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Abstract:

Like most teachers, I start every school year by making a short but motivating speech to my students. Milton's French Immersion students start learning French in first grade. After studying the language for 6 or 7 years, most of them walk into our French classroom with a "been there, done that" attitude. Yet, at age 11 they are still looking forward to a fun year. During my short talk, I explain that I had to learn French much like they are now. That outside the classroom, I spoke another language with my friends, and at home with my parents.

Judging from past experience, I know that when I get to this part, I have to quickly get to my conclusion that learning another language is tough but possible: as soon as they find out that I was born and raised in Iran, I see a new spark in their eyes.

"Wow!" they say, "Would you tell us about your country?"

This unit is created as an answer to their call.

Essential Questions:

In this unit I will try to either directly or indirectly answer a few questions

1. What is the biggest holiday celebration in Iran?
2. What do they celebrate and why?
3. How do modern day Iranians prepare for their holiday celebration?

Unit Summary:

This is an intra -curricular unit tying science, language arts, and social studies together. The unit starts with a PPT presentation giving students an overview of seasons on Earth. The last slide is linked to a short movie depicting the movement of the Earth on its orbit and exploring changes in plant and animal's activities in early spring. This lesson plan fits perfectly into our existing Social Studies/ Earth Science curriculum.

Building upon the idea of changes of seasons, students will read a Persian folktale: "*Nowrooz and Naneh Sarma*". This lesson plan also fits into my French Language Arts curriculum as part of our chapter on "Folktales from Around the World". The unit will end with a viewing of an Iranian movie, "*The White Balloon*", which will give students an intimate look at a middle class Iranian family's preparation for Nowrooz less than 2 hours before the New Year begins.

Unit Plan:

This unit may be easily expanded into 5 days depending on the teachers choice of activities. Here are my suggestions:

Day 1 ~ Social Studies class:

- a. Teacher will use "The Spring Equinox" power point presentation
- b. Students will complete the questions from the "Spring Equinox Questions" booklet.

Day 2~ Social Studies Class

- a. By clicking on the last slide from yesterday's ppt, the teacher starts the film "Seasons Under the Sun".
- b. Students will complete the accompanying worksheet while watching the movie or as homework.

Day 3~ Language Arts class:

1. Teacher makes a reference to the learning in the Social Studies class.
2. S/he will then explain to students that many cultures around the world celebrate the first day of spring or have special spring celebrations.
3. S/he will ask students if they know of /participate in any spring celebrations.
4. The teacher will explain that in many countries in Asia, people celebrate Nowrooz, a celebration that has its roots in Ancient Persia, which is now the modern day Iran.
5. S/he can read with the class the historical narrative to give students some information about Nowrooz.
6. Reading of "*Nowrooz and Naneh Sarma*"
7. Students will answer the accompanying questions for homework.

Day 2 ~ Language Arts class

- a. Teacher may start the class with one activity from "*Nowrooz and Naneh Sarma*" as stated in the lesson plan to deepen students' understanding of the previous lesson.
- b. Do session 1 of the movie "The White Balloon".
- c. Start completing "General Activity":
 - Teacher will explain major and minor characters in a play/ a movie.

- S/he then helps students identify the major/minor characters in session 1 of the movie. The balloon seller is a minor character at this point.
 - Teacher gives students 5-7 minutes to finish adding a few descriptive adjectives to each of these characters.
- d. Students will do the accompanying questions for homework.

Day 3~ Language Arts class:

- a. Watch sessions 2 and 3 of the movie “The White Balloon”
- b. Continue to complete the “General Activity” in class as a brainstorm activity: teacher gives students a few minutes to work individually, then the teacher puts the diagram on the board and asks each student to add to it.
- c. Do questions from session 2 for homework.

Day 4 or a longer block if block scheduling ~ Language Arts class

- a. Do worksheet questions from session 3
- c. Start working on the composition assignment.

OR

- d. Go over all HWs from previous 3 days or choose another activity from “Nowrooz and Naneh Sarma” reading and comprehension activities.

Important Note:

If interested in the germination project, teacher has to introduce and start a week prior to the start of this unit.

Unit Objectives:

In this unit, students will be able to:

- 1) Understand and define “to orbit” and “ to rotate”

- 2) Understand why seasons change.
- 3) See folktales as a means to communicating cultural wisdom from one generation to the next.
- 4) Learn about different parts of a seed and their function during the seed's growth
- 5) Understand "Photosynthesis".
- 6) Become familiarized with Persian carpets and designs as a form of art as well as an indicator of regional identity.
- 7) Understand that the arrival of spring is celebrated in many cultures.
- 8) Become familiar with the modern Iranian culture and their biggest holiday celebration in spring.
- 9) Develop a better understanding of people's lives in the modern Iran.

Standards met:

- Students use language arts to critique, analyze and discuss texts.

Culture:

- Students demonstrate an understanding of the practices and perspectives of the Iranian culture
- Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the Iranian culture

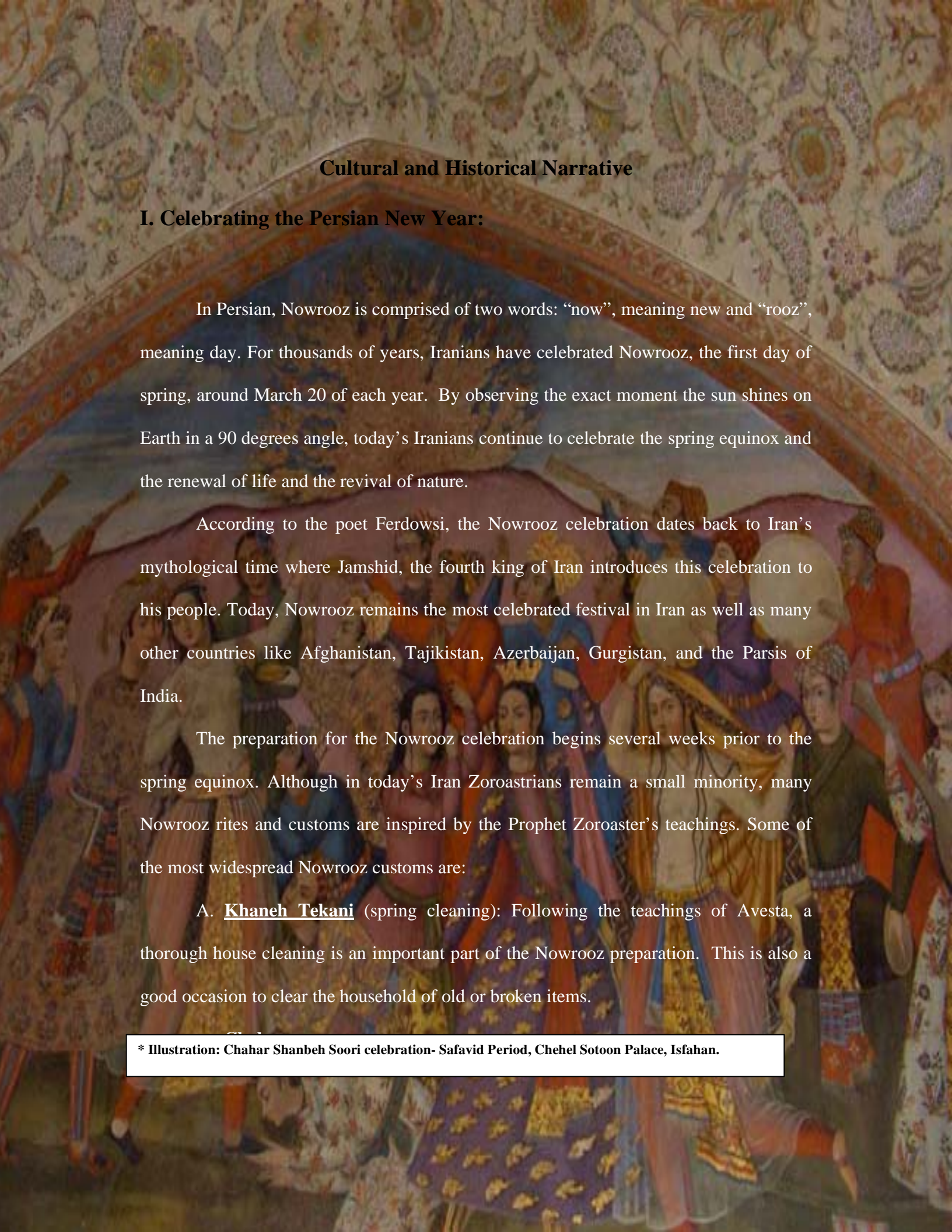
Connections:

