

Discovering **Iran**

through Journeys in Film

Educating for Global Understanding www.journeysinfilm.org



Children of Heaven

An Interdisciplinary Guide for Teachers



Journeys in Film™
EDUCATING FOR GLOBAL UNDERSTANDING

JOURNEYS IN FILM STAFF

Joanne Strahl Ashe, Founder & Executive Director
Anna Mara Rutins, Director of Program Development
Eileen Mattingly, Director of Education
Amy Shea, Director of Research
Roger B. Hirschland, Executive Editor
Ethan Silverman, Film Specialist

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Joanne Strahl Ashe, Founder & Chairman
Erica Spellman Silverman, Vice Chairman
Claudia Sandler, Secretary, Treasurer
Terry Lee Heller, Member At Large

The authors of this curriculum guide are:

John Egbert
Mari Haas
Pat McCarthy
Eileen Mattingly
Deenah Dunkelman Mollin
Sarah Rainsberger
Dede Sinclair

This publication is copyrighted by Journeys in Film, © 2005

Journeys in Film
46 Sandia Lane
Placitas, NM 87043
Tel: 505.867.4666
www.journeysinfilm.org

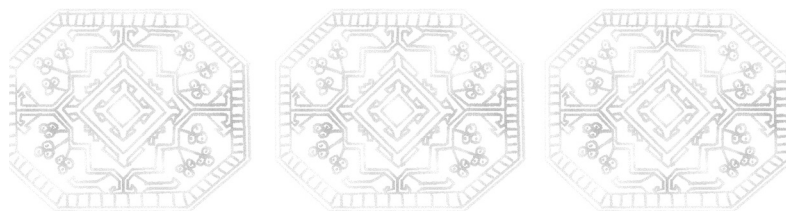


Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

Prologue	6
Letter from Liam Neeson	7
Journeys in Film National Advisory Board	8
Introducing <i>Children of Heaven</i>	9
To the Teacher	10
Additional Suggestions for Assessment	14

PRE-VIEWING LESSONS:

LESSON 1: Social Studies (Geography/World History) The Islamic Republic of Iran	15
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

LESSON 2: Media Literacy Viewing <i>Children of Heaven</i>	29
----------------------------------------------------------------------	----

POST-VIEWING LESSONS:

LESSON 3: Language Arts/Visual Literacy Understanding <i>Children of Heaven</i>	33
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

LESSON 4: Film-Specific Cross-Cultural Understanding Perspectives on Iranian Culture	43
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

LESSON 5: Social Studies (Geography) My Home is Tehran	59
------------------------------------------------------------------	----

LESSON 6: Media Literacy Film as Storytelling: How Filmmakers Use Technology to Tell Their Tales	69
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

LESSON 7: General Cross-Cultural Understanding Put Yourself in Someone Else's Shoes: The Issue of Limited Resources	83
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

LESSON 8: Mathematics Keeping Secrets: Probability, Percentages and Functions for Creating and Deciphering Secret Code	95
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

LESSON 9: Science Iran: Land of Earthquakes	127
-------------------------------------------------------	-----

LESSON 10: Art Persian Carpets	135
------------------------------------------	-----

APPENDIX: Iran Country Profile	145
---------------------------------------	-----

Introducing *Children of Heaven*

Children of Heaven is a contemporary Iranian film about families, compassion, moral responsibilities and issues of limited resources. This film, shot in and around Tehran, follows the lives of two siblings, nine-year-old Ali and his younger sister Zahra, who are forced to share one pair of shoes after an unfortunate accident. After picking up his sister's shoes from the cobbler, Ali stops to do another errand for the family, sets the shoes down in the market, and loses them when a street vendor takes them. Not wanting to burden their struggling parents, the children must work together and find a solution to deal with this significant loss. The film shows the inner strength we have when faced with adversity.

Children of Heaven, a simple story with minimal dialogue, relies heavily on visual story telling and cinematography to carry it through. The two children (Mir Farrokh Hashemian who played Ali and Bahareh Siddiqi who played Zahra) were selected from thousands of school-children who sought to play these roles. Although *Children of Heaven* was the first movie role for both of the leading child actors, Majid Majidi's talent as a director is evident as the children seem to be completely natural and believable onscreen. In order to best capture these genuine performances, Majidi chose to make the camera less intrusive during filming with the use of hidden cameras. The result was a more authentic and natural feel to the entire movie.

It is interesting to note the similarities and differences between film ratings and censorship in Iran and ratings in North America. Many Iranian films seem to occupy a space somewhere between documentary and fiction with limited production budgets resulting in no frills, straightforward filmmaking, much of which is suitable for a "G" general audience rating.

In Iran, the government supervises the production of all movies. It supplies the film stock and equipment and has the right to make final approval on script, choice of director and actors before filming can begin. Since the revolution in 1979, Islamic moral codes have restricted the content of Iranian films. Violence, obscenity, and sex are forbidden in film. Women must observe Islamic dress codes, and there are social taboos about men and woman touching in any way on the screen.

There are not the same restrictions on the actions of children in film. As a result we are seeing more films from Iran that focus on everyday life through the eyes of children who can tell their story in a believable way without a strict behavior code that may be misunderstood. This has led Iranian filmmakers to become more resourceful and skilled storytellers as they work within the confines of these restrictions. The result is a revitalization of Iranian cinema and films that can be appreciated by family audiences worldwide.

