

Reading to Challenge Our Cultural Bias and Assumptions About Islam

Anne Marie Esposito

Pen and ink makes the whole world think.
Persian proverb

Years ago, at the close of chapter one, I, like most readers of *The Kite Runner*, was hooked. Those two lines in italics, “there is a chance to be good again” and “a thousand times for you,” haunted me, compelling me to read on, to know what the narrator had done, to learn how and why he had betrayed his childhood friend. Until recently, however, I never really considered the backlash of this book, the resentment and betrayal experienced by many Afghans. After all, I saw the book more as a testament to the power of friendship and family, and more importantly, the power of the human heart rather than an indictment of conservative Afghan politics. Moreover, as a teacher, I saw it as a perfect opportunity for my students to enrich their own understanding of literature and to explore an unfamiliar culture. The decision to add this book to the required reading list for my world literature class was a given, and I joyfully did the required research and planning so that my students would be familiar with some specifics about the country, the culture, and the Persian/Islamic allusions.

What I did not consider, in spite of all my research, was the possible accusation that I may have unwittingly presented an Orientalist or skewed vision of Afghan/Islamic society. In the aftermath of 9/11, what did my students need to know and understand so that in reading *Kite Runner* they did not misread, misunderstand, or misconstrue any of the historical, cultural, or religious comments and situations? What could I do to help my students develop a more culturally discerning eye as they read and make more informed inferences about the troubling events that unfold during the tragic occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviets and the evolution of a more conservative Islamic political and religious authority in this country? The answer to questions like these is my commitment to creating a unit of study where my students can learn more about the geographical, cultural, and religious developments of central Asia that have helped shape and influence modern concerns in the area.

Instructional Environment and Challenges

Now, as a teacher in a vocational high school, this task may be more challenging for me than for a teacher at a comprehensive high school. Although students who attend a vocational high school are still required to complete the same number of credit hours in the required academic courses as the students who attend a comprehensive high school, the students at my school fulfill the requirement for elective studies through their

vocational programs. Whereas students in a comprehensive high school have the opportunity to take elective classes in comparative religions, film study, and the social and physical sciences, students in the vocational high school do not. This is not a reflection of ability but of interest and inclination. The students in my classes may or may not elect to go to college. The students in my classes may view reading more as a classroom requirement rather than a lifelong pleasure. The students in my classes may have had fewer opportunities to travel or interact with students who have different interests, backgrounds, and academic aspirations. In fact, for the most part, the students in my classes are more likely those who will, upon graduation, secure entry-level positions in local businesses, remain there, and hopefully, acquire the additional skills, experience, or education required to advance in their chosen vocational career path. This is not meant as a criticism of my students, many of whom I find to be highly motivated individuals interested in completing their high school education and successfully transitioning from school to work. It is a simple assessment of their current reality and focus. Therefore, the responsibility of creating an environment for learning that naturally requires a degree of intellectual and cultural curiosity can be an arduous task for the world literature teacher.

To further complicate the situation, my school continues to have a blocked schedule. This means that the students' academic classes are scheduled for ninety-minute blocks each day for only half the school year. This often limits what students can read and how much time can be spent in discussion. Moreover, because we are a vocational high school, many of the junior and senior students hold jobs where they work 20 or more hours per week, whether independently or through the school's co-operative education program. This is a unique challenge for a senior English teacher, especially if, in addition to her other English classes, she is teaching a co-op section of English 12. In this case, the teacher must plan lessons and/or units that can easily be covered or molded to fit a two-week in and two-week out turnaround schedule for about 20 or more students. I am learning very quickly that each two-week rotation is an entirely different preparation that must be tailored to the needs and work ethic of each two-week group. Even though I have tried to make adequate use of our school's blackboard site as a means of staying in contact with both rotations simultaneously, many of the students are unfamiliar with the expectations and responsibilities of a blackboard site and fail to check assignments or post on the discussion forum. Therefore, any additional material I add to my existing lesson plan must be cut and designed to fit or replace what I currently do with my students to build any of the required background for the novel and to supplement its reading with culturally related resources that will enhance both their appreciation and understanding of this literary work.

