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Review of Graphic Novel

Period 3

The graphic novel, "Persepolis," by Marjane Satrapi is an eye opening story about life in Iran from the innocent perspective of a child. Through drastic changes such as the Iranian Revolution to the Iran-Iraq War, Marji's life is turned upside down and this chaos and confusion is expertly portrayed through Satrapi's black and white images. Differing from the West's ignorant portrayal of Iran as a land of terrorists, Satrapi sheds light on her childhood to show how the constant devastation in Iran forced her to grow up and changed life as she knew it.

Satrapi's usage of a graphic novel format has its benefits and drawbacks. In terms of benefits, Satrapi's usage of pictures is able to directly express the imagery she's trying to show the readers. By creating images to portray her story rather than explain it strictly in words, the author can utilize graphic weight to draw the reader's eye to what she believes is important. In a classic novel, it's harder to tell which moments are more important than others in the plot since the only way to get thoughts across is through words. With graphic novels, authors are able to directly show the reader what's most important to them through the use of light and dark shades of images to draw the reader's eye to the most important aspects of the scene.

Although there are many benefits of graphic novel format, there are also some drawbacks to the format such as diminishing the ability of the reader to be creative in how they depict the scenes of a story. For instance, when a writer uses word imagery to depict a scene, the reader has the opportunity to create how they view the scene based on the interpretation of the words. This keeps the reader's mind active while reading the novel and allows us to forge different opinions based on our interpretations. However, in a graphic novel, we see what we see. Although there is

still some room to interpret the images provided for us, we ultimately take the images depicted at face value and don't struggle to interpret miniscule details such as the time of day, the expression on someone's face, the color of the scene, etc. We take the visuals provided for us in a graphic novel and often use strictly these visuals to tell the story. This leaves readers with less of a creative thought process while reading which is a definite drawback of reading graphic novels.

Taking the benefits and drawbacks of graphic novels in mind, I believe graphic novels are a legitimate medium for academic study for learning the ability to interpret pictures which we normally wouldn't learn reading classic novels. Although graphic novels possess comic book type pictures, if we dig beneath the surface interpretation of the images, we can find an array of subtle symbolism in the pictures that words can't always depict. For instance, when Mohsen returned from being tortured in jail, as he's describing his torture experience to Marji's parents, they depict Marji shrinking in size as compared to her parents as the frames continue. This subtle graphic weight teaches the reader how to interpret visual depictions of emotion as opposed to verbally stated emotions. Marji felt small in comparison to such mature and disturbing discussions, overwhelmed even. Through reading a graphing novel such as "Persepolis," readers learn through teachers' guidance how the size of a character in an image depicts one's emotions. I view this as a useful tool to learn in academic study. Also, graphic novels are important in academic study in teaching students to take in all aspects of images and question why the reader included the images they did, and how they influence the reader's perception of the storyline. This is easier to question with visuals as it allows readers a specific frame to try to connect to the story. Graphic novels allow the reader to learn skills such as interpreting graphic weight and significance of frames when analyzing graphic novels in academic study.

Marji's life was impacted by both American and Islamic factors, both possessing similarities and differences. America impacted Marji's life for the better in terms of cultural aspects like music, clothing, and collection items, but negatively affected Marji by hurting her family and ultimately, hurting her by training the torturers in Iran. Starting with the positives, Marji developed a connection through the music she listened to and the clothing she wore. Through all the pain and confusion in her life with the fundamentalist rule of the Shah, she found comfort through American culture and pop singers. By following modern artists, it gave her a sense of defiance and power for herself and against her oppressive government. As for the CIA training the torturers in Iran, this brought sadness and confusion to her life towards America for assisting torturers in hurting people like Mohsen. As for Islamic influence, it forced Marji to wear a veil that she didn't understand and tried to take away her modern life by forcing fundamental ideologies on the people. However, Islamic influence also impacted Marji by giving her religion and God to confide in which formed her morals and compassion for others. However, the fundamental shift in Iran did force her to stray from God at times and feel alone in her home. In the end though, Islamic influence couldn't take away her joy in modern culture or her joy in where she came from.

In comparing Islamic and American influence, I feel like Islamic influence had a greater impact on Marji than American influence. First, although American culture did comfort Marji during the difficult times of the Iran-Iraq War, she didn't let American culture become her new identity. Although she enjoyed the modern culture found in America, she still loved where she came from and the family she had in Iran. American influence served to cause Marji to feel

defiant against injustice, which is certainly a large impact, but through it all, her parents and family encouraged her to never forget who she was and where she came from. Her Islamic roots would always stay with her, which is why she felt the need to write “Persepolis” and clear her country’s name, showing there is good in her country that shaped her into the woman she is today. Similarly speaking, both influences altered her personality and character. Islam gave her a religious background and morals to always show compassion towards others. American influence caused her to also show defiance in the face of injustice and speak up for herself and her beliefs. Both of these influences caused positive impact. Once she found a balance between the two at the end of the graphic novel, she took her religious beliefs and background, as well as her desire for modern American life and went to Vienna to grow as a person.

