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*Religious Worlds of New York* • *Curriculum Development Project*

# Partition Experiences in Jhumpa Lahiri's “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine”

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## Abstract

The lessons in this project use Jhumpa Lahiri's short story “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine” (from her Pulitzer Prize winning 1999 collection *Interpreter of Maladies*) to introduce students to the history and legacy of the 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan, as well as the 1971 Indo-Pakistani war, and the experiences of South Asian immigrants in the United States. The lessons were originally created for students at a rigorous, college preparatory public high school in New York City.

This document includes lesson plans for four class meetings, classroom materials created by the teacher, and numerous links to additional resources for students and teachers on Partition, migration, and South Asian history.

## Learning Goals

1. Understanding issues that result from migration
2. Historical, geographical, religious, and cultural contexts of South Asia and Partition
3. Reading/listening to oral histories of Partition stories
4. Reading “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine” by Jhumpa Lahiri
5. Reflecting on “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine” by Jhumpa Lahiri as an account of history and a Partition story in literature: discussion, written reflection, or comparative analysis

## Prior to Lessons, Students will Already Have Done the Following

- Studied and applied migration terminology – included below, or [click here to download from Google Drive](#)
- Studied definition characteristics of Hinduism and Islam
- Read at least one short story from [Interpreter of Maladies](#) by Jhumpa Lahiri
- Explored issues of migration through the [virtual exhibition “When Home Won’t Let You Stay” at the Candor Museum at Stanford University](#)

## Teacher Resources and Background Reading

- [Partition in the Classroom](#)
- [Edutopia’s Guide to Partition](#)
- [UNHCR teacher resources on refugees, etc.](#)
- [The 1947 Project](#) & [Oral History Shorts](#)
- [Choices Program Partition Resources](#)
- [BBC’s Partition Voices](#)
- Brooklyn Public Library’s [Listening as a Creative Act lesson](#) and [Muslims in Brooklyn Project](#)

## Materials for Lessons

- Partition Hyperdoc – included below, or [click here to download from Google Drive](#)
- *India’s Partition: The Forgotten Story* by Gurinder Chadha (documentary series on BBC)
- [East Pakistan Becomes Bangladesh](#) (Muslim story) & [transcript](#)
- [Waking Up on the Wrong Side of the Boarder](#) (Sikh story)
- [One Woman’s Incredible Story](#) (Muslim story - Pakistan)
- [Oral History Shorts](#)
- *Interpreter of Maladies* - “When Mr. Pirzada Comes to Dine,” by Jhumpa Lahiri
- Recommended texts for differentiation & enrichment: [Remnants of Partition](#) by Aanchal Malhotra; [The Other Side of Silence](#) by Urvashi Butalia; [The Moon from Dehradun](#) by Shirin Shamsi (picture book); [Ticket to India](#) by N.H. Senzai (YA novel); [Ms. Marvel No Normal](#) by G. Willow Wilson & Adrian Alphona (comic books); *The Magnificent Ms. Marvel* (TV series)

## Lesson Plans

### Day 1 - Historical & Cultural Context of Partition

#### Guiding Questions

- What is Partition? How did it impact the Indian subcontinent?
- What role did religion play in the Partition of the Indian subcontinent?

#### Students will be able to

- Read and research for a purpose
- Show understanding of key terms by accurately rephrasing them in their own words.

#### Procedure

1. Heard–Questions–MoreQuestions (HQQ): Students brainstorm what they have HEARD and what QUESTIONS they have about South Asia (Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and the Maldives). Save the 2nd Q for later.
2. Students explore leveled resources about Partition and take notes on the Partition hyperdoc with particular attention to the role religion and colonialism played in Partition. (This could be done as guided reading or direct instruction as well.) They should interact with resources in the order on the hyper doc.
3. Teachers circulate to assist students in accessing materials, redirecting, and challenging students to think critically about the resources they interact with.
4. Students complete the last column of the HQQ chart with more questions they have after having done the research.

