



My Sweet Land

A film by SAREEN HAIRABEDIAN



HAI CREATIVE PRESENTS "MY SWEET LAND" IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH SISTER PRODUCTIONS AND SOILSIÙ FILMS. A CO-PRODUCTION OF ITVS WITH FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING IN ASSOCIATION WITH ARTE FRANCE AND WORLD OF HA PRODUCTIONS. ORIGINAL SCORE BY TIGRAN HAMASYAN. CINEMATOGRAPHY BY SAREEN HAIRABEDIAN. EDITED BY RAPHAËLLE MARTIN-HOLGER. SAREEN HAIRABEDIAN CO-EXECUTIVE PRODUCER. ROBINA RICCIITIELLO. EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS BETH LEVISON, CARRIE LOZANO, HALLIE ADELMAN, RINTU THOMAS, SUSHMIT GHOSH. CO-PRODUCED BY JULIE PARATIAN, DAVID RANE. PRODUCED BY AZZA HOURANI. PRODUCED, WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY SAREEN HAIRABEDIAN.

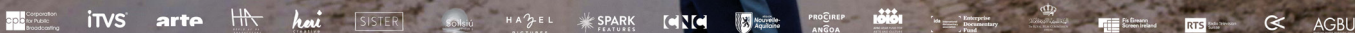




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A note to users:

Each section is designed to be used independently and can stand alone for learning and growth in these areas in connection with the film. But sections can also be used in conjunction with one another, and some sections include suggested connections to one another. You can also use the guide in its entirety for a rich, in-depth learning experience.



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FACILITATION GUIDELINES



Filmmakers use immersive storytelling to produce intense thoughts and emotions in the viewer. **Journeys in Film** uses this powerful medium as a springboard for meaningful dialogue around humanity's most pressing issues. In this guide, you will find suggestions for leading productive conversations that broaden perspectives, increase global competency, encourage empathy, and build new paradigms for education.

- When watching a film or having a powerful discussion, normalize taking breaks and exercising bodily autonomy. Acknowledge that conversations around complex topics can be vulnerable, complicated, and challenging. Encourage members to voice and do what is right for them without needing to explain or apologize.
- People do their best when they know what to expect. Start and end your meetings on time.
- Share or co-create your intentions for the meeting.
- Create your space. If possible, share snacks or find other ways to create an inviting, comfortable atmosphere.
- Create a trustworthy space. Maintain confidentiality and only speak to your own experience.
- Minimize distractions while you are together. Silence cell phones and devices so you can give your full attention to the conversation.
- Practice whole-body listening. Listen to words, tone, body language, and the feeling in the atmosphere.
- Acknowledge voices that may be absent. Is there a lived experience that isn't represented in your group? Who are the bridge people who might be able to connect you with other people in your community who might bring new perspectives to the table?
- Adopt an attitude of positive intent. If someone says something that bothers you, assume positive intent and ask for more information.
- Ignite your curiosity around other people's views and opinions. Listen to understand, not to respond. You don't need to agree with others in your group or make it known that you are "right" to have a worthwhile conversation.
- Words matter. Be open to learning and practicing new ways to communicate with others.
- Be clear, direct, and kind in your communication. Nobody benefits when you bottle your opinions.
- Everyone has blind spots and biases; cultivate a space of grace as you enter into new territory together.
- If a conversation gets heated, practice acknowledging the tension, pausing as a group, and taking a collective breath together before diving back in or taking a longer break to reset.
- Privilege your relationships with others over the content or agenda of the meeting. Show each other kindness.
- Create a closing ritual that celebrates the time you've spent together and either gives closure or gives members something to think about before your next meeting.



ABOUT THE FILM



My Sweet Land is a coming-of-age story set against a multigenerational war in the post-Soviet Caucasus Mountains. It follows an 11-year-old boy named Vrej, growing up in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), who dreams of becoming a dentist in his picture-postcard village with its roaming ducks and golden bees. His sweet land, however, is strewn with mines from previous wars, shaping a country that remains unrecognized to the world. Vrej's life takes a sudden turn when war erupts, forcing him to flee with his family. He spends his days in exile impatiently waiting for victory, but reality takes a different turn: Armenians lose the war. Upon returning to his surviving village, he confronts the devastation, new power dynamics, and an education that prepares the children for near-future battles. Vrej must learn the rules of war... But can he carry a nation's hopes on his young shoulders? The film is a testament to the people of Artsakh, where hope and trauma have shaped their resilience across generations.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



***My Sweet Land* Director and Producer Sareen Hairabedian**

As the great-grandchild of Armenian genocide survivors, I grew up carrying inherited memories shaped by displacement, loss, and survival. My family found refuge in the arts, a space where we could process what history had left unresolved. Yet I often felt that our stories were told only through the lens of trauma. I wanted to steer away from that narrative and find the quiet beauty, dignity, and humanity that exist alongside it.