Consequently, as I begin to re-examine my instructional goals and objective for my students' study of the novel *The Kite Runner*, I need to determine exactly what I will do for my English 12 Honors class and my English 12 Co-op classes. Time in both classes

is tight. Although both classes may be assessed differently and the number of additional readings will vary, I am committed to making sure that all classes have a balanced and less biased introduction to the political, cultural, and religious landscape of Afghanistan and its neighboring Islamic countries.

Instructional Rationale and Focus

As part of an earlier unit I created at the Yale Teachers Institute, I became familiar with Edward Said and his study of western orientalism. As Said posited in his book *Orientalism*, the European, or Western, view of East Asia and North African, has often distorted our assumptions and conclusions about places and people that are seemingly different from us, making them appear to us as primitive and uncivilized. As I quoted in an earlier unit of mine, Said explains,

“they (Orientals) are a subject race, dominated by a race that knows them and what is good for them better than they could possibly know themselves. Their great moments were in the past; they are useful in the modern world only because the powerful and up-to-date empires have effectively brought them out of the wretchedness of their decline and turned them into rehabilitated residents of productive colonies” (1).

However, awareness of this otherness takes on new light as we move forward in a post 9/11 world. Our fear of a Muslim minority has colored our perception of an entire Islamic community and this can be more dangerous than an outside terroristic threat. This fear, in fact, has fueled our political and social decisions to wage war on foreign soil and within our own communities. Herein lies the danger. Maybe Americans have short memories, but America’s bloodiest war was fought in our own country between our own countrymen. I was reminded of this when I recently learned that during the last 50 years, the number of deaths directly tied to a civil war is about five times the number of those tied to a war between countries (2). This can be almost prophetic if we acknowledge, as John Esposito does, that today there are anywhere between four and six million Muslims living in the United States (3). In his article “Islam in the World and in America,” Esposito states that Islam is the second-largest world religion, and it claims 1.2 billion followers, many of whom live in fifty-six Muslim-majority countries (4). Therefore, rather than focus on the “exotic,” it is my intent to focus on the similarities.

Now, since I am neither a social studies teacher nor a comparative religions teacher, I will take a more literary approach to my course of study. My students will explore Islamic culture and religion as it directly relates to a deeper and more reflective reading of Hosseini’s novel, *The Kite Runner*. This, of course, in the light of the new Common Core Standards for English 12 is more rigorous than some may think, especially given the expectations of my Honors English 12 students. In addition to the typical understanding of literary terms like motif, symbolism, allusion, theme, epic, and parable, my students

need to understand how authors use these literary devices to convey the big ideas explored through their works. More importantly, my students need to know how a closer examination of an author's use of selected words, images, and literary and cultural allusions can inform and enrich our reading of a selected work, giving us a deeper understanding of character, conflict, culture, and even ourselves. This deeper understanding can only occur if my students have the opportunity to read, reflect, and then share their thoughts and reactions with others in a productive way. Fortunately, several years ago I had the pleasure of reading Nancie Atwell's work, *In the Middle: New Understandings About Writing, Reading, and Learning*, where I was introduced to Vygotsky's theory of social development and constructionist thinking. Through both my independent reading and actual classroom applications, I learned that students begin to really construct meaning from text when they are given opportunities to make the required connections to a character or situation. To identify with a character, to understand his concern and motivation and the concerns and motivations of other characters in the story, is often the foundation for both student motivation and comprehension. I, as the teacher, must augment those connections with the requisite study of the religious, political, and literary traditions that relate directly to the text, allowing my students to extend and enrich their initial connections, hopefully recognizing our common humanity, beliefs, weaknesses, and strengths.

Consequently, even though I responsibly present the geographic vulnerability of Afghanistan and its long history of repeated invasions that created a diverse population, one that harbors centuries of ethnic hatred and injustice, I do not always feel I do an adequate job developing within my students an appreciation for pre-Islamic and Islamic culture. Fortunately, my research has enabled me to locate some supplemental materials that will fill that void.

