



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

Center for Middle Eastern Studies

Noruz (Persian New Year)

How to use this lesson: You can adapt this lesson for use in all levels of elementary classrooms. For example, the PowerPoint slides contain pictures that are interesting for all grades and other maps/images from which you may want to pick and choose. In addition, you may choose those activities and supplementary materials that are more relevant to the grade you teach and eliminate those that are not appropriate.

Materials needed:

a computer and projector (to show Powerpoint pictures)

materials for any of the optional projects that you choose to do

Notes on spelling and pronunciation:

People in Iran write in a different alphabet than we do – one that goes from right to left. This means that there are many different ways to render words or phrases phonetically into English. For example, you will see many different spellings of the phrase for the Persian new year: No Rooz , Norouz, No Ruz, etc. It is pronounced No (like the English word “no”) and Rooz (that rhymes with “choose”).

Plan (using PowerPoint pictures):

1. What year is it now? When (what season) do we celebrate New Year’s? Iranian New Year, called *No Rooz* in Persian, is celebrated throughout Iran and by large groups of people in many neighboring (from Turkey to Kyrgyzstan). Iran has a solar calendar like we do so that one of their years is the same length (365 days) as one of our years. But Iranians started counting at a different point in history. So instead of saying that it is March 2020 – March 2021, they say that year is 1399! (The date comes from Iranian history, NOT their religion.) Also, our year begins in the middle of winter – on January 1. Their holiday begins on the first day of spring, March 21. For Iranians, the year 1400 will begin on March 21, 2021.

Optional activity for older students: Figure out what day and year it is now, and figure out what day and year each of your students was born. See the converter at: http://www.iranchamber.com/calendar/iranian_calendar_converter.php. (If you enter the date in the second section of the converter, then the first part will change to give you the date, month, and year according to the Persian calendar.)

2. Iranian New Year is a lot about ending winter (cold, dark) and starting life again (more hours of sunshine – the Spring Equinox, everything growing). When you think of springtime, what pictures come into your mind? (flowers, grass, maybe even colored eggs and the Easter bunny) Iranian New Year has a lot of these same things. Let’s look

at the pictures. They are from Shiraz, a city in Iran, and were taken by a young American woman who was visiting there.

Slide 1: Flowers – Notice the outdoor flower shop. People will decorate their homes with these signs of spring.

Slide 2: Colored eggs – decorated to look like little animals. Iranians dye eggs for No Rooz just like we dye eggs at Easter time (which is also around the same time of year). The symbolism is the same – the eggs hatch, and new life emerges.

Slide 3: Goldfish – At No Rooz, people will buy a goldfish. You can see that this one is swimming in a fishbowl that has coins on the bottom. If you can take good care of your goldfish and keep it alive for the whole year, people in Iran believe you will have good luck. (If you can keep it alive for more than a year, that's even better!)

Slide 4: Toys – For children, No Rooz is a lot like Christmas in the U.S. This is the time that children get presents. They also get a long holiday from school and go to lots of parties and family get-togethers. (Note that most Iranians are not Christians and therefore do NOT celebrate Christmas. No Rooz is their biggest holiday of the year.)

Slide 5: Tents – Because it is such a special holiday and people have a vacation from work or school, many families travel to visit their relatives. Shiraz has beautiful weather, so rather than stay in a hotel (which is expensive), people often pitch tents in parks or any public space near public restrooms and water fountains.

Slide 6: Shopping – Like we do before Christmas, people do a lot of shopping for gifts, food for guests, and decorations for their homes. People also clean their homes thoroughly to show that it is the end of the old year and the birth of a new one. There are a lot of parties with lots of food. Unlike American New Year's parties, Iranian ones are for all ages. No liquor is served since people don't drink in Muslim countries, and drinking is not part of their tradition.

Slide 7: "Haft Sinn" (Seven S's): Just like we Americans decorate our house during the Christmas season by putting up traditional things like holly, stockings, and a Christmas tree, Iranians have a traditional display for New Year's. It is called the "Haft Sinn" or "Seven S's" since the display has seven things which begin with the letter "s." In the middle is the, "sabzi," or greenery, growing on the plate (a very important symbol of new life). There are other things like garlic and apples, which begin with "s" in the Persian language.

Activity: Give each student a sturdy, deep paper plate and enough lentils (that you can buy in any supermarket) to cover the bottom of the plate completely. Have each student take a paper towel, wet it thoroughly, and place it over the lentils. Students should be directed to keep the paper wet as much as possible – using a new paper towel when necessary. After a week or so, the sprouts will be so high that you can take off the paper towel, but you need to spray the sprouts with water or sprinkle water on them frequently. Iranians start growing them a few weeks before New Year. They tie a ribbon around them (as in the picture) when the lentil shoots get so tall that they start to fall over. Then, 2 weeks after New Year (beginning of April), there is a special holiday marking the end of the New Year's season. On that day, people go out for a picnic in the countryside, taking the greenery that they've been growing with them. Then, they throw the greenery (NOT the paper plates or the ribbon) into running water (river, stream, wash), which also brings luck for the new year.

3. Other activities:

Math – Persian New Year Math lessons and stories for grades 2-4 (separate lesson for each grade).

Music/dance: (all grades) Find on YouTube Persian dance music. It is interesting to note that people of all ages (toddlers to old people) and both men and women do what is essentially belly dancing, shimmying their shoulders and shaking their hips. Everyone dances with their arms up (bent at the elbows, hands about the height of their heads). Women do more graceful hand and wrist movements; men do a lot of finger snapping and bigger hand movements.

Geography: (all grades) Several maps of Iran and surrounding areas are included on the PowerPoint for you to use. Look at its location with respect to other countries and its shape (like a cat that is lying down – note the pointed ears and arched back). Older children will be fascinated by the time difference. If you have a globe and a flashlight, you can show how Iran is on the opposite side of the world than the western United States. And if you pretend the flashlight is the sun, you can see that when the sun is shining on Iran, the western U.S. is turned away from the light. The opposite is true too. What does this mean? (that when it is dark in the U.S., it is daytime in Iran; daytime in the U.S. is nighttime in Iran.) Look up the time difference (10 ½ hours later in Iran than in Arizona during the winter; 11 ½ hours in the summer). What time is it in Iran right now?

Language (Grades 3-5): Note that in Iran, people speak Persian (also called Farsi), NOT Arabic. In fact, the grammar and words of the Persian language are more like English than like Arabic. The writing system, however, is almost the same as Arabic. Kids will like to look at the way words are written (from right to left). There is a slide (#12) with the words for New Year on it. Another slide shows the numbers in Arabic/Persian (written almost the same as each other). Kids can practice writing numbers. An interesting note: Although words are written from right to left, numbers go from left to right (like English). So if you write a sentence with a number in the middle, you have to guess how much space the number will take and skip ahead to write the number in backwards!

Literature and videos (Grades K-2): Note: Both of these can be borrowed from the Center for Middle Eastern Studies Outreach library.

Yassaman Jalali's *Celebrating Norouz (Persian New Year)* – book.

Babak and Friends: A First Noruz – video.