In 2018, I traveled to the mountainous enclave of Artsakh, internationally known as Nagorno-Karabakh, to meet its ethnic Armenian population living in the shadow of an unresolved conflict since the collapse of the Soviet Union. What unfolded before my lens was the deep resilience of the people present across all generations.

There, I met Vrej, an 11-year-old boy with a disarming sense of clarity and depth. Through his eyes, I began to witness what childhood innocence looks like amid a militarized landscape. In a place

defined by tension and uncertainty, moments of tenderness, play, and belonging came into focus. The more I filmed, the more this place revealed itself as a paradise where family, human connection, and love for one's land are felt in every breath, in every frame. Too often, children in war zones are reduced to statistics or distant headlines. With this film, I wanted to resist that flattening. I wanted to capture the intimacy of daily life, and the emotional weight of what is at stake when that life is disrupted. Through Vrej's story, I invite audiences into a world that may feel distant, yet is bound to us through our shared humanity. In witnessing his life, we are reminded not only of what is at risk in places of conflict, but also of what endures.

— Sareen Hairabedian



GETTING STARTED – ACTIVE VIEWING

Film Terms

Sharing our [Glossary of Film Terms](#) can be useful before learners watch the film, especially if you plan on using our **Active Viewing Handouts** with them. Understanding the terminology and techniques used in filmmaking can help learners become critical viewers of the media content that they consume, and can raise their awareness of content as created with intent, no matter the form that content might take. This understanding is critically important given the amount of media youth typically consume over the course of an average day. These handouts can also be helpful if you choose to have learners write a film review as part of their learning process.

An abbreviated glossary is provided in this section of the guide with the full glossary available at the end of this guide.

Active Viewing

We are providing an [Active Viewing Handout](#) and [Active Viewing Worksheet](#) for learners to complete as they watch the film.

Before watching the film, distribute the **Active Viewing Handout** and **Active Viewing Worksheet** to learners. Review the handout together first. Then review the worksheet so learners have focus areas for engagement.

If you have distributed the **Glossary of Film Terms** to students as well, encourage students to look for the film techniques and approaches mentioned in the glossary.

This process will be helpful for learners if you choose to have them write a film review.

GLOSSARY OF FILM TERMS



Camera angle: The angle of the camera as it records scenes to suggest a particular emotion or attitude. E.g., an *extreme low angle*, looking up, suggests the strength and dominance (sometimes evil) of the subject; a *slight low angle*, looking up, suggests the strength and nobility of the subject; an *extreme high angle*, looking down on the subject, suggests the weakness, perhaps pitifully so, of the subject; a *moderate high angle*, looking down, suggests disdain for the subject. An **eye-level shot** is used when the camera is on the same level as the subject, usually seated or standing; the suggestion is non-judgmental.

Camera movement: When the camera changes location or angle during filming.

- **Pans or panning shot** (from “panoramic”): rotates horizontally on a stationary base.
- **Dollies or a dolly shot:** camera moves in (forward) or out (backward) on a subject, usually by means of mounting on a dolly (a wheeled cart).
- **Tracks or a tracking shot:** the camera moves sideways such as with a walking person, often with the camera mounted on a long track for smooth movement.

Close-up: A shot of one person, usually of just head and shoulders.

Cut:

1. Any change from one shot to the next, usually *smooth*, *unobtrusive*: the new shot is somewhat similar to the former scene in tone, light intensity, and/or sound. Or the cut may be *abrupt*: the new shot strongly contrasts with the former in tone, lighting, and/or sound, often used for changes in scene and/ or sequence.
2. The word called vocally, usually by the director, to end the filming of a particular **take**.

Discovery shot: When the camera moves, usually by **panning** or **booming**, during a shot and unexpectedly shows (“discovers”) a person or significant prop that was present from the beginning of the scene but not in the camera’s view or focus.

Editing: The process of assembling the **footage** from the many and various **takes** into an effective narrative form. (Note: In fiction film and docudramas, the film editor is usually not the same person as the director; in documentary film, the director often serves as his/her own editor.)

Focus: The sharpness of the image. In normal filming, the subject is in “clear focus”; part or all of a shot may be deliberately out of focus for a special effect.

Handheld shot: A shot taken with a handheld camera rather than on a tripod; it often appears shaky rather than stable and may be used for a documentary or news-reporting effect.

Intercut: A brief interruption in the ongoing scene when an image of an object or person, not in the scene, appears suddenly for a short time.

Metaphor: A term borrowed from literature to describe the use of an object, character, or action that is meant to suggest, through association, another object, character, or action with which it has an implied relationship.

Motif: A recurring image or symbol in the film that helps to advance the plot, develop the theme, or delineate the character.

Off-screen: Refers to dialogue or sound coming from a source not seen but understood to be nearby, as an unseen character talking to the subject.

Point of view (p.o.v.): A shot taken to suggest the perspective (including relative height and direction of view) from a character’s position; seeing things as if through the character’s eyes. Usually a **p.o.v. shot** follows a shot showing a character looking in a particular direction.

