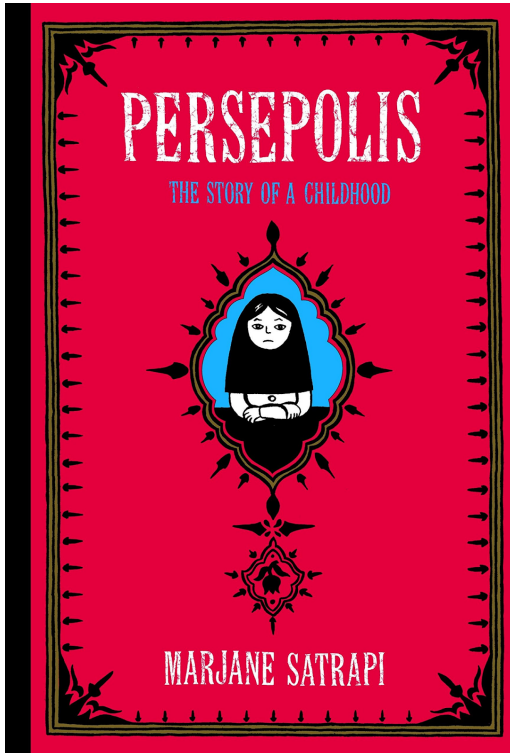


## World Literature & Composition Summer Reading Requirement

### *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* by Marjane Satrapi



Wise, funny, and heartbreaking, *Persepolis* is Marjane Satrapi's memoir of growing up in Iran during the Islamic Revolution. In powerful black-and-white comic strip images, Satrapi tells the story of her life in Tehran from ages six to fourteen, years that saw the overthrow of the Shah's regime, the triumph of the Islamic Revolution, and the devastating effects of war with Iraq. The intelligent and outspoken only child of committed Marxists and the great-granddaughter of one of Iran's last emperors, Marjane bears witness to a childhood uniquely entwined with the history of her country.

*Persepolis* paints an unforgettable portrait of daily life in Iran and of the bewildering contradictions between home life and public life. Marjane's child's-eye view of dethroned emperors, state-sanctioned whippings, and heroes of the revolution allows us to learn as she does the history of this fascinating country and of her own extraordinary family. Intensely personal, profoundly political, and wholly original, *Persepolis* is at once a story of growing up and a reminder of the human cost of war and political repression. It shows how we carry on, with laughter and tears, in the face of absurdity. And, finally, it introduces us to an irresistible little girl with whom we cannot help but fall in love (Good Reads).

### How Summer Reading Works:

1. Using this supplemental guide, read *Persepolis* over summer break. Be ready to discuss the book when you return to school in August.
2. Within the first two weeks of school, you will complete an assessment worth 3% of your final semester grade.

### Essential Questions:

1. **The ties that bind:** In both societies and families, how can the instinct to protect its members be both a gift and a burden? In other words, both a blessing and a curse?
2. **Our world, ourselves:** How do current events help to shape our identities and values and alter our view of our country?
3. **More than just school:** In what ways are we educated outside of school?
4. **The power of questions:** What is the value *and* the risk of questioning authority and challenging social norms?

# Persepolis Reading Guide

To access this information digitally, use this link:

<https://sites.google.com/wgcloud.org/summerreading10/home>

**THE AUTHOR:** Marjane Satrapi is an Iranian-born French graphic novelist, cartoonist, illustrator, film director, and children's book author.

## THE TITLE:

The book takes its name from the historical town Persepolis (roughly, the Greek name for 'City of Persians'), the region of southwestern Asia now known as Iran.

## THE SETTING:

- **time:** The story begins in 1980, the year following the Islamic Revolution. Satrapi's story sometimes dips back in time, to reveal backstory and context through flashbacks.
- **place:** The story takes place in Tehran, Iran. Tehran is the capital city and is a bustling urban area with a population of 9 million people.