- Students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines

Comparison:

- Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the Iranian and their own culture

The above is an adaptation of the 5 Cs of standards for World Language Education, MA Department of Education.



Cultural and Historical Narrative

I. Celebrating the Persian New Year:

In Persian, Nowrooz is comprised of two words: “now”, meaning new and “rooz”, meaning day. For thousands of years, Iranians have celebrated Nowrooz, the first day of spring, around March 20 of each year. By observing the exact moment the sun shines on Earth in a 90 degrees angle, today’s Iranians continue to celebrate the spring equinox and the renewal of life and the revival of nature.

According to the poet Ferdowsi, the Nowrooz celebration dates back to Iran’s mythological time where Jamshid, the fourth king of Iran introduces this celebration to his people. Today, Nowrooz remains the most celebrated festival in Iran as well as many other countries like Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Gurgistan, and the Parsis of India.

The preparation for the Nowrooz celebration begins several weeks prior to the spring equinox. Although in today’s Iran Zoroastrians remain a small minority, many Nowrooz rites and customs are inspired by the Prophet Zoroaster’s teachings. Some of the most widespread Nowrooz customs are:

A. **Khaneh Tekani** (spring cleaning): Following the teachings of Avesta, a thorough house cleaning is an important part of the Nowrooz preparation. This is also a good occasion to clear the household of old or broken items.

* Illustration: Chahar Shanbeh Soori celebration- Safavid Period, Chehel Sotoon Palace, Isfahan.

B. Chahara Shanbeh Soori: On the eve of the last Wednesday of the year, Iranians make bonfires and chant around them “May my paleness be yours and your red glow be mine”. Some believe ancient Persians lit fire in the streets and their rooftops to ward off bad omen and to welcome their ancestors to bless their homes before the New Year.

C. The Haft (7) Sîn Table: According to some, in ancient times, each family would grow 7 different types of cereals: rice, barley, bean, sesame, lentil, wheat, and oat. They would choose the cereal that grew best to be planted the most that year. How exactly we came to observe Nowrooz with the haft sîn is the subject of much debate. What is certain is that in most Iranian homes today a table is set a few days before Nowrooz. Families would use their best tablecloth and decorate their table with seven specific items starting with the Farsi letter “sîn” or the “S” sound. According to the Avesta, each of these items represents one of the seven Emshaspandan (angels in Zoroastrian religion), the symbols of Ahurmazda’s (God in Zoroastrian) power on Earth. These seven items are:

Sir (garlic): to inspire health

Senjed (lotus fruit): Love and passion

Somaq (dried Sumac): representing the sun at dawn

Serkeh (vinegar): represents patience

Sib (apple): is the symbol for womanhood

Sekkeh (coins): represents fortune

Sabzeh (green sprouts): representing renewal and growth

In addition, some other items like lit candles, a mirror, dried eggs, and the family's holy book (the Qur'an for Muslims, the Avesta, the Torah, etc) is added to the table. A few minutes before the year changes, all members of the family gathers around the table. As soon as the New Year starts, they all greet each other and the older member of the family gives gifts to everyone else.

D. Sizdah beh Dar: Iranians visit friends and relatives during the first 12 days of the Nowrooz celebrations. On the 13th day, everyone leaves their homes and goes on a picnic. In this way, Iranians keep the bad omen away. On this thirteenth day, the sprouts are thrown in a river and thus returned to nature.



II. Why folktales?

Regardless of their culture of origin, folktales are indispensable windows into the history and traditions of a people. As a member of a culture, one can learn and appreciate its values from stories told by the older generation. Additionally, one can glimpse into the wisdom of another culture in listening to its folktales. Inevitably, the listener will conclude that common themes and morals exist in folktales of diverse origins. Therefore, one may argue that world folktales are effective tools for conveying universal human values to audiences both within and without.

Ancient Persians have used folktales to explain the reasons behind natural phenomena or to educate their young with meaningful life lessons. In the tale of “Nowrooz and Naneh Sarma” the changes of the seasons are explored within a mother and son relationship as Old Mother Winter understands it is time for her to retire. Spring and the arrival of the good weather are symbolized in her son, Nowrooz, who makes everything grow green as he walks into the valley.

Lesson Plans

And

Activities

The Spring Equinox PPT:

Answer key

(For Power Point and Power point questions see appendix A & B)

Slide 1: Cover

Slide 2:

1. Mercury, Venus, and Earth.

Slide 3:

1. The Earth rotates around an imaginary axis called the axis of rotation

Slide 4:

1. ... The earth turning around its axis.

Slide 5:

1. It means the Earth moves in a circular motion around the Sun.

Slide 6:

1. It takes the Earth one year (365 days) to orbit the Sun.
2. The speed of the Earth while orbiting the sun is 67, 000 miles /hr or 108, 000 Km/hr

Slide 7:

1. Yes, the Earth's axis is tilted.
2. The angle is $23 \frac{1}{2}$ degree.

Side 8:

1. The 2 reasons are:
 - a) the earth moves on its orbit
 - b) The Earth has a tilted axis

Slide 9:

1. directly / equator
2. equal/day/night

Slide 10:

1. A) in the northern hemisphere, at the end of winter, the sun crosses the equator directly (at a 90 degree angle). This is the spring equinox.

b) At the end of summer, again, the sun crosses the equator directly (at a 90 degree angle). This is the autumnal equinox.
2. During the vernal equinox in the northern hemisphere, the southern hemisphere is in autumnal equinox.

Slide 11:

1. The north pole is most tilted toward the Sun

Slide 12:

1. The North Pole is most tilted away from the Sun.

Slide 13:

1. As the earth warms up, the plants begin to grow and animals leave their shelters.

Slide 14:

1. During spring, farmers work on the field. Many cultures celebrate the arrival of spring.
2. Some of the spring celebrations are: Ostara, Nowrooz, Easter, and Tel Shemesh.

