



MUSICUNITESUS

Lesson Plan: Kayhan Kalhor and Erdal Erzincan, Persian and Turkish Themes 7th grade Social Studies

Context

This lesson has been written specifically to prepare 7th grade Social Studies students in the Waltham schools for the *MusicUnitesUs* performance of Kayhan Kalhor and Erdal Erzincan at Brandeis University in October. Kalhor, an Iranian *kamancheh* (spike fiddle) player joins Erzincan, a Turkish *baglama* (lute) player, producing a duet of the two instruments as well as a musical conversation between Persian classical traditions and the Turkish Sufi traditions. (Students will be studying the music itself more closely in music class, and will be exposed to Persian art forms such as calligraphy and weaving in art class.)

Theme: It's a Complicated World

There are several overlapping goals for this lesson. First, students will be better prepared to appreciate and contextualize the Kalhor/Erzincan musical performance by reviewing the geographic, cultural, and political dimensions of the musicians' home countries, Iran and Turkey. Second, they will investigate primary source materials from contemporary Iran and Turkey in such a way that they develop a more varied, rich, and complex understanding of the lives of their citizens, complicating the often one-dimensional view presented by the mass media in the US. This exposure to photos, poetry, music, and drawings of Turkish and Iranian artists will also help the students develop an appreciation of the artistic legacy of these countries. Finally, throughout the lesson students will practice those skills required by the Massachusetts frameworks and typically developed in the Social Studies classroom.

- **Day 1: Complicating Our Understandings.** Students analyze contemporary photos of Iranian and Turkish youth, reviewing geographical, political, and cultural information and rethinking stereotypical assumptions.
- **Day 2: Complicated Relationships.** Students study an Iranian poem, investigating the complicated relationship the poet has to her country and government.
- **Day 3: Complicated Identities.** Students learn about the life of a 6th grade Iranian girl and see how she is influenced by both her Iranian heritage and customs, as well as Western culture and her parents' travels to Turkey.

Assessment

Before/After reflections will help teachers and MUUS staff assess what students learned. Daily assessments are also built into each lesson.

Frameworks

This lesson augments the unit already in place for October and pertains to the following Social Studies Frameworks as published by the Massachusetts Department of Education.

1. Use map and globe skills... to interpret different projections, including topographic, landform, political, population, and climate maps.
11. Give examples of products that are traded among countries, and also of barriers to trade for these or other products.
WA.1 On a map of the world, locate Western Asia, or the Middle East. On a map of the Middle East, locate the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea, Caspian Sea, Red Sea, Indian Ocean, Arabian Peninsula, and the Persian Gulf.
WA.4 Locate and describe the various ethnic and religious groups of the Middle East.
Optional Compare the form and structure of government for Turkey and Iran.

Materials

Overhead projector
Worksheets (attached)

Day 1: Complicating Our Understandings

Pre-class

Playing a few songs off of the included CD (Iranian folk tunes as well as more modern compositions from the Persian and Turkish traditions) is a great way to let the students know that they will be working on something a little bit different for the next few days and to get them excited for the upcoming field trip. (Students will study the music in more detail during their music classes.)

Preparation

According to the current curriculum plan, students will already have read the sections on Turkey and Iran in their textbooks, but if they have not, it might make sense to either assign the short readings or to do them together in class, so they have some background before they begin this lesson.

Start-up (15 minutes)

Students answer the following on a piece of loose leaf (which they should save):

1. List five things that come to mind when you think of the Middle East.
2. Describe in 3-4 sentences what you think life might be like for teenagers living in this region of the world.

Ask a few students to share their ideas and compile a quick list of common themes on the board.

Investigation of Photographs (25 minutes)

Either pass out copies of the photographs or project them on the overhead. (The first photograph shows three Iranian girls playing basketball in Tehran; the second shows a group of Turkish boys and girls in their school uniforms. These photos were chosen for both their “everyday” qualities and for their evocative details.)

Investigation #1: Photograph from Iran

Ask the students to analyze the photograph, pointing out any details that they find interesting. Many of the details show aspects of Iranian life that we don’t normally hear about. With a little bit of help, students can figure out a lot about the culture!