## THE STRUCTURE:

- **graphic novel:** a book presented in a comic-strip format
- **memoir:** a record of events written by a person having intimate knowledge of them

## Social / Historical Context

- **ayatollah** (noun): a Shiite religious leader in Iran
- **fundamentalist** (noun): a person who believes in the strict, literal interpretation of scripture in a religion
- **monarchy** (noun): a form of government with a king, queen, or emperor at its head
- **republic** (noun): a government that relies on citizens who elect representatives; there is usually a president, as opposed to a monarch
- **secular** (adjective): denoting attitudes, activities, or other things that have no religious or spiritual basis
- **theocracy** (noun): a system of government in which religious leaders rule in the name of a God or god
- **westernize** (verb): to adopt or be influenced by the cultural, economic, or political systems of Europe and North America

The British put Reza Shah, a soldier, on the Iranian throne in 1925 so that the United Kingdom could have access to Iran's most sought after resource: oil. During WWII, he declared that Iran would not side with either the Axis or the Allies. This made the Allies (the UK and the US) angry. So, the Allies invaded Iran and forced Reza Shah out of power.

His son Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, naturally succeeded him until 1979 when his father was also ousted from his throne. However, this time, the *Iranian citizens* were the ones to revolt against him through protests. People did not like him for two reasons:

- He favored the powerful elite, creating a huge gap between the rich and the poor.
- They thought he was a "puppet of the West" by trying to westernize Iran.

Within two weeks after the ousting of Shah #2, Khomeini replaced Iran's secular government with a theocracy ruled by Islamic religious leaders. Religious laws became societal laws. In doing so, he dashed the hopes of millions of Iranians who thought the revolution would bring more freedoms, not fewer.

Shortly after he came into power, Khomeini incorporated an array of anti-women changes into the national culture. Following Islamic tradition, women were barred from becoming judges, and beaches and sports teams were segregated by gender. As you'll see in the first chapter of *Persepolis*, schools are also segregated. Women were also forced to wear hijab, also known as a veil.

## **Ch. 1 "The Veil," Ch. 2 "The Bicycle," Ch. 3 "The Water Cell", p. 3-25**

### **CHARACTERS:**

- **Marjane Satrapi:** the ten-year old female protagonist of the novel; this book is based on the author's real life experiences growing up in Iran
- **Taji Satrapi:** Marjane's mother
- **Ebi Satrapi:** Marjane's father
- **Grandma:** Marji's grandmother who is a very influential person in her life

### **GLOSSARY:**

- **avant-garde** (adjective): favoring experimental or unusual ideas
- **Ché Guevara:** an Argentine Marxist revolutionary, physician, guerrilla leader, and diplomat
- **communist** (noun): a person who believes in communism, a political theory leading to a society in which all property is publicly owned and each person works and is paid according to their abilities and needs
- **dialectical materialism:** a complex philosophy derived, in part, from the writings of Karl Marx that asserts that as long as there are some people who have resources and some who don't, conflict will always exist
- **disciple** (noun): a follower or student of a teacher, leader, or philosopher
- **Fidel Castro:** a Cuban communist revolutionary and politician who governed the Republic of Cuba as Prime Minister from 1959 to 1976 and then as President from 1976 to 2008
- **imperialism** (noun): a policy of extending a country's power and influence through diplomacy or military force (like colonialism but extended through numerous countries / regions)
- **Karl Marx:** a philosopher, economist, historian, political theorist, sociologist, and revolutionary socialist
- **Leon Trotsky:** a Marxist revolutionary, theorist, and Soviet politician
- **Mahatma Gandhi:** an Indian activist who was the leader of the Indian independence movement against British rule (colonialism)
- **Mustafa Kemal Atatürk:** a Turkish army officer, revolutionary, and founder of the Republic of Turkey, serving as its first President from 1923 until his death in 1938
- **prophet** (noun): a person regarded as an inspired teacher or proclaimer of the will of God
- **René Descartes:** a philosopher, mathematician, and scientist who lived until the beginning of the 17th century
- **tyranny** (noun): a government in which one ruler has absolute power
- **Zarathustra:** an ancient Iranian prophet, religious reformer and spiritual leader who founded what is now known as Zoroastrianism

### **NOTES ON THE READING:**

The book begins in 1980, immediately after the end of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. With the new Islamic republic, a stricter, fundamentalist government now meant that boys and girls could not go to school together, and women and girls had to wear the veil. Marjane's storytelling quickly flashes back to a time before the revolution was over, when her family was still hopeful that overthrowing the Shah would lead to a more just society for all Iranians.