Movie: Seasons Under the Sun
Worksheet/Answer key

Duration ~ Video: about 14 minutes

Quiz: About 5 minutes

Watch the movie carefully and answer the questions:

1. Explain: "Early in the season, spring and winter are in a tug of war". *It means the weather keeps on changing from cold to warm.*
2. When does the wind blow? *When masses of warm and cold air replace each other.*
3. What is the name of the wind that is shaped like a funnel? *A tornado*
4. When does spring officially begin? *Around March 21st.*
5. What does "Equinox" mean? *Equal day and night.*
6. When it is spring in the northern hemisphere, what is the season in the southern hemisphere? *Autumn.*
7. What is the meaning of the "photoperiod"? *It means length of daylight.*
8. When is the longest day of the year? *June 21st, the summer solstice.*

Choose T/ F

1. ____ The Earth rotates around its axis once every 24 hours. (T)
2. ____ The Earth's axis is usually tilted. (T)
3. ____ When the north pole is tilted away from the Sun, the northern hemisphere is in winter. (T)
4. ____ When the north pole is leaning toward the Sun, the northern hemisphere is winter. (F)
5. ____ During the summer, daylight lasts longer. (T)
6. ____ At the vernal equinox, there are equal numbers of daylight and darkness everywhere on Earth. (T)
7. ____ The farther you are from the equator, the longer your summer days are. (T)
8. The photoperiod helps animals understand how to prepare for spring.
9. ____ During winter, trees store their sap in their roots. (T)
10. ____ Plants and flowers can only start from seeds. (F)

Video Quiz Answer key:

- | | | | |
|------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Orbit | 2. wind | 3. March 20 | 4. rotation |
| 5. equinox | 6. longer, shorter | 7. Autumn or Fall | 8. the photoperiod |
| | 9. sap | 10. solstice | |

Nowrooz and Naneh Sarma
Comprehension Questions and Activities

1. Name 3 major themes for this tale.
2. In the second paragraph, we read “Each year, equal length”. Which special celestial event is the author referring to? (*Autumnal equinox*)
3. What special celestial event is celebrated on the 40th night of winter? (*The winter solstice*).
4. At the end of the tale, Naneh Sarma goes to bed. What is the significance of this action? (*Spring is her.*)
5. Find details in the text that support each of the following sentences:
 - a. Naneh Sarma is not an ordinary old woman (*She summons the cold air, threads with clouds*).
 - b. Naneh Sarma cares about the people who live in the valley. (*She watches them, likes to see snowflakes on the little children’s nose*).
 - c. The ancient Persians were great astronomers. (*The people in the village had prior knowledge of the winter solstice and the arrival of spring*).
5. Research a map of Iran and locate the Alborz Mountains. What is the name of its highest peak? (*Damavand*). What is its altitude? (*5671m. or 18, 406 feet*).
6. Find 3 special features about this peak. (*Damavand is a dormant volcano, it is almost always covered with snow, is the highest volcano in Asia*).\p]

6. The arrival of spring is celebrated in many cultures. How does your family celebrate spring? Write a short essay (3-5 paragraphs) to describe your family's spring celebration.

(Easter, Eostar, Festival of Trees, etc.)

Writing Assignment:

Persian folktales have certain characteristics:

- Characters: Persian tales have many magical and non-magical characters. They use personification to illustrate natural elements like seasons or the weather.
- Plot: Persian tales are created to pass on the wisdom from one generation to the next. They may explain the reason behind a natural phenomenon or give a life lesson to youngsters.
- Ending: Most tales have a happy ending.

Use the characteristics on the previous page to create your own Persian Folktale. You will be graded according to the rubric below:

Student Name <hr/>	A Outstanding	B Proficient	C Competent	D Needs Improvement
	90-100	80-89	70-79	Less than 70
Ideas/Content (30 points)	<p>a. The tale begins with introducing the major characters and where they live and describes the initial situation, the climax, and the solution as an explanation of a natural phenomenon.</p> <p>b. Student presents a clear argument to explain a natural phenomenon. The introduction is original.</p> <p>c. Student displays original insight and outstanding</p>	<p>a. The tale begins with introducing the major characters and where they live and describes the initial situation, the climax, and the solution as an explanation of a natural phenomenon.</p> <p>b. The explanation of a natural phenomenon is not clear/is not original.</p> <p>c. Student's work shows strong critical thinking skills.</p>	<p>a. Information about the characters, location, and the original situation is not clear.</p> <p>b. The initial situation, climax and solution are not clearly stated. Student does not explain a natural phenomenon clearly.</p> <p>c. Student's work shows average critical thinking skills</p>	<p>a. Information about the characters, location, and the original situation is missing.</p> <p>b. The initial situation, climax and solution are not clearly stated or are not stated at all. Student's explanation of the natural phenomenon is missing or does not make sense.</p> <p>c. Student's work does not show critical thinking skills.</p>

	critical thinking skills.			
Organization (30 points)	a. Paragraphs are related and transition smoothly.	a. Most paragraphs are related and transition smoothly.	a. A few paragraphs are related and transition smoothly.	Paragraphs do not transition smoothly.
Organization (continued)	b. All paragraphs are internally coherent.	b. most paragraphs are internally coherent.	Paragraphs are not internally coherent	Paragraphs are not internally coherent.
Language (20 points)	c. Writing is clear and concise. d. Word choice is effective and lively. e. Sentences vary in length and structure. f. Tone is appropriate to assignment.	c. Writing is not always clear. d. Word choice is not as strong and effective. e. Sentences vary in length and structure. f. Tone is appropriate to assignment.	c. Writing objective is often unclear. d. Word choice is not as strong and effective. e. Sentences are too short and do not have an elaborated structure . f. Tone is appropriate to assignment.	Writing objective is often unclear. d. Word choice is ineffective. e. Sentences are too short and do not have an elaborated structure . f. Tone is appropriate to assignment.
Mechanics (20 points)	Student does not make serious errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, and usage.	Student makes few serious errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, and usage.	Student makes several serious errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, and usage.	. The essay is not easy to understand due to the great number of serious errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, and usage.

Enrichment Activities:

I- Germinating seeds (this will take about 10 days to complete)

Each seed has 3 different parts:

1. The embryo: is a young plant. The embryo holds the beginnings of roots, stems and leaves. When placed in good growing conditions, seeds use the food stored in the embryo to grow into an adult plant.

2. The stored food (cotyledons): When the seed first begins to grow, it uses the stored food until it grows leaves and becomes able to produce its own food. When leaves appear, the seed uses the energy from the sun to absorb oxygen and to produce carbon dioxide. This called “photosynthesis”.

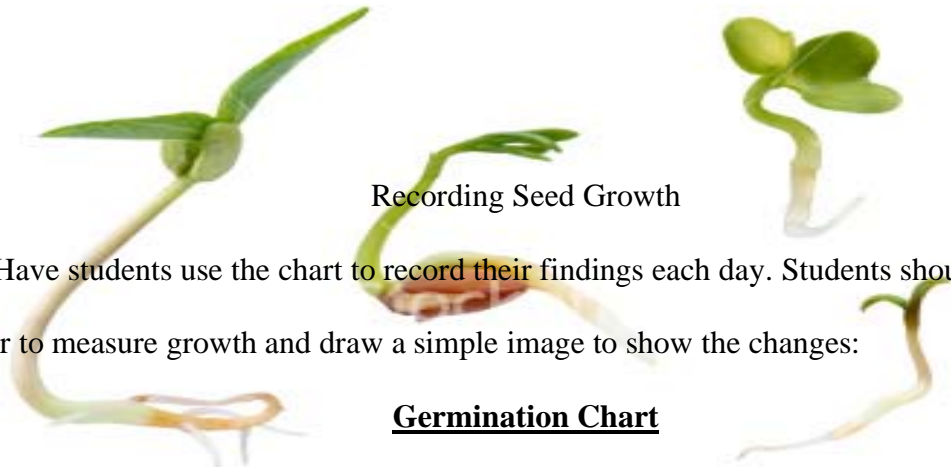
3. The seed coat: Is the outer tissue that protects the embryo from drying.