I walk outside of my house wearing my leather jacket, baseball cap, and denim jeans to meet up with my friends one last time before I move to the United States. John and Simon have been my best friends for as long as I can remember and I can't imagine life without them.

Although, I guess I'll have to accept that reality pretty quickly.

Both of them are sitting on Simon's porch, and when I see them I wave over to them. Simon looks up and quickly smiles at me, but when he sees what I'm wearing, his smile disappears just as fast. I walk up to them and they both look concerned, worried even.

"Hi guys, didn't think I'd leave without saying goodbye did you?" I ask with a smile on my face.

Suddenly, John grabs my arm and yanks me inside Simon's house.

"Dude, what are you wearing?!" asks Simon as he closes the door behind us.

"I...this is me, guys. You know, since I'm leaving Iran tomorrow, I figured there was no harm in wearing what I wanted to wear for once," I say nervously, avoiding eye contact with my friends.

I didn't expect them to be...embarrassed by my interests. Why shouldn't I wear what I want?

"You could've gotten yourself arrested, or worse! Do you think this is cool or something? How come we never knew about this? You told me you were coming to say goodbye to us, not coming to endanger us by being around you," John shouted.

"I thought you guys disagreed with the new rule of the regime! Why shouldn't I be defiant of their rule? We can't just allow them to tell us what we can and can't wear! I thought you guys understood that," I say, regaining confidence.

“Well, not at the extremes that you believe in. I mean, this is *clearly* taking it too far. You can’t honestly believe we should just walk around wearing things that are sacrilegious and encourage western culture!” said John.

“I...can’t believe what I’m hearing. Well, fine. If this is the response I’m going to get from my best friends for being myself, I’m leaving,” I said.

I make my way out the door before they can say anything else. As I round the corner to approach my house, my eyes brim with tears at the friends this regime had taken from me. The lives it’s changing. The life I’m losing. But I know they are good people at heart, and I refuse to believe they’ll stay this way forever.



That night as I sleep my last night in my childhood house, I hear an explosion that startles me awake. And then it goes quiet. As I run out of my room, I see my mom, wide eyed with fear, frantically smashing numbers into our telephone. I hear her mutter that a bomb hit on Green Ave as my dad tries to comfort her.

The street where John and Simon live.

I dart out the door hearing my dad yell at me to stop. But I keep running. I run straight through mobs of people. A blur of faces, sounds, and debris that don’t matter anymore.

Nothing could’ve prepared me for the scene playing in front of my eyes. Both their houses, reduced to smashed up concrete. Their parents, sobbing, for they had been at work during the explosion. Nothing could’ve prepared me for the wave of anger and devastation that hit me. I collapse to the ground and sob. I cry for John, for Simon, the life that I can never return to, the life I have lost because of the war, the government, the world. I pray God can make this right,

and can somehow fix the state of my country. I will get on a plane for the U.S. tomorrow. And I'm going to take my experiences with me, the emotions I've felt today, everything.

I will tell people my story so that people like John and Simon will never be forgotten.

In this scene, I changed how Matthew's friends handled seeing him say goodbye as compared to how Marji's friends handled seeing her say goodbye. Marji's friends took the gifts of Marji's interests in posters from western culture as a way to remember her, but Matthew's friends were fearful and confused by his differences in interests. They shamed him for it, shedding a light on how people's opinions on western culture surely affected relationships in Iran during the Islamic regime. This created more conflict for Matthew than it did for Marji as she was leaving. Marji's friends reminded her of how much they cared for her, while Matthew's friends hurt him with their fears and opinions. Also, where Marji's experience with a bomb killing a friend happened before she said goodbye, Matthew's experience happened after meeting with his friends, which was significant because it happened right after their argument, leaving Matthew mourning them even more. The people killed were also his close friends. Marji's friend who died was a friend, but not one who had just said goodbye to her like Matthew's situation. Matthew's situation was more traumatic and confusing, but ultimately left him more defiant and confident in telling his story to the world to keep his friends alive through his stories.

Kayleigh Di Brico

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English "Beyond the Drawn Veil"

Period 3

In "Beyond the Drawn Veil," I learned that Satrapi was convinced by her friends to tell her own story and that even if no one wanted to read it, she'd still give copies to her friends to read. This shows her defiance to finally tell her story, even if no one wanted to hear it. Also, President Bush's rhetoric towards Iran disgusted Satrapi for his lack of honesty even after the U.S. clearly only cared about Iran's oil all along. Writing Persepolis in the honest narrative it's told in, proves Satrapi wishes for honesty in politics, and not pretending to care about Iran for personal interests. When she tells of how she was talked down to in customs before getting on a plane to Austria, and fainted later on from the fear of it, it shows just how people view Iranian people and how unfair it is to treat everyone like this even though Iran as a whole has many kind and good people.