I plan to augment the study of *Kite Runner* with the reading and discussion of two or more pre-Islamic Persian and Arabian folk tales, excerpts from the Persian epic *The Shahmaneh*, an article on Islam as well as the viewing and discussion of four short documentary films and one feature film, and a small group research activity. Although this may seem like a lot of material, all of these selections can be directly tied to events, references, and issues found in the novel and can create opportunities for the type of dialogue that will challenge the typical stereotypes and prejudices fostered in our post 9/11 world. In using these materials I hope my students will begin to understand and find answers to the following essential questions:

1. How does an author's use of literary symbols and motifs help readers better understand character, conflict, culture, and theme?
2. How does an author's use of word choice and imagery heighten the reader's understanding of conflict and character?

3. How do authors use literary allusions and other literary devices to assist readers in their understanding of both internal and external conflict?
4. How does Hosseini's exploration of the political, social, and religious strife within Afghanistan challenge our current perceptions of Islam and Islamic culture?
5. More specifically, how does Hosseini's exploration of the different attitudes toward women, ethnicity, and religion within a single family and culture challenge our current perceptions of Islam and Islamic culture?

To begin, like many of the *Kite Runner* curricular units found online suggest, I always have my students do a quick assessment of our cultural attitude toward kites and kite flying. The results usually show that Americans see them as remnants of an idyllic pastime honoring both family and freedom. After viewing at least two of the any number of videos found through YouTube on kites and kite fighting, or *Gudiparan bazi*, in Afghanistan, I have my students reflect on the similarities and difference they find and then share them as a class. This provides me an opportunity to introduce the novel, its characters, the potential conflicts, and an important literary symbol. To extend this pre-reading, background-building activity, I luckily found, through YouTube, an old news documentary on Afghanistan that provides footage of trucks rumbling along the Khyber Pass, prewar Kabul and its people, and the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. Here again I have my students reflect, in writing, on the information and images presented and how it informs or supplements their current knowledge of the country or culture. This then allows us share what we think we know about Afghan history and culture and to take a look at the country on a map before we read Chapter One together. This introduction to the novel is the same for both my English 12 Honors and English 12 Co-op classes. It guarantees my students recognize the kite as a symbol, can locate Afghanistan on a map and identify the names of places referenced in the novel, and have a basic understanding of the extenuating historical circumstances that have contributed to the cultural and political strife within the area.

As we continue reading the opening chapters of the novel, I demand that my students do a deep reading of selected passages. This not only involves an examination of word choice but a look at Hosseini's use of literary motifs and allusions. Consequently, my students recognize that Amir's preparation for the kite flying competition is equivalent to that of a soldier readying himself for battle and that the recurring images of mirrors, scars, sheep, and corduroy pants play into the development of conflict and theme. What demands attention outside the text, however, is the literary allusion to *The Shahnameh*, or the Persian *The Book of Kings*. This story, like many of the stories shared by the world's earliest societies, was created to recount the history and exploits of a king. These stories were first shared verbally, and then, as permitted, recorded in beautiful calligraphy accompanied by gilded illustrations. *The Shahnameh*, written by Ferdowsi Tousi, is

about a Persian shah and the men who fought for him. Like the *Sundiata*, a West African epic and the *Panchatantra*, an Indian collection of animal fables, the book addresses the art of kingship – its expectations and responsibilities. Literary allusions are easy to identify when reading selections from one’s own culture but are sometimes overlooked if not pointedly examined when reading selections from outside one’s culture. Therefore, to have my students question and explore Hosseini’s continued use of allusions to the “Rostam and Sohrab” story, they need to read it. Fortunately, I uncovered an excellent website, Heritage Institute, through Google Scholar, that provides a very student-accessible history of the author, the text, and the text itself, accompanied by original illustrations. Needless to say, as part of a classroom assignment, my students read the excerpts on Rostam and the tragedy of Sohrab and share their thoughts with their classmates and teacher using an online discussion forum. The online component demands the participation of all students and allows time for more reflective responses without detracting from too much class time. The lines below, adapted by the website’s author, should give the students pause for thought. The child, Sohrab, is the promise of a hopeful future, yet his father kills him because he doesn’t have the patience to learn the truth.

God give me a son with your strength and valour,
To whom shall be given these lands and empire.
I will recover Rakhsh before the day is done,
And place under thy feet the land of Samangan.