Finally, when the environment is favorable for growth, seeds germinate.

Directions:

1. In a small bowl, soak one cup lentils or red kidney beans. After 3-4 days, seed coats start to separate from the seed.
2. Put a kitchen towel in a colander. Drain the lentils inside the bowl. Cover and keep moist for several days. Check at least twice each day to be sure lentils are moist and roots are growing.
3. Soon, a root appears, followed by a stem.
4. Next you will notice a small leaf .
5. At this point you can put the lentils in a large flat tray, spray with water and cover with a plastic bag. Place in a well lit area with a controlled room temperature.
6. Check at least twice a day for moisture. When the stem and leaves grow green, you can take the plastic wrap off and simply spray the lentils to keep them from drying.

7. When the stem is tall enough, put a red ribbon around it.



Recording Seed Growth

A) Have students use the chart to record their findings each day. Students should use a ruler to measure growth and draw a simple image to show the changes:

Germination Chart

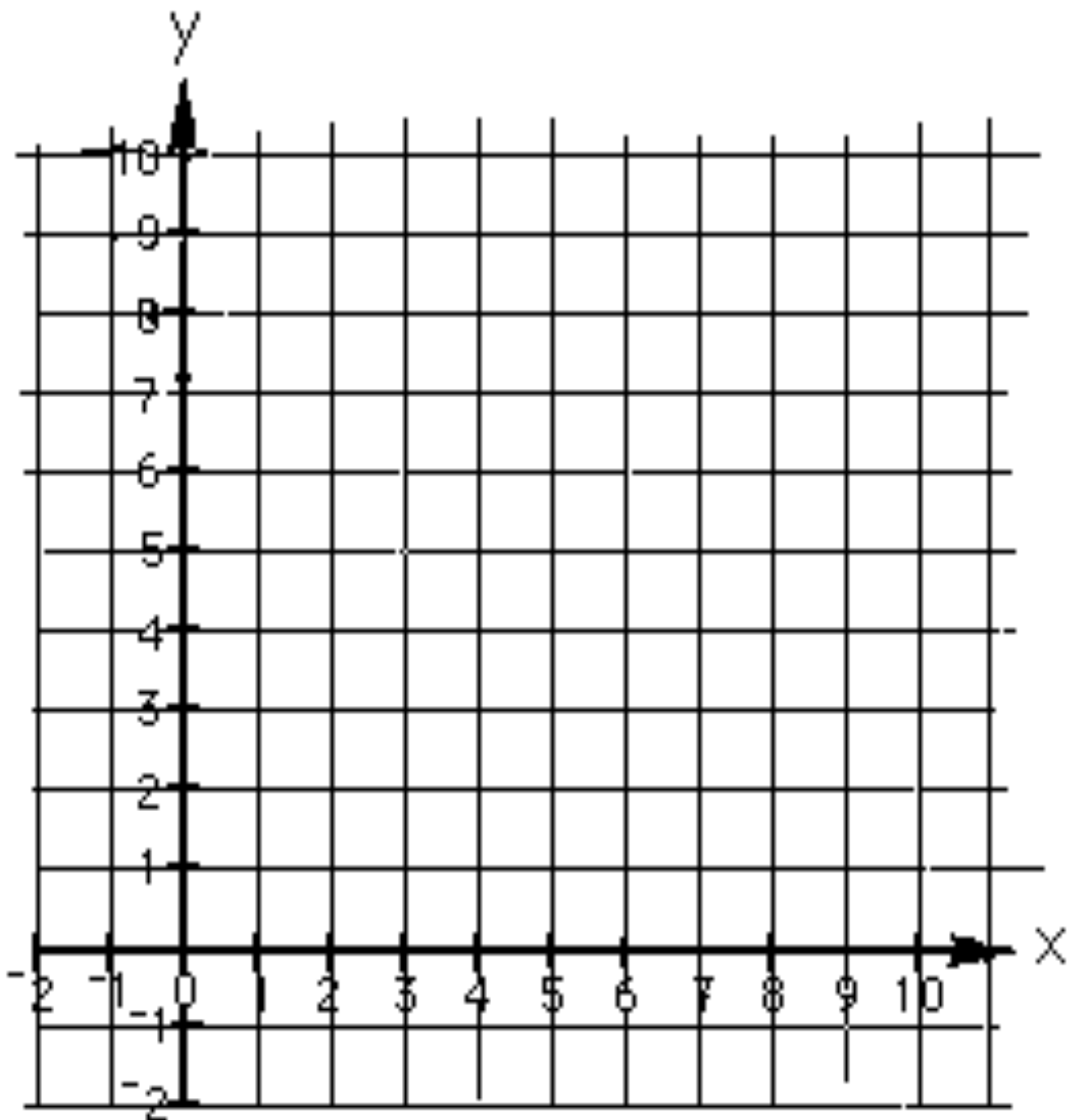
Day #	Seed coat detaches (mm)	Root appears/grows (mm)	Stem appears/grows (mm)	Leaf appears/grows (mm)
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				

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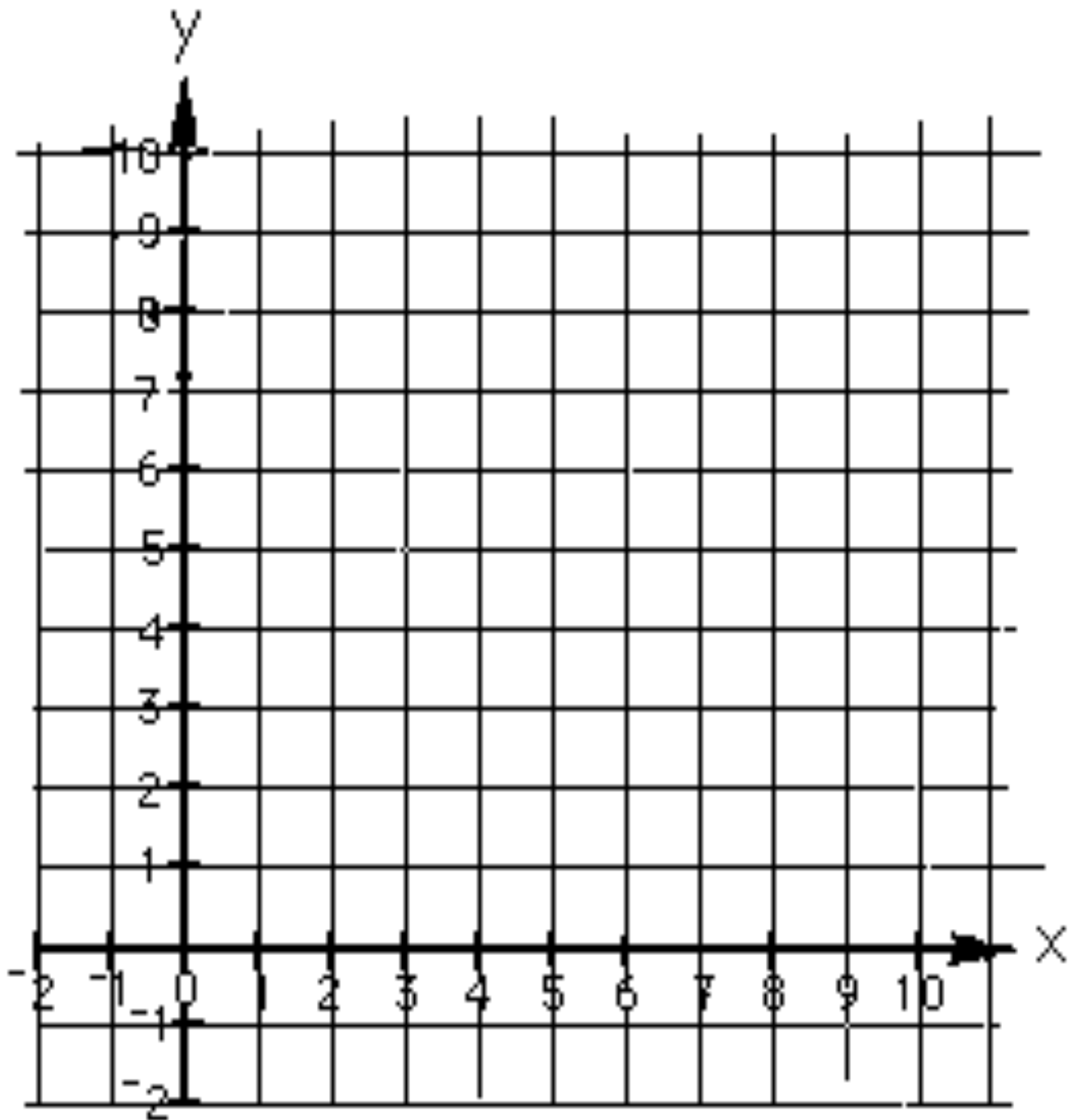
B) Use the data in the previous chart to make a graph showing the growth of the seeds.