Some things worth noticing (with explanations):

- *Headscarves:* The picture shows three girls, all wearing similar headscarves. In most parts of the world, including the US, the headscarf is worn by some women as either a religious symbol or as part of a cultural tradition, but in Iran, girls and women are required to wear it (in public) by law, even if they are not Muslims. Students should know from their reading that Iran’s government is made up of religious leaders. (Critical thinking: how this is different from our government? Do we have religious ideals as part of our laws? What is “separation of church and state”? Is it good to have religious people making laws?). Review vocabulary words secular, democracy, and Islam.
- *Basketball:* The picture shows girls playing basketball. Iranians love sports, and the most popular sport (as in many other countries around the world) is soccer. It might be interesting to note that even though Iranian girls play sports, they have to do so in their traditional clothing. This, in practice, means that most Iranian women’s teams do not participate in international competitions like the Olympics, since the Olympics has its own dress code. (Critical thinking: What do you think about this? Why are there dress codes? Should the Olympics determine what people should wear, or should each country? How would you feel if you wanted to compete, but rules about clothing kept you out of the competition?)
- *Clothing:* The girls seem to be covered up, and one is wearing gloves. Many people in the US think of the Middle East as only desert terrain, but Iran is actually a mountainous country, and its capital city, Tehran, gets a few major snowstorms every winter, just like Boston. (Find Iran on the topographical map and point out terrain.)
- *Gender:* This picture shows only girls. In Iran boys and girls are not allowed to take classes at school together or to play sports together. (Critical thinking: What do you think the reasons are? There are schools in this country that are just for boys or just for girls. Who decides what kind of school you go to? Do you think the government should decide? Why or why not?)
- *Facial Expressions:* The girls are laughing, having fun!

Investigation #2: Photo from Turkey

- *Gender:* One of the first things to notice about this picture is that the boys and girls are all together. Boys and girls go to school together in Turkey, and the Turkish government does not place restrictions on men and women being together in public or in private. In general, the Turkish government is secular and does not promote religion. It is devoted to making Turkey a “modern” (Critical thinking: What is “modern”?) country. (Map skills: examine Turkey’s location on the map and note its proximity to Europe and Asia. What might this mean for Turkish culture?)
- *Clothing:* Students in this picture seem to be wearing school uniforms, just like some students in the US. The girls are not wearing headscarves. Turkey actually forbids the wearing of headscarves in public places, such as government buildings, even though there are many women, especially in rural areas, who want to wear them for religious or cultural reasons. Some girls and women in Turkey feel so strongly about the headscarf that they wear it even though it is against the law. (Critical thinking: Iran requires that women *do* wear headscarves, and Turkey, also a majority Muslim country, restricts the places women may wear them, encouraging women *not* to wear headscarves. What do you think of each of these systems? Are there pieces of clothing that you are either required to wear or not allowed to wear? How do you feel about this?)
- *Glasses:* Two of the boys are wearing glasses, which tells us that these students are probably have health care. This might be an opportunity to discuss Turkey’s relative economic prosperity and impending admission to the EU.
- *Facial expressions:* These students are smiling too!

Review and Synthesis: Chart (end of class, homework)

Pass out copies of the blank chart.

Either in pairs or, if students need more guidance, as a class, begin filling out the chart. This will require some “research.” The answers to the first three questions are in the textbook sections on Turkey and Iran. The last three questions the students will be able to answer on their own.

Day 2: Complicated Relationships

Start-up: Review (10 minutes)

Review the homework charts with students. Note especially the differences between their impressions of the governments versus their impressions of the people. Emphasize that the two cannot be conflated, and remind them how many people always disagree with their governments. Today's poem illustrates one poet's complicated relationship with her heritage or government.

Investigation: Poem (30 minutes)

Pass out copies of the Iranian poem "If the Snake is Domestic," by Simin Behbahani.

This poem can be read on many levels and can be explored in greater or lesser detail, depending on time and interest. One way to read the poem might be that the snake is an evil that Simin is fighting within herself. Another way of understanding it is as a political allegory; even though her government does "cruel things," it is domestic and therefore must be tolerated in some way. This is an important point in terms of understanding the complexity of many Iranians' response to the Islamic Republic.

- Explain that poetry is probably the most popular art form in Iran today. In Iran, everyone from schoolchildren to taxi drivers to powerful business people can all recite their favorite poems, much like many Americans can remember their favorite words to songs. (Do any of the students in the room have any poetry memorized? What about words to their favorite songs?) Poets are celebrities in Iran – they could be compared to pop or hip-hop stars in the US!
- Simin Behbahani, the author of this poem, is one of the most famous poets in Iran and the winner of many important awards (she was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1997). She started writing poetry when she was twelve years old and published her first poem when she was fourteen.
- Help students define/understand the key term "domestic."
- The first four lines introduce the main idea, that a snake is in Simin's home, and she has decided not to destroy it. What could this mean? What/who might the snake be? (Some sort of evil, there are many possibilities: something within herself, a person, her government). Why does she use a symbol (the snake) rather than naming the evil? Most important, why does she decide not to kill the snake?
- The second part of the poem can be read in four-line sections. How does the description of the snake make you feel? Why does she describe it this way? Why does she give it salt? (Salt in ancient times was the most valuable commodity, more expensive than even gold) Why does she bring the snake images from her poems (something so important to her)? How does she deal with the snake? Does she keep herself safe?
- The last four lines of the poem repeat some of the main ideas from the beginning. Do you agree with how Simin treats the snake? What are some "snakes" in your own life? Can you imagine deciding to let some of these "snakes" live, even though they are dangerous?
- What sort of statement might Simin be making about her government?
- Imagine if someone thought of *you* as a "snake." How would you want her or him to treat you? Would you want her or him to make peace with you?