(6)

How these lines and others run parallel to the now unknown plot twist will eventually unfold, but the reasons behind Hosseini’s choice to include the story is open to discussion. It is my belief that Hosseini uses the story to force those familiar with the tale to consider the behavior and choices of Rostam and compare them to the behavior and choices of the adults in the novel. To me, Baba, General Taheri, and Assef are characters with distinct and/or misguided beliefs and values that, at times, become representations for our most stereotypical characterizations of men from Islamic cultures. For example, although Baba and General Taheri are both loving parents and spouses, they allow their own idea of what it means to be a man, or a woman, in Afghan society to dictate how they interact with their families, creating unnecessary strife and unhappiness. Their “larger than life” personalities should force readers to re-examine the choices they make in light of the impact they have on both the individuals involved and their respective families as a whole.

Like it or not Hosseini clearly shows the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behavior in all his characters. If Islam, like Christianity and Judaism, values the fair and equitable treatment of all individuals, then the book is an indictment of those behaviors that run counter to the basic tenets of Islam. Hosseini clearly calls into

question the mistreatment of both the Hazara and women in modern Afghan society. Hassan, who continually chooses to do the right thing even at great personal cost, is tormented and betrayed by those he loves and an object to scorn by others. Moreover, the women are often victims of tyrannical fathers or husbands who seem only to thrive once they align themselves with men who are more respectful of women and see them as equal partners in a relationship. As my students read chapters five through fourteen, I want them to hear some pre-Islamic folk tales, specifically “Stubborn Husband, Stubborn Wife,” and some selected passages from the Qur’an. These selections should allow my students to differentiate between positive behaviors as evidenced in the outside readings and the novel and the inappropriate behaviors as evidenced in the novel. Hopefully, they will soon realize that much of the behavior shown in the course of the novel is not characteristic of or acceptable to all Afghans or Muslims. In fact, to guarantee that they begin to draw parallels between the behavior of some men in Islamic countries and the behavior of men here in the United States, I make the time to show the film *House of Sand and Fog*. This film, more than any other, examines just how dangerous a clash of cultures and stereotypical behaviors and attitudes can be to individuals and a society.

Assessment of Student Learning

By the time we finish the novel, my students should not only be able to show, in writing, how Hosseini uses various literary motifs, images, and symbols to develop theme in his novel, but to discuss how he makes a distinction between the behaviors and choices supported by the tenets of Islam and those that have been adapted or twisted to satisfy the selfish and sometimes corrupt needs of the individual. I have already modified my current final assessment of the novel to include two specific open-ended questions that focus on both literary motifs and storytelling/dreams. I intend to add one or two others that

Also, as suggested by my instructor, Alan Fox, I plan to have my students read some articles that specifically address Afghanistan’s response to the film adaptation of the novel and then actually view the film. Rather than merely comparing and contrasting the book and the film, my students will identify the parts of the film the people and the government of Afghanistan may have found particularly offensive. In doing so, we will examine a different cultural perspective and how that might influence how we now see the film and challenge some of our own cultural and Islamic stereotypes. Assessment here will be formative, through the use of an Exit Pass and a Reflective Response, yet it will give me, the teacher, a real snapshot of student understanding and learning.

There is always a way for us “to be good again,” and that may mean choosing to do what we know to be the right thing in how we treat others within our own culture and country and those from outside our culture and country. I will be perfectly satisfied if at the end of this unit my students not only have a stronger understanding of literary devices and how authors use them to help readers better understand the character, conflict,

culture, and theme but a greater awareness of how it is our responsibility to challenge our preconceptions and biases of others if we want to successfully adapt to our ever-changing cultural landscape.

Lesson Plans

Creating lesson plans to introduce a new unit of study can sometimes be a genuine challenge, especially when a teacher has a classroom filled with reluctant readers. I have found, however, if a teacher truly enjoys a particular course of study, she can generate enough energy and momentum to carry even the most difficult student along for the ride. Personally, I find that any lesson that begins with what students already knows are the ones that work best. Moreover, if that lesson then builds on the existing knowledge, adding a unique twist or interesting application, students remain engaged and open to the new information. Therefore, I try to design preliminary lessons with activities that are familiar to my students, allow them to share their individual connections with classmates, include different media and/or tactile resources, and frequently encourage them to create products where they can validate or shown their new understanding or connections.