Use the Y axis to show the growth in mm. Use the X axis to show the number of days.

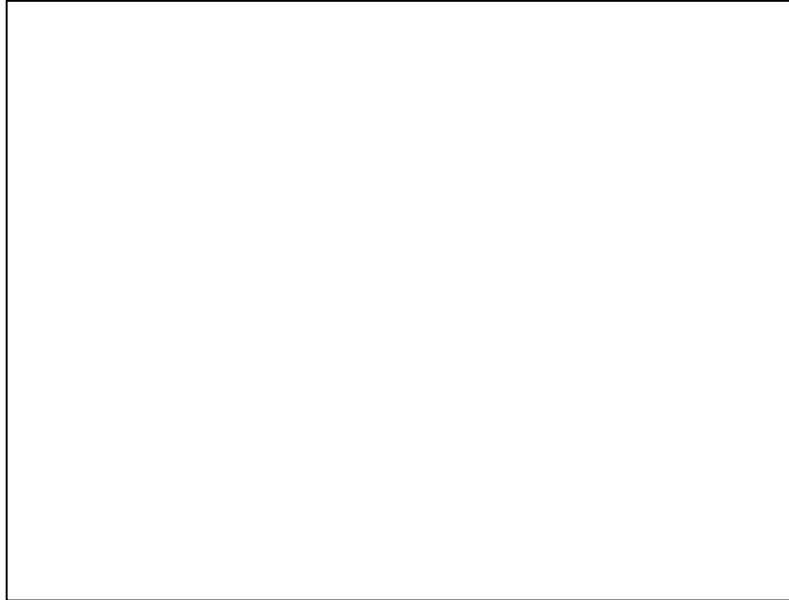
Graph #1: Stem Growth in mm



Graph #2: Root growth in mm



C) Draw a model of a seed in germination. Use the vocabulary to label each part of the seed:



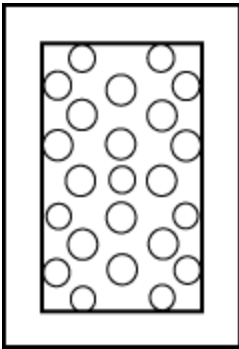
II-Understanding Designs

Ask students to look at the title page of this story. Does the frame holding the title look familiar to them? Does it remind them of something? This box is indeed designed like a Persian rug.

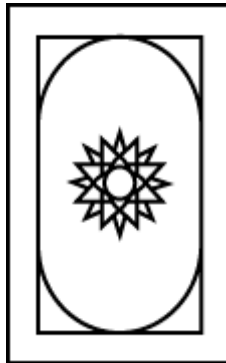
Persian Rug Layouts:

Persian rugs can have 3 different layouts as shown below:

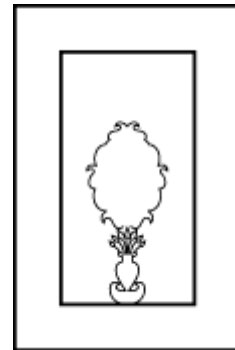
a. All over layout



b. Medallion layout



c. One sided layout:



Persian Rug Colors:

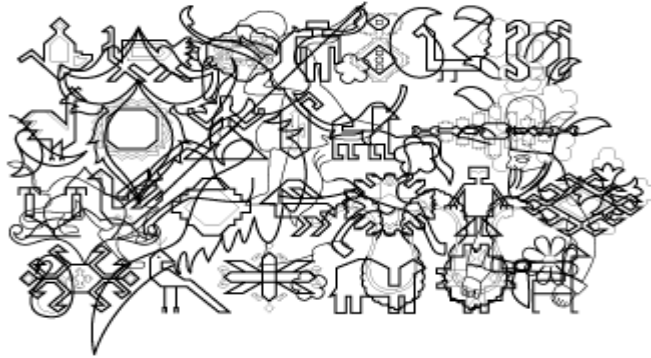
The colors used in a rug are one of the most important factors in deciding its quality and its visual beauty. The contrast between colors enhances the beauty of the design. Certain colors are more commonly used in certain areas. For example a Kashan rug is most likely to have a beige background with blue motifs although red Kashan is also common..

Persian Rug Designs:

There are 3 types of Persian Rugs:

- a. The Curvilinear: has motifs made with curved lines.

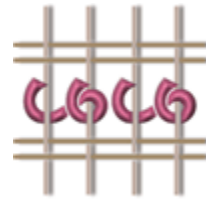
- b. The Geometrical: has motifs made with straight lines.
- c. The Pictorial: portrays people or animals.



Knots

Persian rugs are usually woven by making an asymmetrical knot with a piece of wool, cotton, or silk. The more knots there is in a square inch, the higher the quality of the rug.

It takes a skilled rug weaver about 2-3 years to make an average rug.



Questions:

Use the information you just learned to answer these questions:

1. Look at the first page of the tale of “Nowrooz and Naneh Sarma”. What is the layout of the title box? (A: medallion)
2. What is the design of the title box? (A: curvilinear)
3. Choose at least 3 contrasting colors and color the rug.

III-Paper table cover:

Naneh Sarma makes a new table cover for Nowrooz. It is true that most Iranians today use a special tablecloth during the Nowrooz celebration. Here is an idea to make your own class table cover:

You need:

1. One pack of light colored table napkins (White is better)
2. #2 pencils with rounded tips
3. colored pens
4. patterns
5. double sided tape

Directions:

1. Make several copies of various Persian patterns (Ali Dowlatshahi's book has great patterns and is available through Amazon.com for under \$10).
2. give each student a paper napkin, a pencil, and several color pens. Students will carefully trace the patterns on the napkin, then trace it again with color pen.
Depending on the quality of the napkin, they may be able to color it in as well.
3. Place the napkins one next to another or work a pattern on the paper table cover.
Once you have decided where you want each napkin, use piece of double sided tape to decorate the table cover.