Educated, politically active, modern, and accepting of Western culture, Marjane's parents represent for her an ideal way of living. The Satrapis were against the Shah and in support of the revolution because they felt the Shah was corrupt (committed crimes, distributed wealth only to the powerful elite, causing people in lower socioeconomic classes to really struggle). However, they were severely disappointed with the new government after the revolution was over, as well. Marjane imitates what she sees her parents discuss, but because she is so young, it's more of a game to her than anything to take seriously. In actuality, it's a very dangerous time to grow up.

In the chapter "The Water Cell," Marjane learns some important family history when her parents reveal an even deeper reason to oppose the Shah.

## **Ch. 4 "Persepolis," Ch. 5 "The Letter," Ch. 6 "The Party", p. 26-46**

### **CHARACTERS:**

- **Mehri:** the Satrapis' maid; she came to live with the Satrapis when she was eight years old because her parents needed help taking care of her

### **GLOSSARY:**

- **Anwar Al-Sadat:** the third President of Egypt, serving from 15 October 1970 until his assassination by fundamentalist army officers on 6 October 1981
- **clandestine (adjective):** kept secret or done secretly, especially because illicit
- **Charles Dickens:** a 19th century British author who wrote stories highlight the problems of the poor and distinctions between social classes
- **Cyrus the Great:** founder of the Persian empire
- **effigy (noun):** a sculpture or model of a person
- **Jimmy Carter:** an American politician and the 39th President of the United States from 1977 to 1981
- **martyr (noun):** person who is killed because of their religious or other beliefs
- **peasant (noun):** a person of low social status
- **SAVAK:** the Shah's secret police force

### **NOTES ON THE READING:**

Marjane's grandmother visits, and Marjane takes this opportunity to learn more about her family's direct interactions with the Shah and his father. Her grandmother details exactly why she personally dislikes the Shah.

"The Letter" details a story about Mehri, a young girl who lives with the Satrapis. She is a minor character but plays an important role in Marjane's understanding of social class in Iran.

Once the Shah resigned, he needed to escape Iran and looked to former allies to help him. The President of the United States at the time was Jimmy Carter, but he denied his friend refuge because he did not want to anger the next Iranian government and its leaders. You see, he needed to maintain our country's access to Iran's oil. The Shah also looked to Egypt for a place to live.

After the revolution was over, life was not instantly back to normal. Families had to contend with the fact that their friends and acquaintances were on the other side of the revolution. School textbooks had to be updated so that they no longer supported the Shah.

## Ch. 7 "The Heroes," Ch. 8 "Moscow," Ch. 9 "The Sheep," p. 47-71

### CHARACTERS:

- **Siamek:** a Satrapi family friend who was imprisoned and tortured by the Shah for writing subversive newspaper articles
- **Moshen:** another Satrapi family friend who was imprisoned and tortured for being a revolutionary against the Shah
- **Ferrydoon:** Marjane's great uncle Ferrydoon was one of the separatist leaders who declared independence for the province of Azerbaijan from Iran
- **Uncle Anoosh:** Marji's mom's brother; he worked with Ferrydoon to free Azerbaijan; he escaped and lived in the U.S.S.R. for many years

### GLOSSARY:

- **diabolical** (adjective): characteristic of the Devil
- **proletariat** (noun): the working class
- **subversive** (adjective): seeking or intended to undermine an established system or institution

### NOTES ON TODAY'S READING:

In today's chapters, we see the Shah's political enemies released from prison once the Shah is out of power. Satrapi family friends like Siamek Jari and Moshen Shakiba come to visit and retell awful stories of their torture. Marji also meets her Uncle Anoosh for the first time and learns a great deal about her family's history. Uncle Anoosh helped her great uncle Ferrydoon liberate the country Azerbaijan from Iran; Ferrydoon was caught and killed by the Shah. However, Uncle Anoosh managed to escape to Moscow and start a family.

Near the end of this section, we see the new government after the Shah's ousting turned into an Islamic Republic. Remember, this is NOT what the Satrapis and their like-minded peers wanted. The Satrapis and their friends sense that the election results have been rigged, and to them, this is the beginning of another corrupt regime ruling Iran. Many Iranians decide to leave the country for places like the United States; they are fearful of what changes that the new government will bring. We also see that the new government declares the Shah's enemies its new enemies.