### Day 2 - Oral Histories - Partition Stories

#### Guiding Questions

- How were people’s religious identities impacted by Partition? How were their relationships with people from different religious communities affected?
- How were people’s lives and cultures (for multiple generations) impacted by the forced migration of Partition?
- What do primary source oral history stories convey that traditional history cannot?

#### Students will be able to

- Use primary source oral histories to gather personal information about history.
- Make inferences about oral histories and how they connect to historical events/political accounts of historical events.
- Apply historical, religious, cultural contexts to make inferences about oral history narratives.
- Understand how Partition affected people’s lives and homes.

## **Procedure**

1. Students free-write in response to the following questions: How is history written? By whom? For whom is it written? What purpose does a written history have for us?
2. Define oral history as a primary source briefly. Contrast with traditional history.
3. Watch *India's Partition: The Forgotten Story* 0:00-5:37. Students take notes based on the Guiding Questions.
4. Share observations about how the docuseries as a primary source is different from the secondary sources from the previous day.
5. Students return to the Partition hyperdoc Day 2 to listen to the Partition stories and oral histories. Optional: Differentiated texts listed above.
6. Answer the following questions for each or one of their choices: What were your reactions to this person's story? How were people's religious identities impacted by Partition? What insights do we gain from personal stories and oral histories that we don't from historical accounts?

## **Day 3 - Reading "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" by Jhumpa Lahiri**

### **Guiding Questions**

- How does "Mr. Pirzada" illustrate how people's lives were impacted by the forced displacement/migration of Partition and the role religion played?

### **Students will be able to**

- Read and annotate for critical reading of literature.
- Apply historical knowledge to literature for character analysis (historical critical theory, post-colonial theory).

## **Procedure**

1. Review significant events and impacts of Partition on people's lives and the role religion played.
2. Read "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" by Jhumpa Lahiri. Students annotate for connections to their historical research and the characterization of Lilia, her parents, and Mr. Pirzada.
3. Students reflect on connections to their historical research, characterization of Lilia, her parents, and Mr. Pirzada, and how religion is referenced in the story. How are the characters' internal and external conflicts connected to Partition and the role religion played in people's lives as a result of it?

## **Day 4 - Procedure for Reflecting on Literary Narratives and Historical Accounts of Partition**

### **Guiding Questions**

- What role does literature play in understanding historical events and their impacts on people's lives?
- Which media is most impactful and memorable for you? Why?

### **Students will be able to**

- Evaluate understanding of Partition from historical (primary and secondary) and literary sources.

### **Procedure**

1. Students review their historical and literary notes and choose material they can share in a Socratic Circle discussion, written reflection, or comparative analysis in response to the Guiding Question.
2. Students create a response based on the evidence they have chosen: discussion, written reflection, or comparative analysis.

***For information about the Religious Worlds of New York summer institute for teachers, and more resources to enrich your teaching on religious diversity, visit [www.religiousworldsnyc.org](http://www.religiousworldsnyc.org).***

**Migration Terminology**

We expect that you use this terminology when discussing and writing about the global issues around migration for this unit.

Research the following terms on [Columbia University's Forced Migration Learning Module](#) linked on the Classroom. Write definitions in your own words so we know you understand them

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition <i>In Your Own Words</i></b>	<b>Examples</b>
Forced migration (displacement)		
Conflict- Induced Displacement		
Refugee		
Migrant		

Smuggled people			
Trafficked people			
Stateless People <a href="#">Read the US Dept. of State's site</a>			

# The Partition of the South Asian Subcontinent - Day 1



## Today's Goals

- ❖ What is Partition? How did it impact the Indian subcontinent?
- ❖ What role did religion play in the Partition of the Indian subcontinent?
- ❖ How does Partition impact global international relations today?

### Warm Up - HQQ Warm Up - HQQ (Hheard, Questions, More Questions)

**HEARD** - What have you **heard** about South Asia (Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and the Maldives)?  
At least 8 things.

**QUESTION** - What **questions** can you ask about South Asia (Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and the Maldives)?  
At least 5 questions.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



7.




8.



Great work! Move onto the next page.