Student's Name _____	Exemplary: A+, A	Profficient A-, B+	Acceptable B, B-	Needs to improve C+, C
Content: Comprehension Questions	All questions are answered clearly and thoroughly. Student is articulate	All questions are answered. All activities have been completed.	Most questions are answered. Student has participated in at least 2 activities.	Half the questions are answered. Student participated in only 1 activity
Germination Activity	All charts and tables are completed thoroughly and with precision. Student shows excellent work ethics	All charts and tables are completed. Student's work is not always precise.	Most charts are completed. Student's work lacks precision and does not display good work ethics.	Some charts are completed. Student's work lacks the necessary information.
Persian Rug	All questions are answered. Student has completed the coloring activity, and shows understanding of the text.	All questions are answered. Student has not completed the coloring activity.	Most questions are answered. Student has not completed the coloring activity	Some questions are answered. Student has not completed the coloring activity

Film: The White Balloon

Questions and Activities

Introduction:

Winner of the 1995 Camera d'Or award at the Cannes Film Festival, Jaafar Panahi's "The White Balloon" is the story of a little girl's ordeal to buy a most cherished fancy tail gold fish for her family's Nowrooz celebration. The hustle and bustle of Tehran's busy middle-lower class neighborhoods is well depicted in the opening scene. The movie lapses in real time (80 minutes) mimicking the amount of time left before the arrival of the Persian New Year, in exactly one hour and 28 minutes from the start of the movie.

My lesson plan suggestion is to view this movie in three sessions of 20-30 minutes each. This will allow some time to do the accompanying worksheets and to follow up with a short discussion. Teachers with block scheduling can show the movie in one period and use the "General Activity"

Session 1: End when Raziieh runs out of the hose to buy a goldfish. Duration: about 20 minutes.

Questions:

1. The movie starts in a marketplace in the heart of Tehran. What are some of the shops you recognize?
2. The camera follows a woman in the market. What does she seem to be concerned about?
3. What is she wearing?
4. Is she carrying something?
5. Who tells her which direction she should take?
6. Why is everyone in a rush?
7. What does the girl want?

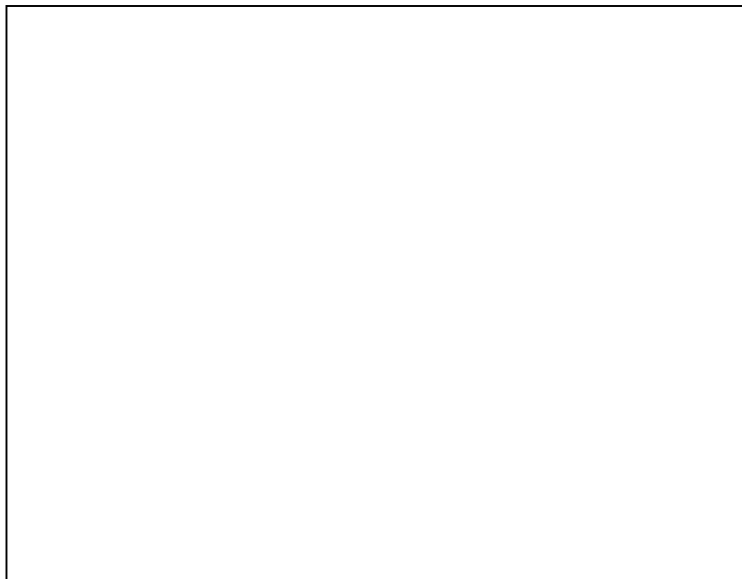
8. Why doesn't her mom agree?
9. When they reach the house, they meet Ali, Razieh's older brother. Where is he going?
10. Who is going to help Razieh to convince her mom into buying another goldfish?
11. Whose voice can you hear yelling? What does he want each time?

Cultural Note:

Razieh's home is a traditional Iranian home in Tehran's historic district. As they enter, notice how the building structure is very different from homes in the west. What are some of the features of this home that you find different from the typical home in the US?

- Use the box below to draw a plan of the courtyard. Show where the main entrance, kitchen, bathroom, and the main living areas are.

Street



Session 2: Stop after Razieh returns the fish to the shopkeeper. Duration: 30 minutes.

Questions:

1. Razieh leaves the house to buy the goldfish. Why does she stop on her way?
2. Who takes her money? Why?
3. What does she need to do in order to have it back? Is her money in real jeopardy?
4. Why does the snake charmer return her money to her?
5. Razieh eventually makes her way to the fish store. What does she realize then?
6. Who tries to help her? What is their plan?
7. Does Razieh find her money?
8. Who promises to get Razieh's money for her?
9. Ali comes to find her sister. Why is he mad at her?

Cultural Note:

Explore the interactions among the adults and children. Iranian children are very formal and respectful in their exchanges with adults. Based on various characters in the movie, you can understand the adults' perception of children in general. Use these two examples:

- Razieh tells the fish seller that she has lost a 500 Tooman (Iranian currency) note. The man shows Razieh different bills and asks her if it looked like any of them. Why?
- Razieh and Ali ask the tailor to find a way to open the basement and let them take the money as he had promised the old lady. He continues to reply by: "Come back next week", why?

Session 3: to the end of movie. Duration 30 minutes

Questions:

1. Who watches the two kids struggle to reach their money?
2. How does he know the shop owner is supposed to leave town?
3. Why does he enjoy talking to Razieh?
4. It is very important for Iranians to spend the Nowrooz holiday with their family. Why can't the soldier return home?
5. Are there special US holidays that are celebrated with families?
6. Why do Ali and the balloon boy start to fight?
7. Why do they stop?
8. When Ali returns, the balloon boy is gone. What does he bring back?

9. The three kids become friendly. Describe the game they play.
10. The movie ends with Razieh and Ali going home with the fish they had just bought. Who is the last one to leave?
11. Do you think *The White Balloon* is a good title for this movie? Why?

Cultural Note:

- The soldier tells Razieh that he is from *Neyshaboor*, a small town located in a northeastern province. The young man asks Razieh why she does not talk to him. Is it that she finds him a stranger? He then explains:

“I may not be from around here, but I’m no stranger. In the city people view each other as strangers because they don’t interact with each other.” Do you agree with him? Explain your answer in a short paragraph. Give at least one example to support your opinion.

