

Dear 10th Grade Teachers,

As you prepare to teach Unit 5: Reading as Resistance: *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, 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 *Reading Lolita in Tehran* 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:

- *Reading Lolita in Tehran* chronicles Azar Nafisi's experiences living in Iran from the late 1970s through the 1990s, spanning the time period during and after the Iranian Revolution.
- 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.
- Since 1979, Iran has continued to operate as an Islamic Republic, with a political system influenced by Islamic law.
- The Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s further entrenched this form of government in Iran; during this time, the United States supported Iraq.
- The Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini referenced in *Reading Lolita in Tehran* 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 be/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 very relevant to Azar Nafisi's memoir; the conflicts she experienced 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 is about Nafisi's experiences returning to Iran and teaching at the university level 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 Nafisi and her students' experiences, 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. *Reading Lolita in Tehran* gives readers insight into how large political events affect everyday life. Encourage students to focus on the details of Nafisi's and her students' experiences as they engage with the text.
- **Leverage the research project in the unit.** In [Lesson 2](#), students will research selected topics to deepen their understanding of Iranian culture and traditions, offering an opportunity to explore Iran beyond the war and conflict represented both in the memoir and in the current news media.

## 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, *Reading Lolita in Tehran* is a memoir about navigating life during a time of tremendous change and about both individual and collective forms of resistance in the face of an oppressive regime. As students read, they have the opportunity to learn not only about an important historical moment but also how Nafisi and her students 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**