Homework:

Write 3-5 sentences about a "snake" in your life and how you deal with it, *without naming* what or whom the "snake" actually is. Is your relationship with the snake complicated? How? How do you live with it?

Day 3: Complicated Identities

Yesterday the students were introduced to Iranian poetry, one of the most ancient and beloved art forms in the country. Today they are going to look at a different sort of art, a drawing from a comic book written by an Iranian girl. This relatively new art form shows cross-cultural influences, and the particular frame here shown emphasizes those.

Start-up (15 minutes)

Quick write:

Ask students to imagine that they are describing themselves for someone who doesn't know them, someone who lives far away. Have students make a list of things that they might want to tell this person: favorite pastimes, hobbies, or sports; favorite singers or musicians; favorite types of food; the types of clothing they prefer; special people in their lives.

When they have finished, ask for volunteers to share. Note how different each of these responses are. Speculate on how people from other parts of the world, who only know American teenagers from TV shows and movies, might think of them. They could think that all American teenagers are blond haired and blue-eyed, live in California, and listen to Britney Spears! Is this true? Is it possible to generalize this way? Is there such thing as a "typical" American teenager?

Investigation (25 minutes)

Place the drawing of Marjane Satrapi as a 6th grade student on the overhead projector.

- What do students see?
- Where do they think Marji might be from? Why?
- Why do they think she chose to draw herself in this particular outfit?

Read (or have a volunteer read) the following summary of Marji's story:

Marji (short for Marjane) grew up in Tehran, the capital city of Iran. Her parents were religious Muslims, and also well-educated and familiar with the customs of other cultures and peoples; they did not always agree with the strict policies of the religious government. They taught Marji to think for herself and to work hard in school so that she could do whatever she wanted when she grew up. At school, Marji got excellent grades, but sometimes got in trouble for breaking rules she did not agree with. The "dress code" of the Islamic Republic was always getting in her way!

Like many wealthier Iranians, Marji's parents used to vacation in Turkey, especially enjoying the beautiful capital city Istanbul and the warm beaches on the Mediterranean Sea. While there, they would often buy items that were not for sale in Iran: American clothing, forbidden movies and music, and other items that the Iranian government had banned. In this drawing, Marji is wearing a denim jacket that her mother bought for her in Turkey, with a pin of her favorite American pop star, on top of her traditional Iranian coat and headscarf.

Explore the complicated influences of Marji's life (and our own) through such questions as below:

- Does Marji look like a "typical" Iranian teenager? Do you think there is such thing? (Refer back to conversation about American teenagers).
- What countries and cultures are represented in Marji's self-portrait? (US, Turkey, and Iran). Is this surprising?
- Looking back at your own lists of favorite foods, sports, etc, how many cultural influences can you identify? (This might be a good pairs activity. Students could even write influences on the board.)
- Both our lives and Marji's life show the influences of many cultures. Do you think it is possible to judge someone by finding out what "culture" she or he is from? Why or why not?

Final Assessment

After the completion of the third lesson plan (and attendance of the performance at Brandeis), ask students to return to the Start-up activity from the first day of this mini-unit. Have them draw a line underneath what they wrote in response to the two questions, so that they can answer two new questions now.

- What comes to mind now when you think of the Middle East?
- What have you learned about the lives of young people in Iran and Turkey, and how did any of what you learned surprise you?

Please collect these responses, along with the formal evaluations included in the folder, for evaluation by our staff.

Name:
Date:
Class:

Day 1 Homework

Category

Turkey

Iran

What countries are on my border?		
What are the languages that people here speak?		
What religious traditions are practiced here?		
What is one thing that you learned about my government today?		
What is one thing you learned about young people who live here today?		
What is one question that you have about this country?		

"If the Snake is Domestic"
Simin Behbahani

If the snake is domestic*
I will give it shelter.
I will be fond of it still,
even if it does cruel things.