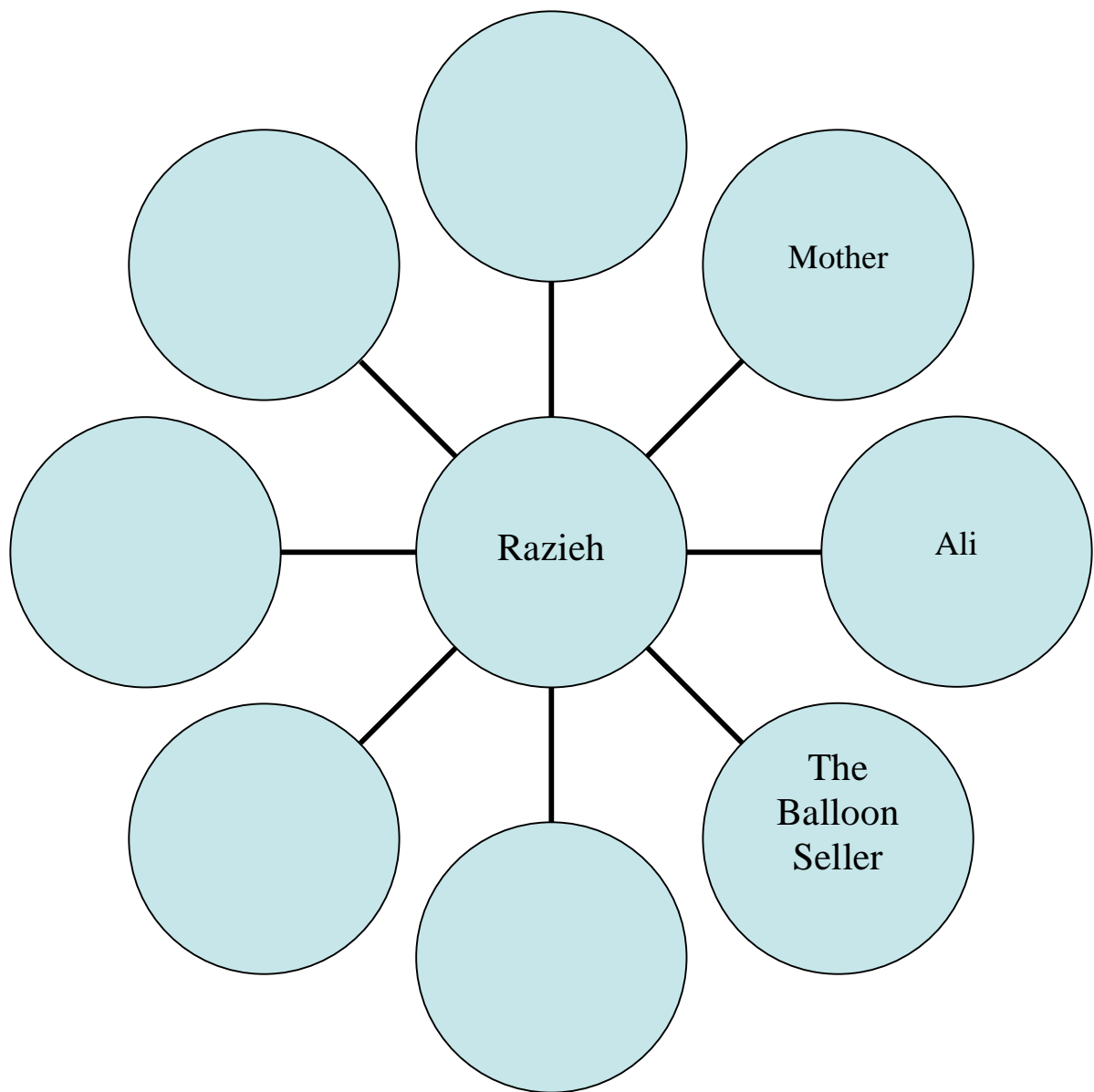
- In the year 621 AD, the prophet Mohammed fled from Mecca to Medina. This is called “Hijra”. After Persia was conquered by Muslims, the ancient Persians decided to use this date as the starting point of their Muslim calendar . Unlike all other Muslims, today’s Iranians use a solar calendar.

- Can you calculate which year corresponds to 2007 in the Persian calendar?

General Activity:

As you view the movie, complete the diagram as directed below:

1. Find the names of the 4 major characters in the movie
2. Write the names of the minor characters (i.e. The father, the old lady, the fish seller, the tailor, the soldier, the shop owner).
3. At the end of each viewing, draw a line branching out from these characters, next to the line, write something you know about each one.
4. Draw a line between characters that interact. Write brief outline of their interaction. Follow Ali and the mother as your model.



Teacher
Reference
Pages

STRUGGLE OF DAY AND NIGHT

By Abdol-Hossein Zarrinkoub (1922-1999)

UNESCO Courier (January 1990 issue)

[Iranian Historian and specialist in Oriental literature, he is professor of History at the University of Tehran and the author of more than thirty books. His latest work is a study on the Persian poet hafez]

All Iranians, whatever their religious beliefs, language or origins and wherever they live, are strongly attached to Now Rooz (New Year). This festival, which does not feature in the Islamic lunar calendar, begins the solar year at the spring equinox, 21 March. Lasting around two weeks, it is the longest of all Iranian feasts and its rites are the richest in symbolism. The ceremonial includes customs from pre-Islamic festivals and rites introduced by people of non-Iranian origin, such as the Jews, and even borrowings from rites practiced elsewhere.

Two weeks before Now Rooz, each household traditionally grows a plate of sprouts of wheat, barley or lentils as omens of a good harvest or as tokens of fruitfulness in the future. This significant ritual is followed by two important celebrations which mark the closing days of the year and prepare for Now Rooz proper. At nightfall on "Ember Wednesday" (Tchaharshamba-souri) a bonfire of brambles and other dry plants is lit. Men and women, old and young leap over the flames shouting "Fire that burns! Fire! Fire! May your red come to me and my yellow go to you!" The light of the flames symbolizes the Sun. By challenging the setting Sun to shine more brightly and to compete with the fire, they urge it to throw off its winter torpor. Once the fire has gone out, earthenware pots and vases filled with water, and a variety of other objects, are hurled from the top of the house to shouts of "Dard-o bala! Dard-o bala!" ("Pain and unhappiness!"). Wednesday being traditionally considered as a day of ill-omen, in this way misfortune is averted and unhappiness symbolically banished from the house.

On the same day, people try to foresee the future. The omens are read in various ways. Women who want a child, girls who have not yet found a husband, men who are hoping to conclude a successful business deal or even to get married, go out into the streets or stay behind closed doors eavesdropping on conversations between people they do not know. They interpret the words they overhear as omens of the future and make wishes and pray to try to ward off misfortune. Another custom is for women and children in

disguise, their faces hidden, to go out into the streets at twilight carrying an empty receptacle and bang on doors with a spoon. They say nothing but go on knocking until someone opens a door and gives them a present.

Purification and fireworks

The second end-of-year celebration, the "Day of Reckoning"(rooz-e brat) is the Iranian day of the dead. On the last Thursday of the year alms and gifts are distributed at the cemetery: money, food, halva or new clothes are given so that the poor can celebrate the feast. The house is cleaned from top to bottom-this is a vestige of a pre-Islamic festival. In this way the living seek to pay their debts to the departed and attract the benevolence of their ancestors. The "spring cleaning" (Khana Takani) done before New Year is more than just a cleaning operation. From cellar to attic, from carpets to bedding, everything must be made as good as new. A new life is dawning and the house must be symbolically purified and thoroughly cleansed as if it were a human body, by being carefully washed and by wearing new clothes.

For the New Year ceremonial, the plate of sprouting grain and the tray of the "seven sin" must be placed on the Now Rooz cloth in front of a mirror lit by as many candles as there are members of the household, a copy of the Qur'an, a bowl of milk, a bowl of yoghurt, and gifts of coins. While they are waiting for the New Year to begin, the parents and other older people pray that the year will be propitious and recite the Qur'an to bring blessings and happiness to the family. Immediately afterwards, sweetmeats are eaten. Their taste presages a happy year. The tray of the "seven sin" contains seven products whose names in Persian, Turkish or Arabic begin with the letter sin, the initial letter of the Persian words for green (sabz) and white (sefid), colors which symbolize respectively the renewal of springtime and the purity that wards off demons. Today the tradition has changed: everyone can choose seven symbols representing renewal, creation, abundance and wealth. The number 7 is a sacred number, as it was for the Babylonians and the ancient Hebrews, linked to the idea of creation which runs through all the symbolism of Now Rooz.

On New Year's Eve, fireworks are set off in the courtyard of the house or on the terrace. They symbolize the combat between dark, gloomy winter and bright, joyful spring; the victory of fire over darkness, a reenactment of the moment when the world of shadows is attacked by the world of light, the moment of Creation.

On the morning of the big day the children are given gold coins, cakes and hard-boiled eggs that have been painted, decorated and wrapped as gifts. They have been cooked in a brew of onion peel, walnut shells or straw so that they are colored green, brown or yellow. They symbolize the renewal of the world and they are a pledge of fruitfulness.