The production budget for *Children of Heaven* was small and yet the overall quality of this film is a testimony to its outstanding production, direction and cinematography.

IRAN, 1997 – RUNNING LENGTH: 1 hour and 28 minutes

DIRECTOR: Majid Majidi

PRODUCERS: Amir Esfandiari, Mohammad Esfandiari

SCREENPLAY: Majid Majidi

Cinematography: Parviz Malekzaade

AWARDS: Academy Award nomination as Best Foreign Film in 1999, Best Film at the Montreal 21st Montreal Festival for World Films and awards from the Fajr International Film Festival in Tehran 1997 for best film, best director, screenplay, editor and makeup.

Iran – Country Profile

PROFILE [Adapted from U.S. Department of State at
<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5314.htm>]

OFFICIAL NAME: Islamic Republic of Iran

GEOGRAPHY

Area: 1.6 million sq. km. (636,294 sq. mi.); slightly larger than Alaska.

Cities: *Capital* – Tehran. *Other cities* – Isfahan, Tabriz, Mashhad, Shiraz.

Terrain: Desert and mountains.

Climate: Semiarid; subtropical along the Caspian coast.

PEOPLE

Nationality: *Noun and adjective* – Iranian(s).

Population (2004 est.): 69 million.

Population growth rate (2004): 1.07%.

Ethnic groups: Persians 51%, Azeri 24%, Gilaki and Mazandarani 8%, Kurd 7%, Arab 3%, Lur 2%, Baloch 2%, Turkmen 2%, other 1%.

Religions: Shi'a Muslim 89%; Sunni Muslim 10%; Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, and Baha'i 1%.

Languages: Persian and Persian dialects 58%, Turkic and Turkic dialects 26%, Kurdish 9%, Luri 2%, Balochi 1%, Arabic 1%, Turkish 1%, other 2%.

Education: Literacy (total population age 15 and over who can read and write, 2004) – 79.4%.

Health (2003 est.): *Infant mortality rate* – 44.17 deaths/1,000 live births. *Life expectancy at birth* (2003) – total population: 69.35.

Work force (2001): Agriculture 30%, industry 25%, services 45% est. There is a shortage of skilled labor.

GOVERNMENT

Type: Islamic republic.

Constitution: Ratified December 1979, revised 1989.

Branches: *Executive* – "Leader of the Islamic Revolution" (head of state), president, and Council of Ministers. *Legislative* – 290-member Islamic Consultative Assembly (Majles). *Judicial* – Supreme Court.

Political parties: The following organizations appeared to have achieved considerable success at elections to the sixth Majles in early 2000: Assembly of the Followers of the Imam's Line, Freethinkers' Front Islamic Iran Participation Front, Moderation and Development Party, Servants of Construction Party, and Society of Self-sacrificing Devotees.

Administrative subdivisions: 28 provinces.

Suffrage: Universal at 15.

ECONOMY

GDP (2004 est.): \$477.8 billion.

GDP real growth rate (2003 est.): 6%.

GDP composition by sector (2004): Agriculture 19%, industry 26%, services 55%.

Per capita income (est.2003): \$7,000.

Natural resources: Petroleum, natural gas, and some mineral deposits.

Agriculture: *Principal products* – wheat, rice, other grains, sugar beets, fruits, nuts, cotton, dairy products, wool, caviar; not self-sufficient in food.

Industry: *Types* – petroleum, petrochemicals, textiles, cement and building materials, food processing (particularly sugar refining and vegetable oil production), metal fabricating (steel and copper), armaments.

Trade (2002): *Exports* – \$24.8 billion: petroleum 85%, carpets, fruits, nuts. *Imports*—\$21.8 billion: food, machinery, and semi-finished goods. *Major markets/suppliers* – Germany, Japan, Italy, South Korea.

PEOPLE

Almost two-thirds of Iran's people are of Aryan origin—their ancestors migrated from Central Asia. The major groups in this category include Persians, Kurds, Lurs, and Baluch. The remainder are primarily Turkic but also include Arabs, Armenians, Jews, and Assyrians.

The 1979 Islamic revolution and the 1980-88 war with Iraq transformed Iran's class structure politically, socially, and economically. In general, however, Iranian society remains divided into urban, market-town, village, and tribal groups. Clerics, called *mullahs*, dominate politics and nearly all aspects of Iranian life, both urban and rural. After the fall of the Pahlavi regime in 1979, much of the urban upper class of prominent merchants, industrialists, and professionals, favored by the former Shah, lost standing and influence to the senior clergy and their supporters. Bazaar merchants, who were allied with the clergy against the

Pahlavi shahs, also have gained political and economic power since the revolution. The urban working class has enjoyed somewhat enhanced status and economic mobility, spurred in part by opportunities provided by revolutionary organizations and the government bureaucracy.

Unemployment, a major problem even before the revolution, has many causes, including population growth, the war with Iraq, and shortages of raw materials and trained managers. Farmers and peasants received a psychological boost from the attention given them by the Islamic regime but appear to be hardly better off in economic terms. The government has made progress on rural development, including electrification and road building, but has not yet made a commitment to land redistribution.

Most Iranians are Muslims; 89% belong to the Shi'a branch of Islam, the official state religion, and about 10% belong to the Sunni branch, which predominates in neighboring Muslim countries. Non-Muslim minorities include Zoroastrians, Jews, Baha'is, and Christians.