It slithered down the ceiling
with angry carnelian* eyes
and a quick poisonous tongue,
and it coiled itself by my side.
People tell me, bring it salt:
as salt consumed will
make one beholden* to its giver.
I will bring what is needed
from my poems: images like emeralds
formed in my lover's soul.
I shall lay them in front of it
and enumerate them one by one.
Dazzled by the colors and light,
it will begin warming up to me.
It will move its head,
expecting me to scratch its back and neck.
Its fangs glistening like brass,
a snake intoxicated* --
what need to destroy it?
Oh, this is a domestic snake.
You can't kill it in anger.
Even if it does cruel things,
I let it be.

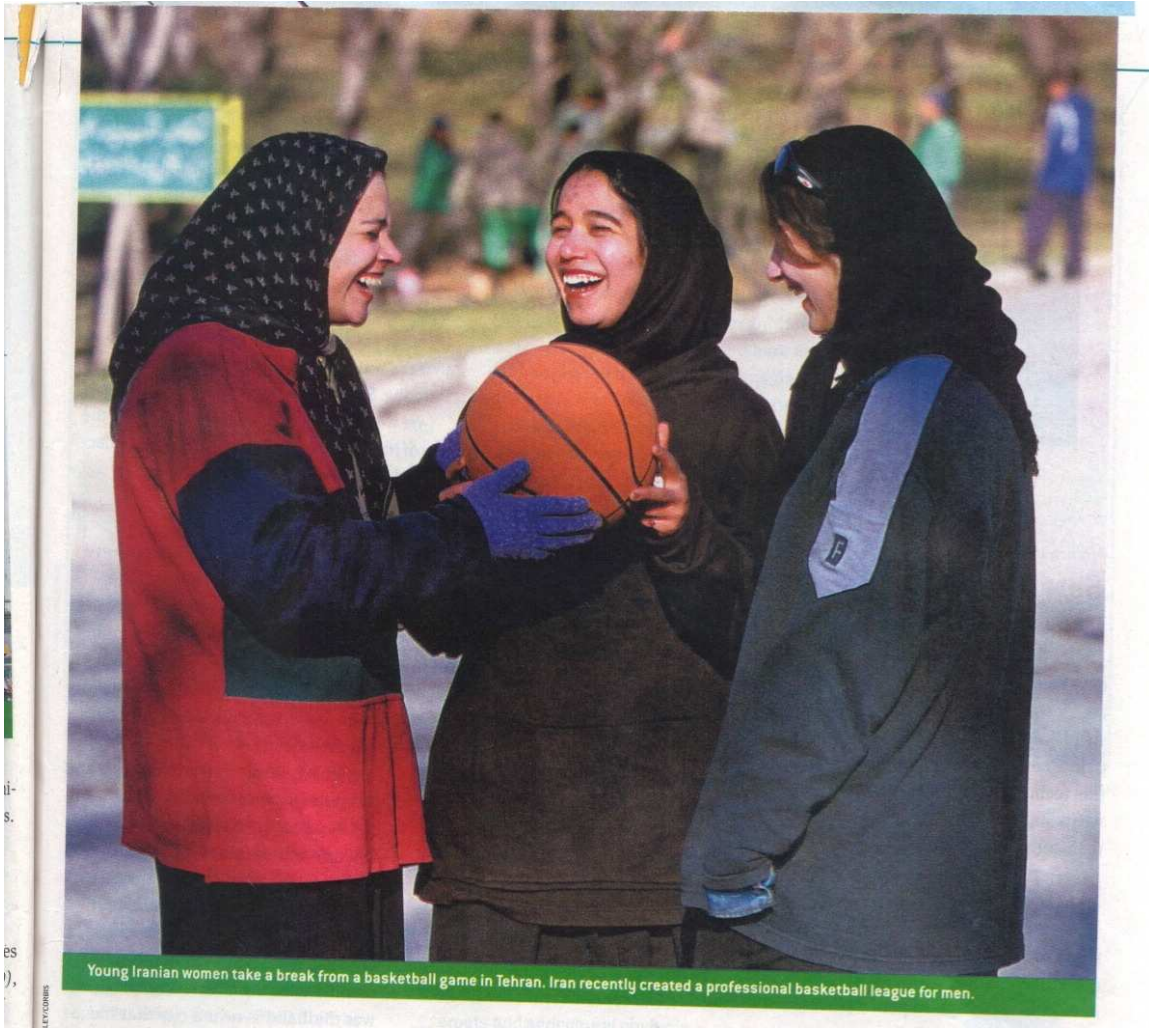
domestic (adj): made or raised in one's home or country; not foreign.

carnelian (adj): pale red

beholden (adj): owing something to someone; indebted

intoxicated (adj): stupefied or excited, as if by a chemical substance such as alcohol

Photo # 1: Iran



Junior Scholastic: September 4, 2006; p11

Photo #2: Turkey



Marjane Satrapi Self Portrait



Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis*. Pantheon: Paris, 2003.

