagined, but a world that was—and is—absurdly unfair.