## Ch. 10 "The Heroes," Ch. 11 "Moscow," Ch. 12 "The Sheep", p. 72-93

### CHARACTERS:

- **Pardisse:** Marjane's classmate; he father is a fighter pilot who is killed in action at the beginning of the Iran-Iraq War
- **Mali:** Marji's mom's friend; when her house is bombed, her family comes to stay with the Satrapis for a week

### GLOSSARY:

- **coup d'etat** (noun): a sudden, violent, and illegal seizure of power from a government

### NOTES ON TODAY'S READING:

The Iran-Iraq War took place from 1980 to 1988. The two countries who fought against each other were Iran, led by Ayatollah Khomeini and its neighbor, Iraq, led by Saddam Hussein.

Politically, the war was based on border disputes. Iraq and Iran had engaged in border clashes for many years and had revived the dormant Arvand-Roud (Shatt al Arab) waterway dispute in 1979.

Iraq claimed the 200-kilometer channel up to the Iranian shore as its territory, while Iran insisted that the line running down the middle of the waterway was the official border.

A more important issue than geography was religion. Both nations are Muslim, with the leaders of Iraq primarily from the Sunni branch (in fact, 85-90% of Muslims around the world are Sunni), and the Iranians are from the Shiite branch.

The split into two different branches of Islam originates in a dispute soon after the death of the Prophet Muhammad over who should lead the Muslim community. Sunnis revere all the prophets mentioned in the Koran but particularly Muhammad as the final prophet. All subsequent Muslim leaders are seen as temporary figures. On the other hand, the Shia claimed the right of Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, and his descendants to lead the Islamic community.

The essentially secular Iraqi leadership became more of an issue after the Iranian revolution, when Ayatollah Khomeini, who had spent part of his exile in Iraq (he was expelled in October 1978), began encouraging his former colleagues to overthrow Saddam Hussein in Iraq because his regime was anti-Islamic. This was part of Khomeini's broader strategy of spreading the Islamic revolution throughout the Middle East. Saddam responded as he did to any challenge with a ruthless crackdown on Shiite fundamentalists and by sending aid to Arab separatists in Iran.

One of the major concerns throughout the Iran-Iraq war was that one of the nations would win a convincing victory and emerge as the dominant power in the Persian Gulf. This would threaten the security of the weaker nations in the region and ultimately the economic security of the Western nations (and Asian countries such as Japan) that depend on Gulf oil. The United States therefore had an interest in seeing the two countries engage in a protracted, inconclusive war that left both worse off than when they started. Ultimately, the U.S. supported Iraq, even aware that Hussein was deploying chemical weapons on Iranian targets. This was in an effort for continued access to oil. Two years later, the U.S. went to war against Iraq when the country invaded Kuwait to defend that access yet again.

### **Ch. 13 "The Key," Ch. 14 "The Wine," Ch. 15 "The Cigarette", p. 94-117**

#### **GLOSSARY:**

- **self-flagellation** (noun): the disciplinary and devotional practice of flogging oneself with whips or other instruments that inflict pain

#### **NOTES ON TODAY'S READING:**

The Basij, a volunteer militia established in 1979 by Ayatollah Khomeini, was comprised of civilian volunteers whom Khomeini urged to fight in the war. As you'll see in the chapter "The Key", many were still children, many poor, and they were promised a better life if they joined the military...or they were promised paradise in the afterlife should they die.

These soldiers were forced to conduct human wave attacks against Iraqi soldiers. A human wave attack is an offensive tactic in which soldiers overrun the defenders by engaging in melee combat, battles at abnormally close ranges.

Largely due to these human wave attacks, the death toll for Iran is an estimated 1 million people. Iraq is estimated to have lost 250,000 people. This was the most significant outcome to this long and drawn-out war.

**Ch. 16 "The Passport," Ch. 17 "Kim Wilde," Ch. 18 "The Shabbat", Ch. 19, "The Dowry", p. 118-153**

**CHARACTERS:**

- **Khorso:** a former publisher now making fake passports
- **Niloufar:** an eighteen-year-old communist girl
- **Uncle Taher:** Marji's uncle with heart problems

**GLOSSARY:**

- **dowry (noun):** property or money brought by a bride to her husband on their marriage
- **fatalism (noun):** property or money brought by a bride to her husband on their marriage
- **Kim Wilde:** an English pop singer, author, DJ and television presenter; she first saw success in 1981 with her debut single "Kids in America," which reached number two in the UK
- **punk (adjective):** relating to punk rock and its associated subculture