



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

Center for Middle Eastern Studies

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Assignment Description

Title: Afghanistan through Youth Literature

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Purpose/Overview/Connection to the Curriculum: This lesson was designed for middle school Language Arts classes and meets numerous reading and writing standards. Students read one of six award-winning fictional works on Afghanistan, and share the stories with their classmates. In addition to developing students' language skills, the goal is to introduce them to recent events in Afghanistan, a country on which the U.S. has placed a great deal of emphasis in recent times.

Grade Level: Middle School.

Time: The lesson requires at least two days of class time: one for the introduction to Afghanistan, another for students to present their projects. However, you also need to allow time (in school or at home – or a combination of the two) for students to read a book and create a project.

Targeted Skills - Based on Arizona State Standards:

Strand 1: Reading Process

Concept 1: Vocabulary. (All POs).

Strand 2: Comprehending Literary Texts:

Concept 1: Elements of Literature. PO 1 – Analyze plot development (e.g., conflict, subplots, parallel episodes) to determine how conflicts are resolved. PO 2 – Recognize multiple themes in works of prose, poetry, and drama. PO 3 – Describe a character, based upon the thoughts, words, and actions of the character, the narrator's description, and other characters. PO 4 – Contrast points of view (e.g., first vs. third, limited vs. omniscient) in literary text. PO 5 – Analyze the influence of setting (e.g., time of day or year, historical period, place, situation) on the problem and resolution.

Concept 2: Historical and Cultural Aspects of Literature. PO 1 – Describe the historical and cultural aspects found in cross-cultural works of literature.

Books:

You can use any or all of the following books, all of which have won awards from the Middle East Outreach Council for their depiction of Afghanistan. Ideally, you would get some copies of each and have different kids reading different books. However, you could have everyone reading one book, OR if you can't get enough copies, you may want to read "Extra Credit" or "The Breadwinner" aloud in class. (Both are rather short.) Reading aloud is rather time-consuming but gives kids with a lower reading level the chance to ask questions about vocabulary words, etc.

Here is a description of each of the books:

--Andrew Clements. *Extra Credit* (post-Taliban Afghanistan)

Abby is an Illinois 6th grader in danger of being left back because of her lackluster work in school. To avoid failing the grade, she undertakes a big extra-credit project: an extensive pen-pal correspondence with a girl in Afghanistan. During the course of the story, she learns a lot about the people and culture of Afghanistan – and about herself.

--Rukhsana Khan. *Wanting Mor* (post-Taliban Afghanistan)

Inspired by a true story, this novel follows Jameela, a young girl with a cleft palate who moves with her father to Kabul after the death of her mother. Even when she is abandoned by her drug-addicted father and ends up in an orphanage, she doesn't lose hope and strives to make a successful life.

--Deborah Ellis. *The Breadwinner* (Afghanistan under the Taliban)

Life is difficult for women and girls in Afghanistan under the Taliban, so 11-year-old Parvana is not allowed to go to school or even leave her family's one-room house. After her father is taken away, her family is in desperate straits since women are forbidden to work. Parvana is forced to dress like a boy so that she can get work to support her family. Though she loves the freedom of being outside, she lives in fear of getting caught.

--Deborah Ellis. *Parvana's Journey* (Afghanistan under the Taliban)

The sequel to the breadwinner, this book follows Parvana, now 12 years old. After losing her father, she travels across war-torn Afghanistan in search of her missing mother, sister, and brother, creating another "family" of lost children along the way. (Note: This book is often heartbreaking.)

--Deborah Ellis. *Mud City* (Afghanistan under the Taliban)

The third book in the trilogy follows Parvana's 14-year-old friend Shauzia as she struggles to survive and find hope in an Afghani refugee camp.

--N.H. Senzai. *Shooting Kabul* (Afghanistan under the Taliban)

In summer 2001, 12-year-old Fadi and most of his family escape from Afghanistan and eventually come to live in the U.S. They have trouble enjoying their new-found safety, however, since all are haunted by the fact that Fadi's 6-year-old sister was separated from the family during the flight, and they have no idea what has become of her. Out of a sense of guilt and duty to his family, Fadi hatches a desperate plot to win a photography content, which he believes could help him find a way back to Afghanistan to look for his sister.

Suggested Procedures:

Required materials:

- Copies of the background section (document #2)
- Photographs from “PowerPoint of Images” on the Choices website: http://www.choices.edu/resources/supplemental_afghanistan.php. Either make a set of photos for each group of students OR have a way to project the photos for the whole class.
- Copies of any or all of the above-mentioned six books

Introductory Day: Background on Afghanistan:

1. Discuss the physical geography of Afghanistan:
 - A. Physical geography: Locate Afghanistan on a map. What do the kids notice about its geography? (in central Asia, landlocked, very mountainous) How might these things affect the people who live there?
 - B. Look at Afghanistan’s neighbors. Point out that in earlier times, Russia (later the Soviet Union) bordered on Afghanistan (today’s countries of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan were all part of Russia/the Soviet Union until the 1990s). Also, Britain controlled India and Pakistan and sometimes the southern parts of Iran. How would this affect Afghanistan’s history? (Britain and Russia, later the U.S. and the Soviet Union, competed to control the country.)
 - C. When there were wars and civil wars in Afghanistan and Russia is hostile, where could people flee? (Iran or Pakistan)

2. Have the students read – either individually or aloud as a group – the background section on Afghanistan – **document #2**.

3. Have the kids work in groups (if possible) or as a whole class to study photos of Afghanistan (http://www.choices.edu/resources/supplemental_afghanistan.php and click on “PowerPoint of Images”). Have them discuss what they can learn about life in Afghanistan from looking at the pictures. (Be sure to warn them – or get them to tell you – why you have to be careful with photos: People could photoshop them – like when people put someone’s face on a gorilla’s body – which would make the picture misleading. People could take a photo and misinterpret it – for example, a picture of you dressed for Halloween would not be a good example of how Americans usually dress. If you see only photos from one place – for example, pictures of Kabul – that doesn’t show how everyone lives.)

While Reading the Book:

Have them do the “What the Book Is About” sheet (**Handout #3**).

After Reading the Book:

Have students do one of the following projects. (You can have them work individually or in groups; you can have them choose one of the options or do a project that you assign.)
Handouts 4a-e

- Interview with a Reporter: A reporter for an American television show has come to interview the main character of your book to ask about his/her life experiences! Write a script of the questions that the reporter asks and the answers that the character gives. Be sure to make it interesting, detailed, and true to the book. (You can also act this out or do it as a film, but be sure to write the script first.)

- Imagining the Future: You are one of the main characters in the book, but it is now **three years after** the book ends. Look back on your life over the last three years and describe what has happened during that time. Be sure to refer to specific people and events that occurred in the book and describe what effect they had on your life in the years just after the book ends.

- Graphic Novel: Write and draw a summary of the book as a graphic novel or comic book.

- Survival Guide: You are the main Afghani character in the book. An international agency has learned about your experiences in Afghanistan (or as a refugee from that country) and wants you to write a short pamphlet on how to survive in your situation. Divide your pamphlet into three sections: things you need to survive, skills you need to learn, and what others could do to help. You may include pictures too.

- Rap Song: Write a rap song to describe the important events in the book. Remember that a good rap song uses some poetic conventions and a lot of rhythm, but the heart of the rap is telling a story. (If you want to hear a good example of a rap song, download the song “Kenji” by Fort Minor, a song about a Japanese-American family’s experiences during World War II.)