

CBLDF Discussion Guide

Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood by Marjane Satrapi



Given their visual nature, comics are easy targets for would-be censors. CBLDF's Discussion Guides are tools that can be used to lead conversations about challenged graphic novels and to help allay misconceptions about comics.

Synopsis

In *Persepolis*, author Marjane Satrapi tells of her experience growing up during the Iranian Revolution, the subsequent war between Iran and Iraq, and the rise of the Islamic Republic. Against these tumultuous events, readers get a glimpse of Satrapi's teenage angst and her struggles to express herself under the burgeoning social repression of the new regime.

Themes

Coming-of-age, becoming self-aware in times of social upheaval, other cultures, freedom and repression

Reasons Challenged

Profanity, violence

Suggested Age Range

Middle school and up

Discussion Questions

Remembering

1. From what you read in *Persepolis*, what do you understand about the Iranian Revolution, its objectives, and its impact?
2. List some ways in which Marjane's life changed due to the Revolution and the subsequent invasion by Iraq.

Understanding

3. Marjane was a normal child. Give an example of a time when she acted childish or did not comprehend the seriousness of her situation.
4. At the core of the book is Marji's family. What is this family like? What is important to Marji's parents? What kind of an environment do they create for their daughter, despite living under an oppressive regime and through a brutal prolonged war?

Applying

5. Satrapi says, "Every situation has an opportunity for laughs" (page 97). What parts of the book made you laugh?
6. Satrapi writes, "In spite of everything, kids were trying to look hip, even under risk of arrest" (page 112). What acts of rebellion have you undertaken? In what ways is Satrapi — who grew up during the 1980s in Iran — similar to a teen in 21st century America?

Analyzing

7. What role do women play in the story? How are the roles of the women different from the roles of the men?
8. Satrapi shows a range of faith in Islam. Were characters who opposed the government or the war with Iraq also opposed to the religion of Islam? Use quotes from the book to support your conclusion.

Evaluating

9. Sometimes, Marjane spoke up when it would have been safer for her to remain quiet. Do you think that her defiance was worth the risk?
10. How does Satrapi's style of drawing influence your reaction to and understanding of the story?
11. The use of this book in classrooms has been challenged because of graphic scenes of torture. How would the book be different if the panels about torture were removed?

Creating

12. Conflicts based on religious or political extremism are not unique to Iran. What are some similar situations in which people were willing to die for a cause or did not value the lives of those who think differently than them? How could such conflicts be resolved?

Activities

Writing

One of the key themes in *Persepolis* is censorship of art by a repressive government. Several countries that are ruled by dictatorships have banned the book either because of how their country is represented or because of the blasphemy of Marjane wishing to become a prophet. Write a letter to a fictitious government official explaining why you think he or she should reconsider the ban. Assume that the official has not read the book. Your tone should be formal, respectful, and informative.

Illustration

Page 75 shows examples of two types of people who are differentiated by the subtleties of their clothing. Choose two types of people you would like to contrast, and imitate Satrapi's flat, bold style of illustration to draw them. No shading or color allowed.

Digital Presentation

How has the situation in Iran changed since 1984, when the book concludes? Use multiple news sources to determine the changes in the rights of women, freedom of expression, access to Western culture, or any other examples of political or social repression expressed in *Persepolis*. Create a digital slideshow that includes images, text, and citations that provide a glimpse of Iran's current political climate.

Poster Project

Create a pair of propaganda posters representative of the conflict in Iran in the 1980s. One poster should represent the views of the government or a conservative religious group in Iran during this period. The other poster should represent the views of the opposition. You may use text and slogans from *Persepolis* or create your own.

For additional teaching and discussion suggestions, including correlations to the Common Core State Standards, visit <http://cblddf.org/librarian-tools/using-graphic-novels-in-education/using-graphic-novels-in-education-persepolis/>

*For more about attempts to censor *Persepolis*, visit <http://cblddf.org/banned-comic/banned-challenged-comics/case-study-persepolis/>*

Comic Book Legal Defense Fund is a non-profit organization dedicated to the protection of the First Amendment rights of the comics art form and its community of retailers, creators, publishers, librarians, and readers. CBLDF provides legal referrals, representation, advice, assistance, and education in furtherance of these goals.
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