



UNION

Religious Worlds of New York • Curriculum Development Project

***Persepolis* in Context and Conversation**

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Abstract:

Situated in a larger unit around Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, this project will help students engage critically and respectfully with women from various Islamic traditions. The panel discussion at the heart of the project will have at least four speakers, representing a variety of observances and practices of Islamic tradition.

Within my specific school community, there is at least one adult Muslim staff member, who many of the students do not know is Muslim since she does not wear a hijab or talk about her religion. Additionally, I am in contact with a sex educator working in a Brooklyn public high school who is originally from Afghanistan and identifies as a lesbian. Furthermore, Brooklyn's vast Muslim population and my connections with the Interfaith Network will help me to connect to two more panelist who are more "traditionally" observant of Muslim custom and practice (i.e., who wear a hijab or veil in some way). While these examples are specific to the school community in which I am working, they can easily be replicated across the country. Teachers need only contact Islamic centers or Mosques in their area, explain the purpose and direction of the panel, and ask for volunteers to speak. See the list below for resources.

Background:

The target audience of this lesson are students who are in an urban, low-income nontraditional (sometimes labeled "alternative") high school setting. The students at this school are chronically truant for a variety of reasons and, as a result, struggle with certain academic skills, including reading comprehension and cohesive writing. The sporadic attendance at the school presents a persistent obstacles to developing key skills. As a result, the school community has come together to focus on developing broader academic behaviors through interdisciplinary collaboration: teachers attempt to instill communication and collaboration, self-reflection, and critical dialogue skills throughout each daily lesson. One important skill that students in this population need to learn how to engage with

academics and community leaders. This sketch of the sequence leading up to a panel discussion attempts to set up the necessary conditions for a successful critical engagement with religious lay people.

Essential Questions:

How does religion respond to social context?

How does religious affiliation or practice impact one's personal life?

Objectives:

Students will be able to develop strong critical questions that remain respectful of the panelists' various lived experiences as Muslim women. Students will be able to use their academic behavior skills to engage in an academic setting that they have not previously been exposed to.

Panel Preparation Activities:

Students will prepare their content knowledge in preparation for the panel through various readings. Students will have read at least half of Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* by the time of the panel discussion, analyzed the different factors in deciding (or not deciding, or being forced) to wear Muslim women's head coverings through nonfiction articles and essays, and developed their own opinions on the role of religious garb in their own lives. Throughout the trimester, students will build their academic conversational skills through modeled and experiential practice of the use of academic language and questioning techniques.

Culminating Activity:

3-4 panelist will present narratives about their lived experiences Muslim women. Students will ask pre-screened questions that draw on higher-order thinking. Students may ask some candid questions. The panel will last 50 minutes total, with time for questions.

Debrief:

An informal debriefing class will help students to process the new information they received from the panel. Students will be asked, "What surprised you?" "What seemed like an odd moment to you?" "What is something you realized that you had not realized before?"

Resources:

New Muslim Cool (YouTube)

Allah Made Me Funny

Shouting Across the Great Divide

Prerequisite Activities and Skills:

This panel discussion comes as a formative assessment mid-semester. Students will be assessed on their ability to respectfully engage panelist on relevant topics. Students will need to develop critical questioning skills. As this lesson is designed to occur at the beginning of the year, many prior lessons will strengthen students' ability to develop deep-thinking questions that open up conversation rather than shut it down with simple one-word answers. Students will be trained to use the Bloom's taxonomy question stems as well as use accountable talk strategies to first engage with their peers. A strong emphasis on respectful engagement will help students to develop the skills to engage with people outside of their cultural, social, and / or religious worlds in order to foster better understanding among diverse populations. They will transfer those same skills to the panel discussion.

Relevant Standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.A

Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.B

Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.3

Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.

For information about the Religious Worlds of New York summer institute for teachers, and more resources to enrich your teaching on religious diversity, see: www.religiousworldsnyc.org.