One of the first lessons I have used and will continue to use focuses on symbolism. Since the title of the novel itself includes the word *kite* and the very first chapter ends with those two kites flying high above Golden Gate Park, a discussion about kites, what they might mean to us and how that meaning could be compared and contrasted to the meaning others may hold about kites, is a no brainer. Consequently, I begin my lesson, and my class, with an informal writing assignment, sometimes called an “Admit Slip,” where I ask my students to share any memory they have regarding kites or kite flying. If the students are uncomfortable with that direction, I will then suggest they write about any story or television show where they remember a kite featured and what they thought about its significance or function. When the students have finished writing, I have them “Pair/Share” their responses with their “shoulder-partner,” the student sitting to the left or right of another. This sharing allows them to validate their personal connections and generate others.

After the students have shared with each other and some have shared with the class, I then clearly state that kites and kite flying will play an important role in the novel we will be reading and it is something we, as readers, will need to monitor. I also explain that since much of the story is set in Afghanistan, we need to explore how kites and kite flying here in the United States compares or contrasts to kites and kite flying in Afghanistan. It is then I share with my students any two or three videos that are readily available through YouTube on *Gudiparan bazi*, or Afghan kite fighting, and have them writing again, this time explaining the similarities and difference they see between kites and kite flying in the United States and in Afghanistan. Naturally, this second writing assignment is followed by yet another “Pair/Share” and class share.

Now that we have looked at the similarities and difference of kites and kite flying in our culture and Afghan culture, it is easy to show my students where Afghanistan is located on the map, reiterate that much of the story will be set in Afghanistan and that we will be noting other cultural similarities and differences as we read, but for today we want to think about kites, kite runners, and kite flying, and how these might be important in the story. With that said direct students to read the first chapter and close the class with an “Exit Pass” where they predict what kites or kite flying could possibly begin to symbolize in the story. Don’t forget to collect their work. Students like to know the teacher values their written connections, comparisons, and predictions.

Lesson I – Building Background (pre-reading activity)

- Essential Questions: What is a symbol? How can a seemingly ordinary object morph into the representation of a societal ideal and the foundation of a literary theme?
- Admit Slip: What is your earliest or fondest memory of kites or a kite flying experience?
- Pair/Share
- View Kite Flying/Fighting videos available through YouTube and compare/contrast with American experience
- Pair/Share
- Read and discuss Chapter One in *The Kite Runner*
- Exit Pass: Based on today’s discussion and reading, what do you think the kites could come to represent, or symbolize, in the story?

Before students continue to read too much more of the novel, it is important to provide some historical and geographical background on Afghanistan. Now, I am not a history teacher, and many of my students do not expect or want too much historical information; however, some background is necessary if I want them to begin to consider how conflict within a culture can shape how people think about themselves and others and often impact the choices they make and the way they treat those around them. Sadly, what I have learned through much of my own research is that Afghanistan is a country with a long history of cultural conflict. Afghanistan’s geographical location, sitting right on what was once known as the “Silk Route” and promising easy accessibility to both the Caspian and Arabian seas, has often made it the target of numerous invading forces from various regions of Asia, creating within its borders a very diverse population of once warring ethnic tribes or castes. Consequently, the purpose of this next lesson is to create an opportunity for my students to explore the problems created within and between cultures when conflicts go unresolved.

As in most cases I usually begin with an “Admit Slip” writing assignment asking my students to write about a cultural conflict they have witnessed or read about here in the

United States and to “Pair/Share” their stories with their shoulder-partners. After we have shared some of those with the class, I then simply state that Afghanistan has experienced a long history of countless invasions because of its geographical location, making sure I mention the “Silk Route.” Using the classroom presentation station and the Internet, I show them several of the many maps available online, highlighting those that show its proximity to the sea and its ethnic diversity. To focus on the ethnic diversity and give them a visual distinction between Pashtun and Hazara, I continue to use the Internet to access photographs of people from the various ethnic groups found in Afghanistan. Next, I explain that although Afghanistan is an Islamic country, Islam, like Christianity, has many distinct branches and that in our reading we will be introduced to the two major groups: Sunni and Shi’a. Then, to satisfy their craving for film, I have them watch any of a number of videos available through YouTube on Afghan history. In the past I have used different, short documentaries that are part of the BBC archives and focus on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Many students have some knowledge of this significant piece of Afghan history and others have even seen the film *Charlie Wilson’s War*, with Tom Hanks, Julia Roberts, and Phillip Seymour Hoffman. After viewing the selected video, I again ask them to respond in writing, this time with either a text-to-text or text-to-world connection, and to “Pair/Share” with their shoulder partners.