Return to paradise

The first thirteen days of the year are a time of rejoicing. Children think only of play and adults of visiting each other. The real purpose of these joyful days is to rediscover an original state of purity and equality. Relations with friends and neighbors begin anew. People visit everyone, the mighty and the humble. The period of mourning for those who died the previous year is ended. The straightjacket of convention is broken, though indulgence in licentiousness is not encouraged. Distances due to social rank are abolished. Everyone, rich and poor, enjoys the same kind of food and recreations and wears brightly- colored new clothes. Work stops in fields and factories. All the rites performed at this time look back to a lost paradise, the original earthly paradise in which the divine breath infuses humankind with a feeling of spiritual fraternity and equality.

On the "Thirteenth day outside" (Sizdah bear) the mount of the demon of cold is driven from the city. The cereals that have sprouted in the plate are thrown into the river after being examined by the elders in an attempt to predict the weather during the coming year.

This day inaugurates a happy New Year. Friends and neighbors usually organize a picnic in the countryside at which noodle soup or dishes of rice in sauce are eaten. People go and see the streams and rivers swollen with melted snow. The young play traditional games and sports, and the girls weave together fresh herbs, singing as they do so in a low voice: "The thirteenth day, next year, at my husband's, a baby in my arms" (Sizdah bedar - sale degar - khana-ye shouhar - batcha baqual). No conflict should be initiated on that day. In all the rites of Now Rooz, whatever their origin, there is one constantly recurring feature: the conflict between light and darkness, in keeping with the old Zoroastrian dualism. It is no coincidence that legend should attribute the invention of this feast to Jamshid or Freidan, legendary kings and divine heroes who triumphed over the forces of darkness. But if Islam has kept up this Zoroastrian feast, it is because of the role it plays in the stabilization of the fiscal year and also because of its jovial and lively ceremonies which were highly esteemed at the courts of the caliphs and the sultans. The singing and music which always mark Now Rouz explain why the sufis are interested in this festival.

The above article has been scanned from UNESCO Courier by Mr. Payman Arabshahi and he had first posted it on SCI Usenet Newsgroup on 3/26/92.

Nowrooz Memories

By
Saviz Safizadeh

According to the Avesta, the Zoroastrian scripture, Ahurmazda chose Jamshid as his high priest and charged him with the task of leading mankind and looking after life on Earth (Avesta: Yasht 19, Vandidad 2). As King, he was asked to look after his people and to protect them against demons. Jamshid ruled over the world for 900 years when Ahurmazda warned him that an evil winter was approaching. To save the living creatures put in his charge, Jamshid constructed a multi-level underground enclosure. There, he sheltered the fittest men and women, and two of each kind of animals and plants. He created artificial light and sealed the cavern with a golden ring. When the harsh winter ended, Jamshid led everyone back on the earth's surface and watched as animals spread over the land and plants and seeds germinated. He celebrated this new beginning on the first day of spring, the first day of the first month on the Persian calendar which corresponds to March 20/21.

Today, millions of people in the modern day Iran and many other Persian lands continue to celebrate the triumph of light over darkness and the renewal of life with the feast of Nowrooz. Going beyond religious and political boundaries, Nowrooz binds us all as one nation. In my family, we prepared for the Nowrooz celebration from months ahead. My mother, who also worked full time, would make Nowrooz her new fixation. As days became longer, she would start a thorough inspection of the house. Some rooms had to be painted, the yard was to be cleaned and new flowers would be planted. All windows had to be washed, the carpets were sent to the rug cleaner, and all curtains were sent for dry cleaning. Lighting fixtures would get dismounted and washed, every bookshelf, cabinet, and closet was emptied, cleaned, and filled again. She was on a mission and would not give in until done.

By late February my brother, Sarang, and I could tell spring was on its way. Everything was different. The temperatures were already up to 60 degrees or higher. Days were longer and the ground was soft under our footsteps. The grass was turning green, trees were budding and birds were everywhere. At school, we would take a round of tests and then we would enjoy 2 weeks off for Nowrooz!

We knew the holidays were just around the corner when Maman would start germinating wheat or lentils for our "haft sîn" table. About 10- 14 days before Nowrooz, she would soak the seeds in water for 3 days. She would then drain the water and cover the seeds with a damp cloth. From this point on, Sarang and I had to be sure the seeds had everything they needed to grow. We would water them several times each day and place them in the sun. With the passing of each day, we would watch the seeds grow greener under our excited eyes. Sometimes I felt like the Great King Jamshid as he helped the Earth turn green after the long, harsh winter.

The dinner conversations were now focused on the holiday vacations and where we would spend them. We usually drove to my father's town, Ahvaz, in the southern part of Iran where there are many oilfields. There, we would stay with his family and visit our

cousins. My favorite vacation was the year we traveled to Shiraz and visited Takhte-Jamshid (which means Jamshid's throne), also called Persepolis. "This is where it all started!" Baba said. According to some, this was the site of the first Nowruz. It later became the capital of the Persian Empire since Cyrus the Great. I remember running up the short steps of Apadana, pretending I was a horseman in Ancient Persia. Every few steps, I would look at the stone carvings on my left. There I was, in the midst of ancient lords from far away corners of the Empire. They had all come with their Nowrooz offerings to honor the great King of kings...

No matter how prepared we were a few things had to wait until the final week of the year. One was a visit to the cemetery. We would visit my grandfather's grave on the last Thursday before Nowrooz. Maman said paying respect to the dead would bless our home in the upcoming year.

My favorite pre-Nowrooz feast was Chahar-Shanbe-Souri which is celebrated by making bonfires to ward off evil on the eve of the last Wednesday of the year. We usually celebrated it at my aunt's house. Soon after nightfall, we would light up bundles of thorn-bushes and jump over them while singing "Zardie man az to, sorkhie to az man". It means "May my sickly pallor be yours and your red glow be mine". My grandmother used to make a special trail mix made of various nuts and dried fruits for that night. My cousins and I would sing and prance around the fire and eat the trail mix with great delight. Every now and then, a friend or a neighbor would stop by in disguise. Armed with a pot and a spoon, they would announce their presence by vigorously hitting the pot. This is called "Qashoq Zani" meaning "pot hitting". We would all rush to the gate and try to guess who it was. My aunt would put some trail mix and money in the visitors' pot and send them off.

What is unique about the Persian New Year is that it begins at the precise moment when the sun reaches the equator at a ninety degree angle. The exact time of "Tahvil" is calculated and announced months in advance. In Tehran, Nowruz 1351 (corresponds to 1972 CE) took place close to midnight. Maman gave Sarang and me permission to stay awake. After the special New Year's Eve "Sabzi Polo Mahi" dinner, Maman checked on her "Haft Sîn" table one more time.

We each had chores to prepare for the big event. Maman sent me to take my shower before spending countless minutes trying to fix my very straight and untamable hair. She eventually decided to let most of it around me and settled for two small braids ending with a piece of white ribbon to match my socks. Sarang and I became more and more excited with each passing hour. Maman went around the house inspecting every room one more time. All beds were made and our rooms were tidy. Everyone changed into their new clothes.

A few minutes before Tahvil, we all gathered around the Haft Sîn table. To be sure, Baba turned on the television. As soon as Maman was done fixing his bowtie, Sarang ran around the table one more time before we all scolded him in unison: "Sit down!" He eventually took his seat next to me. Soon we heard a clock ticking on TV. The countdown was on...3, 2, and 1. The house filled with cheers and music! There it was. Spring had just begun!