## Persepolis Questions

### The Veil (Pg 3)

1. Why does Marji's mother disguise herself?

Marji's mother disguised herself because a German journalist took a picture of her at a demonstration against the veil and the picture was in newspapers. However, she feared being imprisoned or punished for what she did so disguised herself from the people who would see her.

2. Why do women have to wear the veil?

An Islamic revolution took place and this led to it being mandatory for women to wear the veil. It was viewed as a sign of oppression against women by forcing them to wear a veil.

### The Bicycle (Pg. 10)

1. Why did the police and the Shah burn the people in the movie theater?

They burned the people in the movie theater to assert control of the people to keep them in line and this was during the time of the Shah and revolution against the Shah. The Shah claimed religious fanatics did it so people favored the Shah over religion but everyone knew the Shah did it.

2. Why does God leave Marji?

God leaves Marji because she is turning away from being a prophet to be like Fidel Castro, showing God isn't the center of her being at this point in her life. So, God "leaves," and Marji feels distant from God due to her change of heart in the matter.

### The Water Cell (Pg 18)

1. Is Grandpa for or against the government?

Grandpa is against the government because he had been a prince but when the Shah came and took over, the prince became his prime minister and started meeting intellectuals and eventually became a communist and was imprisoned for it.

2. Why does he get arrested for being a communist?

He gets arrested for being a communist because he had different political views from the Shah and therefore was imprisoned for wanting equal social classes.

### Persepolis (Pg 26)

1. Has the revolution already happened?

The revolution had started already.

2. Which side are her parents on?

Her parents are against the Shah and for modernization and westernization.

### The Letter (Pg 33)

1. Why was the book-signing clandestine?

The book signing was secret because the author was writing things of the modern progressive world such as Charles Dickens, which was not allowed in Iran at this time.

2. Why does Marji feel shame?

Marji's shame is because of the differences in social classes as seen by her dad owning a Cadillac and them having a maid. She realized how unfair these classes were and how she wanted everyone to have the same opportunities.

3. What is the revolution for?

The revolution was against the Shah and the republic. This “Black Friday” so many people were killed in the neighborhoods for demonstrating that rumors were being spread that Israeli soldiers were responsible for the slaughter. Really, it was their own people for the Shah.

4. Who exposes Mehri’s relationship?

Mehri’s sister fell in love with Mehri’s boyfriend and exposed their relationship out of jealousy which eventually got to Marji’s dad who told Mehri’s lover who stopped sending letters to her.

#### The Party (Pg 40)

1. Why does the Shah attempt to create a democracy?

He attempts democracy because his people keep revolting and he is trying to please them to get them on his side.

2. Why wouldn’t any countries accept the Shah?

No one cared about the Shah, they only cared about the oil in the Middle East and how it would benefit them. So since he no longer had power to give them oil, the politicians abandoned him.

#### The Heroes (Pg 47)

1. Why did the CIA train the torturers?

The CIA trained the torturers so they had a way to punish people who went up against the Shah and keep them in line. This was done so the U.S. could keep getting oil from Iran.

2. Why does the author/artist portray Marji's image shrink?

Marji's image is portrayed to shrink because she felt alarmed by what Mohsen was saying about torture he was exposed to. However, she felt small and out of place compared to such a mature and disturbing conversation in which she hadn't been a part of till now.

#### Moscow (Pg 54)

1. Why does Marji's grandfather remain loyal to the Shah?

Marji's grandfather remained loyal because at the time he was set in his ways and didn't want to be executed like he feared his son would.

2. Why does Fereydoon stay to meet the Shah's soldiers?

Fereydoon didn't believe he'd escape and gave up by staying rather than fight to leave. Also, his girlfriend was still in Iran. He didn't want to be hurt worse for running, he knew the Shah's army was already coming.

#### The Sheep (Pg 62)

1. What are the idealistic differences within the revolution?

The Revolutionaries believe the religious leaders don't know how to govern and that the proletariat should rule (uncle's perspective)

2. Do you think the elections were faked? Why or why not?

I believe the elections were faked because the government was oppressive and put down people who opposed the Islamic republic. I can't see how almost 100% of the people wanted this republic to take over because of all the demonstrations that had

happened prior because of the veil. Plus, Marji's dad did say anyone he asked said they didn't vote for the republic.

3. What dangers make Marji's friends leave?

Marji's friends feared the Islamic regime and believed it was impossible to live under it.

4. Which war starts?

The Iran-Iraq war starts.