Explore the Resources below . . .

- to understand the **history** of Partition
- to understand how **Partition** continues to **impact** the world **today**

Resources	What is interesting, new, and important?
 <p><b>*Watch</b> an explanation about <a href="#">why and how India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh were created</a> after British Colonial Rule in 1947. (6 min)</p>	
 <p><b>*Explore</b> the <a href="#">Partition Map Progression</a>.</p>	
	

\*Why is 1971 important, you ask? Well, check [this out to learn more about how Bangladesh became a sovereign nation](#).



\*Listen to [Nisid Hajari discuss how Partition continues to have a "Deadly Legacy"](#) with Terri Gross on NPR's Fresh Air. You can check out his book [Midnight's Furies at NYPL](#).

👍 Great work! You are done for Day 1.

**Homework** - Due tomorrow in class.

### Reflect - Finish the HQQ (Hheard, Question, More Questions)

**QUESTIONS** = Now that you know a bit about the Partition of the South Asian Subcontinent, what **more questions** can you ask?

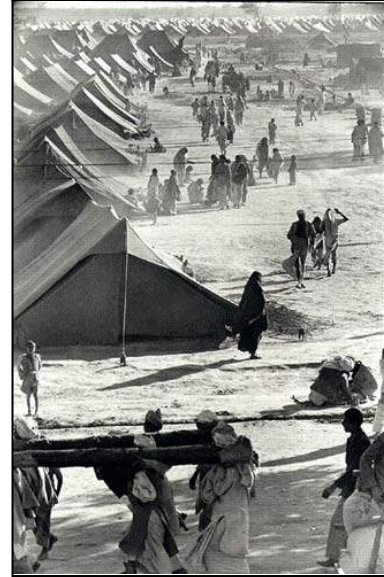
- 1.
- 2.
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4.

5.

# The Partition of the South Asian Subcontinent

## Partition Stories - Day 2



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### Today's Goals

- ❖ How were people's religious identities impacted by Partition? How were their relationships with people from different religious communities affected?
- ❖ How were people's lives and cultures (for multiple generations) impacted by the forced migration of Partition?
- ❖ What do primary source oral history stories convey that traditional history cannot?

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### Warm Up - History

How is history written? By whom?

For whom is history often written? How do you know?

What purpose does a written history have for us?

👍 Great work! Move onto the next page.

Explore the Oral History Resources below . . .

- to understand people's experiences during Partition
- to understand how Partition impacts people's lives today

Partition Stories

Answer the following questions for each story:

1. What were your reactions to this person's story?
2. How were people's religious identities impacted by Partition?
3. What insights do we gain from personal stories and oral histories that we don't from historical accounts?



Listen to [Shaheen Rushd](#) share a story about [her father during Partition and creating Bangladesh](#).

(7 min) You can also read the transcript as you listen to the audio.

1.



Watch [“One Woman’s Incredible Story”](#).  
(3 min.)

1.

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ARCHIVE

Choose one more oral history to listen to with [The 1947 Project’s Oral History Shorts](#).  
(3-12 min.)

1.

👍 Great work!

### Interested in More? Extend Your Understanding (Optional)

Here are a few more resources if you are interested in learning more about Partition and its impacts on South Asia and the world.

- ❖ [“Ten Myths about Immigration”](#)

- ❖ [Visit the Partition Museum](#) in Amritsar, India
- ❖ Watch some [films that depict Partition](#).
- ❖ Read poetry by [Fatimah Asghar about Partition](#)
- ❖ Read [Nisid Hajari's book \*Midnight's Furies\*](#).
- ❖ Watch Charlie Rose's [interview with Nisid Hajari](#).
- ❖ The Asia Society's [interview with Nisid Hajari](#)
- ❖ [The New Yorker's book review](#) of *Midnight's Furies*
- ❖ [UNHCR's "Refugees and Migrants FAQs"](#)
- ❖ ["Who are stateless people?"](#) and ["Consequences of Statelessness"](#) and ["Rights of Stateless People"](#) (Videos)