It is at this point I introduce the concept of “We-search” and explain that they will be working in groups of three to learn more about various individuals, concepts, and events that will enrich their understanding of both Afghanistan and Islam. On the board, I list no less than six possible research topics; review the guidelines for group work, and distribute the directions and deadline for the product and presentation. Now, although most teachers have their own standards and expectations for group assignments, I created a handout for my students where I clearly established the task, the group and individual expectations, and method of assessment. With all that said and done, I allow my students the opportunity to pick their groups, select their topic, and assign roles and responsibilities before beginning their reading of chapter two of the novel.

The preliminary research for the “We-search” will begin online, at home or at the school library. They will then have three 45 minutes classroom periods to share information and create their power points that they will share with the class.

Lesson II – Afghan History: A “We-Search” Project (during reading activity)

- Essential Questions: How does conflict within a culture shape the way people think about themselves and others? How can cultural conflict influence the choices people make and the way they treat those around them?
- Admit Slip: What type of cultural conflict have you witnessed or read about here in the United States that altered the way you thought about people or an event?
- Pair/Share

- View teacher selected video on Afghan history and respond in writing
- Pair/Share
- Distribute “We-search” directions and allow students to form and organize their groups
- Read Chapter Two

My third and final lesson to share involves getting my students to do a deeper reading of a literary text. Sadly, as I have stated before, many of my students are not strong, reflective readers, and I have grown to believe it is my mission to strengthen and challenge their current reading skills. Hence, in addition to the typical examination of figurative language, symbolism, plot and theme, I use our reading of this novel to introduce the exploration of a literary motif. I believe my students need to consider why authors use certain literary devices and how those specific devices can better help us, as readers, understand the bigger ideas addressed in a work.

To begin this lesson I will again have my students use the first eight minutes of class to write about their favorite battle scar. Of course, that scar can be a physical scar or an emotional one and they must take the time to explain how they got the scar and what it might say about them and how they see the world or their place in it. After they have finished and shared with their shoulder partners, we, as a class, will briefly discuss scars and why they’re sometimes important in our lives. This will then be the perfect opportunity to ask them who in our reading has a scar and what it tells us about him. Next, I will give them a definition for the term “motif” and explain that as we continue to read we will not only keep track of scars but some other recurring images as well.

In an attempt to make the game more interesting, however, I will divide the class into small groups and give each a paper bag containing the following items: a small mirror, a piece of brown corduroy with a red (nail polish) stain, a pomegranate, and a stuffed little lamb/sheep. Each group will have about twenty minutes to discuss each item and what one might infer about its possible purpose or significance in the story. After sharing their inferences with the class, I will have the students create their own recordkeeping device for recording these various items, when they occur in the reading, and what makes them significant at that time. Hopefully, playing detective will force my students to slow down the reading to a point where they can reread and actually reflect on why the author has included a specific event or description in the story.

Lesson III – Theme and Motif (during reading activity)

- Essential Questions: What is a literary motif? How do authors use literary devices and techniques, like a motif, to help readers better understand character, conflict, and theme?

- Admit Slip: We all have experienced some type of personal injury that has become a badge of honor. Write about your most significant “battle” scar and what it seems to say about you as a person.
- Pair/Share
- Small group discussion of selected items
- Large group share

End Notes

1. Edward W. Said. *Orientalism*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978) 41.
2. Russell Jacoby. “Bloodlust: Why we should fear our neighbors more than strangers,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 57.30 (2011). *Expanded Academic ASAP*.
Web. 12 November 2011.
(<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA252661187&v=2.1&u=udlibsearh&it=r&p=EAIM&sw=w>)
3. John L. Esposito. “Islam in the World and in America,” in *World Religions in American*, ed. Jacob Neusner. (Westminster John Knox Press, 2009). 144.
4. Esposito, “Islam in the World and in American,” 144.
5. 6. K. E. Eduljee. “Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh,” *Zoroastrian Heritage*. (2007-11)
(<http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/overview/simplified.htm>)

