

## Introducing the Reading (Slide 1)

1. The story we will read is from Iran. What do you know about Iran?

A. It is in the Middle East (**Slide 2**) in a “rough neighborhood”! It is located between Iraq and Afghanistan.

B. (**Slide 3**) The major language of Iran is Persian (or “Farsi” as they say it in the Persian language). The alphabet looks a lot like Arabic; however, Persian is an Indo-European language, sort of a cousin to English, and NOT like Arabic, which belongs to a different (Semitic) family.

C. Persian is spoken in some other countries of western/central Asia, such as Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

2. (**Slide 4**) The author of the story is a man named Samad (pronounced like *Sam Mad*) Behrangi (*Be ran gee* –hard ‘g’ and the accent on the last syllable).

A. He was born in a poor neighborhood in the city of Tabriz (**Slide 5**). (Yes, it snows there – not all of the Middle East is desert!)

1. Tabriz is in northwestern Iran (**Slide 6**), near the border of Turkey and Azerbaijan.

2. Most people there speak Azeri, a language that is like Turkish and NOT like Persian. But children study Persian in school. (**Slide 7**)

B. Education and teaching

1. Behrangi was born in 1939 when not everyone in Iran could go to school. He went to school and was a very good student. In those days (the early 1950s), honors students could attend a special teacher-training program after finishing 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and that program would prepare people to teach in village schools.

2. He was 18 when he started teaching elementary school in a village. He went to the Tabriz University and got a degree in English Literature while he was working as a teacher.

3. The children in the schools where he taught spoke one language (Azeri) at home and another language (Persian) in school.

4. The children knew almost nothing about life outside their village. So Behrangi wrote stories telling them of problems in different parts of Iran or stories (like “The Little Black Fish”) telling them to learn more about the world outside of their village.

C. (**Slide 8**) Behrangi was only 29 when he died. He mysteriously drowned while swimming in a river. Many people believe he was murdered. Iran was ruled by a king at the time, and many people were beginning to protest the lack of freedom. Some people suspect that the young teacher was killed by Iran’s secret police because Behrangi thought for himself and encouraged others to do that too.

D. After his death, many of his stories were published and became very famous. “The Little Black Fish” is the most famous, translated into many languages. It is read by people of all ages: children and adults.

### 3. The story

A. **(Slide 9)** “The Little Black Fish” is an allegory. (Read the definition.) What this means is that younger kids read the story and think it is a simple story about a fish. *You* and other teenagers and adults know that the story also has another, deeper meaning: about the way people should live their lives

B. Because the story is translated from another language, there is a problem you should know about. In the Persian language, there is only a single word that means “he,” “she,” and “it.” So we don’t really know whether the little black fish is a boy or a girl! The story is sometimes translated into English using “she,” which makes us think the fish is female. However, that is not necessarily what the author intended - AND the fish’s gender is not important to this story anyway.

C. We can learn a lot about a story from the cover of a book. Also, you can learn something about Iranian art, language, and thinking from looking at some pictures of covers from different editions.

1. **Slides 10 & 11** – These are two book covers of English-language editions of the book. Look at them carefully.
2. **Slides 12 & 13** – Compare to these two images from Persian-language editions of the story. What is the difference?
3. This is NOT always true, of course, since artists can see the world in whichever way they want; however, we tend to “read” art the way we read our language. So in English we read from left to right, and the fish is swimming from left to right. In Persian, they read from right to left, so the fish swims in that direction.
4. **(Slide 14)** The Egyptian author of *The Illustrator’s Notebook* writes: “Here’s something that I didn’t learn when I was little and that no adult ever explained to me...  
I realized that in Arabic-speaking countries (as well as in some others), we read and write from right to left, and we draw and look at pictures in the same direction.  
People in countries that use the Roman and Cyrillic alphabets, for example, draw and look at things from left to right, which is how they read and write (and think).  
The pictures that appeal to us in my part of the world are the ones that go in the same direction as the way we read. In these drawings, the eye moves from right to left, and figures move from right to left if they are leaving, and in the opposite direction if they are arriving.”

### 4. Beginning to read: Remember that it is an allegory and not just a simple story.