

Dear 8th Grade Teachers,

As you prepare to teach Unit 4: *Persepolis*: Surviving Repression, we wanted to offer guidance and some resources to help support conversations that may arise in your classroom as students engage with this text.

Together with Israel, the United States attacked Iran in late February 2026, resulting in the death of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei. Because *Persepolis* takes place in Iran and explores the impact of political change, revolution, and war on everyday people, students may connect or have questions about what they are reading in the memoir and the current news or conversations they hear outside of school. This letter aims to support you in appropriately handling these questions and conversations.

### Key Ideas and Historical Notes:

- *Persepolis* is set in the 1970s and 1980s during the Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War.
- The 1979 Iranian Revolution resulted in an overthrow of the Western-backed Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and replaced his monarchy with an Islamic Republic, led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.
- Iran has continued to operate as an Islamic Republic, governed by Sharia, or Islamic law, since the 1979 revolution referenced in *Persepolis*. The Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s further entrenched this form of government in Iran. The United States supported Iraq in this war.
- The Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini referenced in *Persepolis* is not the same Supreme Leader who was recently killed; this was Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The two are unrelated.

### Ways to Engage Students:

- **Address the current sociopolitical context with students** in age-appropriate terms. "Before we begin reading, I want to acknowledge that you might have been hearing about Iran in the news. In February, the United States and Israel launched an attack on Iran, which killed their Supreme Leader. This current conflict is actually very relevant to the story told in *Persepolis*; the conflicts the narrator experiences in the 1970s and 1980s are the same kinds of conflicts Iranians are experiencing today."
- **Contextualize how this text fits into that news and the history.** "This memoir tells the story of one young girl growing up during a major political revolution in Iran in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The government that came to power during this time is the same one the United States is currently in conflict with today. As we read, our goal is to step back in time and learn more about the culture, history, and experiences that shaped Satrapi's childhood, and in doing so, we may also be able to better understand what's happening today."
- **Get to the text.** Use the text as a springboard for informed conversations. *Persepolis* gives readers insight into how large political events affect everyday life. Encourage students to focus on the details of Satrapi's experiences and the author's perspective as they engage with the text. Focus on Marji as a regular, relatable teenager dealing with coming-of-age issues amidst abnormal circumstances, fostering empathy over stereotypes.
- **Leverage the research project in the unit.** In [Lesson 2](#), students will research selected topics to deepen their understanding of the historical setting, cultural traditions, and lived experiences reflected in the memoir. This represents a great opportunity to encourage students to research aspects of Iranian culture and traditions independent of the war and conflict that is over-represented in the news media. Alternatively, it could be an opportunity for some students to do a deeper-dive into Iranian history before or after the Iranian Revolution described in the text.

## Other Supportive Resources:

- [The Background Students Need to Think Critically About Iran](#) - from the Council on Foreign Relations, this resource provides timelines, historical context, and explanations about Iran's history and relationships with other countries.
- [Timeline: A Modern History of Iran](#) - from PBS News, this resource offers student-friendly explanations, news summaries, and classroom resources that may help guide entry into complex global events in an age-appropriate manner.
- [What to Know About the U.S.-Israel Attacks on Iran](#) - from American Federation of Teachers, this article and sample lesson plan can provide teachers with additional information and ideas about teaching into the current conflict. Note that Fishtank does not necessarily recommend spending additional lesson days devoted entirely to the current conflict.

## A final note

At its heart, *Persepolis* is a coming-of-age story about identity, resilience, and growing up during a time of tremendous change. As students read, they have the opportunity to learn not only about an important historical moment but also how one young person navigated uncertainty, conflict, and hope.

Thank you for the care and thoughtfulness you bring to guiding students through this powerful text.

With gratitude,

**The Fishtank Learning Team**