Bibliography

- Atwell, Nancie. *In the Middle: New Understandings About Writing, Reading, and Learning*. Heinemann, 1998.
- Eduljee, K. E. “Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh.” *Zoroastrian Heritage*. 2007 -11,
<http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/overview/simplified.htm>

Esposito, John, L. "Islam in the World and in America," in *World Religions in America*, edited by Jacob Neusner, 143 – 158. Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

Jacoby, Russell. "Bloodlust: Why we should fear our neighbors more than strangers," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 57.30 (2011). *Expanded Academic ASAP*. Web. 12 November 2011.

<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA252661187&v=2.1&u=udlibsearch&it=r&p=EAIM&sw=w>

Edward W. Said. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

Teacher Resources

Aslan, Reza. *No god but God: The Origins, Evolutions and Future of Islam*. Random House, 2005.

A very informative and accessible introduction to Islam.

Atwell, Nancie. *In the Middle: New Understandings About Writing, Reading, and Learning*. Heinemann, 1998.

This book provides a strong foundation for a constructionist approach to teaching reading and writing. This book validated everything I believed about the importance of reading and writing in the high school classroom.

"The Book of Kings; Ferdowsi's 'Shahnameh'." *The Economist* [US] 18 Sept. 2010:

106(US). *Gale Student Resources In Context*. Web. 12 Nov. 2011.

<http://ic.galegroup.com/ic/suic/MagazinesDetailsPage/MagazinesDetailsWindow?displayGroupName=Magazines&disableHighlighting=false&prodId=SUIC&action=e&windowstate=normal&catId=&documentId=GALE%7CA237228586&mod>

[e=view&userGroupName=dove10524&jsid=a856507bea19e02b057673261f34acf](http://ic.galegroup.com/ic/suic/AcademicJournalsDetailsPage/AcademicJournalsDetailsWindow?displayGroupName=Journals&disableHighlighting=false&prodId=SUIC&action=e&windowstate=normal&catId=&documentId=GALE%7CA173101264&mode=view&userGroupName=dove10524&jsid=e84b9d347a9bf7ef2a17cf7923383918)

1

Provided some interesting background on a world literature section most American have never read.

Bradshaw, Magnus. "The five pillars of Islam: an understanding of the five pillars of Islam is important for any study of the religion. Magnus Bradshaw examines the place of the five pillars within Islam, along with the social and spiritual significance of these practices for Muslims." *RS Review* 3.2 (2007): 12+. *Gale Student Resources In Context*. Web. 12 Nov. 2011.

<http://ic.galegroup.com/ic/suic/AcademicJournalsDetailsPage/AcademicJournalsDetailsWindow?displayGroupName=Journals&disableHighlighting=false&prodId=SUIC&action=e&windowstate=normal&catId=&documentId=GALE%7CA173101264&mode=view&userGroupName=dove10524&jsid=e84b9d347a9bf7ef2a17cf7923383918>

Can be used to help explain the five pillars of Islam

Edulijee, K. E. "Ferdowsi's Shahnameh." *Zoroastrian Heritage*. 2007 -11,

<http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/overview/simplified.htm>

Used with my students so they could easily read excerpts from the *Shanameh* and learn about the poet

Esposito, John, L. "Islam in the World and in America," in *World Religions in America*, edited by Jacob Neusner, 143 – 158. Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

Provided the overall background on Islam and the current attitudes toward it. A teacher would find it helpful.

Hosseini, Khaled. *The Kite Runner*. Riverhead Trade, 2004.

This is one of the paperback editions my students use.

Jacoby, Russell. "Bloodlust: Why we should fear our neighbors more than strangers,"

The Chronicle of Higher Education 57.30 (2011). *Expanded Academic ASAP*.

Web. 12 November 2011.

<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA252661187&v=2.1&u=udlibsearh&it=r&p=EAIM&sw=w>

Found this provided sound education reasoning for the study of *The Kite Runner*.

"Kite Fighting in Kabul: VC2." Current, Uploaded by Current on January 9, 2009.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYCLyNvFSDs>

Have used this YouTube video with my students for several years. It provides a strong historical overview and is engaging.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

If you have never heard of Orientalism, this book will explain it all.