#### The Trip (Pg 72)

1. Why does the government close the universities?

The government closed the universities because all modern education was marked as decadent so all the education needed to be revised to not lead people astray from the true path of Islam. They figured it was better to close down all universities than create future imperialists.

2. Why does Iraq attack Iran?

Iraq attacks Iran because Iranian fundamentalists tried to sway Iraqi shiites against Iraq's leader Saddam and Iraq had the excuse to invade Iran so they did.

#### The F-14s (pg 80)

1. Why does Marji's father not believe the news?

Marji's dad doesn't believe the news because the fighter jets didn't look like Iran's F-14s (Marji's dad was an engineer specialist so he would know the difference).

2. Why does Marji think that her father is not a patriot?

Since Marji's father doesn't want to go fight in the war, she believed he had no pride in Iran.

#### The Jewels (Pg 87)

1. Why are the Iranians turning on each other?

Everyone is on edge and afraid of running out of materials during the war so everyone was rushing to the stores to buy as much as they could. This anxiety made people snap at each other.

2. Why does Mali's family move to Tehran?

Mali's family moved to Tehran because her home area was being bombed to Iraq.

#### The Key (Pg 94)

1. Why would virgin martyrs need "carnal knowledge" in heaven?

Virgin martyrs needed carnal knowledge in heaven because they would have to understand what sexual intercourse is.

2. Why do people beat their chests for the martyrs?

It's done because it is over their hearts as an act of respect towards the war effort and soldiers.

#### The Wine (Pg 103)

1. Why are parties and other activities banned?

The parties are banned because these are western ideas which are not supported in the regime if not directly tied to Islamic practices.

2. Why do the police ask to search Marji's parents' apartment?

They ask to search for any western ideals present in the house which were forbidden. They wanted to punish them.

#### The Cigarette(Pg 111)

1. Why didn't Iran accept the proposed peace?

Iran wanted to take over Karbala (the Shiite holy city in Iraq) so we continued the war. Also, the Islamic Republic was able to control people by being in a war, so felt like the war had to keep going to continue the Republic and ideology for its people.

2. What does "To die a martyr is to inject blood into the veins of society" mean?

This means people needed to fight for the war effort to keep society in Iran alive and going.

#### The Passport(Pg 118)

1. Why did Iran close its borders?

They closed the borders to keep Iranians from leaving Iran and opposers bringing different ideologies from the Republic.

2. Why is it so difficult to obtain a passport?

Obtaining passports is difficult because the borders are closed, so people who aren't allowed to travel don't need passports.

#### Kim Wilde(Pg 126)

1. Why are posters and other Western items illegal?

They are illegal because the Republic doesn't agree with the Western ideals being blended with their beliefs.

2. Why do you think Marji's mother is permissive about letting her go out?

Since Marji's mother also values having freedom as a woman and wants Marji to experience it too.

#### The Shabbat(Pg 135)

1. Why is this chapter entitled "The Shabbat?" What is the Shabbat?

Shabbat is the Jewish observation of staying home and not working on Saturdays.

Due to this, the Jewish neighbors were in their house and killed Saturday when bombs hit their home.

2. What does Marji see in the rubble?

Nada's bracelet, proving she was still home, and therefore dead.

#### The Dowry(Pg 143)

1. Why do the police give a dowry to Niloufar's parents?

Since Niloufar was to be executed, they married her which usually meant a dowry would go to her. But since she was executed, Niloufar's family was given the dowry so her awful fate was understood.

2. Give three reasons that Marji's parents decide to send her out of Iran?

-Margi is strong-willed and fights against injustice, so she is safer in Austria.

-Marji's mom values her education in the French school in Austria.

-Marji was miserable in Iran due to Iran's harsh conditions.



## Graphic Organizers

### Pop Stars

- Stevie Wonder
- Pink Floyd
- Rod Stewart
- ABBA
- Kim Wilde
- Michael Jackson
- Bee Gees
- Iron Maiden
- Julio Iglesias

### Cities

- Moscow
- Tehran
- Persepolis
- Qom
- Abadan
- Khorramshahr
- Astara

### Countries

- Iran
- Iraq
- Spain
- USSR
- Turkey
- Italy
- Mongolia
- Israel
- Azerbaijan

### Cultural Terms

- Mosque
- Shabbat
- Persian New Year- Norouz
- Nuptial Ceremony
- Black Friday
- Fire Ceremony
- Islamic
- Chador

### Historical Figures

- Marie Curie
- Karl Marx
- Vladimir Lenin
- Jimmy Carter
- Ataturk
- Reza Shah
- Fidel Castro
- Leon Trotsky
- Free Masons

- Alexander
- Gandhi
- Malcolm X
- Anwar Sadat
- Che Guevara
- Bani Sadr
- SAVAK
- Rene Descartes
- Cyrus the Great
- Zarathustra