"A Saudi view of orientalism: Islam and the West." *Middle East Quarterly* 16.4 (2009).

Expanded Academic ASAP. Web. 12 Nov. 2011.

<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA231094541&v=2.1&u=dove10524&it=r&p=EAIM&sw=w>.

As always, this article let us understanding orientalism through a different culture lens.

“The Stubborn Husband, Stubborn Wife.” *Learning to Give*. Accessed November 12, 2011.

<http://learningtogive.org/resources/folktales/Stubborn.asp>

Enjoyable source of useful folk tales from different cultures and teacher-friendly lesson plans and activities.

"Qur'an." *World Religions Reference Library*. Ed. Julie L. Carnagie, et al. Vol. 5: Primary Sources. Detroit: UXL, 2007. 23-31. *Gale Student Resources In Context*. Web. 12 Nov. 2011.

<http://ic.galegroup.com/ic/suic/PrimarySourcesDetailsPage/PrimarySourcesDetailsWindow?displayGroupName=PrimarySources&disableHighlighting=false&prodId=SUIC&action=e&windowstate=normal&catId=&documentId=GALE%7CCX3448400101&mode=view&userGroupName=dove10524&jsid=df500897081181dfa6b75aa70af465a6>

A good resource for teachers.

Student Resources

Edulijee, K. E. “Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh.” *Zoroastrian Heritage*. 2007 -11,

<http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/overview/simplified.htm>

Esposito, John, L. “Islam in the World and in America,” in *World Religions in America*, edited by Jacob Neusner, 143 – 158. Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

Hosseini, Khaled. *The Kite Runner*. Riverhead Trade, 2004.

“Kite Fighting in Kabul: VC2.” Current, Uploaded by Current on January 9, 2009.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYCLyNvFSDs>

“The Stubborn Husband, Stubborn Wife.” *Learning to Give*. Accessed November 12, 2011.

<http://learningtogive.org/resources/folktales/Stubborn.asp>

“Ki

Curriculum Unit Title

Reading to Challenge Our Cultural Bias and Assumptions About Islam

Author

Anne Marie Esposito

KEY LEARNING, ENDURING UNDERSTANDING, ETC.

To really understand a piece of text, the reader must always take a deeper, more thoughtful look at an author’s use of language and literary techniques or devices. Islam, like Christianity, includes different attitudes, approaches and interpretations, so we cannot paint all Islamic people or countries all exactly the same color. That cultural conflict can occur between cultures and within cultures. That cultural conflict, when carefully examined, can help us re-examine or reassess the way we see others and ourselves.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S) for the UNIT

How does an author’s use of literary symbols and motifs help readers better understand character, conflict, culture, and theme? How does an author’s use of word choice and imagery heighten the reader’s understanding of conflict and character? How do authors use literary allusions and other literary devices to assist readers in their understanding of both internal and external conflict? How does Hosseini’s exploration of the political, social, and religious strife within Afghanistan challenge our current perceptions of Islam and Islamic culture? More, specifically, how does Hosseini’s exploration of the different attitudes toward women, ethnicity, and religion within a single family and culture challenge our current perceptions of Islam and Islamic culture?

CONCEPT A

CONCEPT B

CONCEPT C

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS A

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS B

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS C

How does an author’s use of word choice and imagery heighten the reader’s understanding of conflict and character? How do authors use literary allusions and other literary devices to assist readers in their understanding of both internal and external conflict?

How does Hosseini’s exploration of the political, social, and religious strife within Afghanistan challenge our current perceptions of Islam and Islamic culture? More, specifically, how does Hosseini’s exploration of the different attitudes toward women, ethnicity, and religion within a single family and culture challenge our current

How does an author’s use of literary symbols and motifs help readers better understand character, conflict, culture, and theme?

VOCABULARY A

VOCABULARY A

VOCABULARY A

Imagery; symbolism; allusion

Sunni/Shi’ite; The Five Pillars; Pashtun & Hazara; genocide & Marar-e-Sharif; Taliban

motif

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/MATERIAL/TEXT/FILM/RESOURCES

- Films: *House of Sand and Fog* and *Kite Runner*
- Excerpts from *The Shahnameh*
- Selected Persian folk tales