Scene: A series of shots taken in a single location, relating some portion of the story.

Sequence: A series of **shots** or **scenes** united by the same idea. If we liken a sequence to a book chapter, we can see that a sequence may involve one continuous action, one scene, or several shifts in the action, involving different characters in different locations, different scenes. A sequence has one or more scenes; a scene has many shots, all in the same setting, showing more or less continuous action. (A **scene** could have just one continuous shot, but this has rarely been attempted.)

Voice-over (v.o.): An off-screen narrator, not actively present in the scene, speaking or commenting on the action; can be the same person/character as in the scene, but the comments are recorded separately from the filming.



ACTIVE VIEWING OF A DOCUMENTARY FILM

Documentaries are an important and exciting way to experience narrative. The evolution of documentaries from hard news, nature films, and travelogues to dynamic storytelling experiences has taken place over time so that the documentary can be experienced and critiqued in much the same manner as the fiction film.

The filmmaker's point of view

The first questions an active documentary film viewer should ask are:

- What is the filmmaker's point of view on the subject of the film?
- How does that influence your engagement and experience of the film?
- How would the film differ if a different person was making the film and their point of view was centered instead?

Opening ourselves to new possibilities and new information

If we have determined that the conscious intentions of the filmmaker are genuine, perhaps even noble, we can begin to watch the film with a high degree of confidence in its message. We may, however, notice a clash between the beliefs offered by the film and our own. Or we may find ourselves being presented with information that is new to us and may feel hard to believe, but is factual and important for us to consider. This new information may call into question previously held "certainties." It is up to the viewer to be as aware as possible of any conflicting biases in order to think critically about the film, its point of view on the subject, and the information presented. We may also find ourselves wanting to learn more about a topic.

Calling to mind the fact that others may disagree with the conclusions we reach is a good way to try opening ourselves to the possibility that there is more to be considered on any given subject than we had previously thought.

ACTIVE VIEWING OF A DOCUMENTARY FILM



Directions: Use the following questions to collect your ideas for the film review you are going to write.

1. Make preliminary observations about what you remember about one important theme in the development of the movie. Why is this a primary theme and how does it affect the film and the viewer?

2. Identify character contributions. What are a few ways that Vrej or his family members reflect the theme you identified for the film?

3. Create connections. List connections, similarities, and/or differences between Vrej's coming-of-age experience and your own or that of another person or historical figure.

4. Identify moments in the film when your theme is evident. Include clear details.

5. Pinpoint related topics that need additional clarification. Create a research list, if necessary.

6. Plan the content of your review. Using some or all of the ideas you have described above, write an outline. Make sure you start with a guiding thesis statement that summarizes and gives direction to the review.

7. Engage in any final research needed before writing your review. Use the rest of this page for research notes, if necessary.



HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND KEY BACKGROUND INFORMATION



[Map of Nagorno-Karabakh
Territorial Conflicts - 2023 by
Quickworld Inc.](#)

Geography

The enclave of Artsakh occupies high mountain terrain in the Southern Caucasus that is known for its natural beauty. Artsakh is the historic name of this ethnically Armenian region, although the territory has also been called Nagorno-Karabakh since the 1920s. It is a largely agricultural region, known for its vineyards, orchards, and mulberry groves grown for silkworms. The people of Artsakh are deeply tied to the land.

Despite the historic predominance of ethnic Armenians, Artsakh is not geographically connected to the modern state of Armenia. Today's borders place the region entirely within Azerbaijan, a predominantly Muslim country with ethnic roots in modern Turkey. A single road named the Lachin Corridor, only 37 miles long (60 km), connected Artsakh and Armenia from 1992 to 2023.

Terminology

There are a number of terms that are sometimes used interchangeably to name this region. The following are commonly used Armenian terms and when they came into use. The exact geographic boundaries differ with each term. **The region is today most commonly referred to as Nagorno-Karabakh by Azerbaijanis and the international community.**

- Artsakh, Province of Kingdom of Armenia
180 BCE
- Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO),
Azerbaijan SSR
1921–1991
- Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh (self-declared)
1991–2017
- Republic of Artsakh (self-declared)
2017



[Nagorno-Karabakh Control Map & Timeline: Artsakh Withdrawals as of December 1, 2020 by Political Geography Now](#)

Culture and Language

Artsakh has been inhabited since the Paleolithic Era. The region became an eastern province of the Kingdom of Armenia around 180 BCE. Artsakh showcases its ancient Christian roots through a significant architectural legacy of churches, cathedrals, and monasteries dating from the Middle Ages. Several important historical illuminated manuscripts were created in Artsakh, and it is home to stunning religious paintings and *khachkars* — stone monuments with engraved crosses that are unique to Armenia. This religious heritage is a bedrock of Artsakhtsi cultural identity today. The region is also historically known for its exquisite carpets and embroidery. Many of Artsakh's historic cultural monuments have been destroyed, damaged, or are under threat today.



An image from the film of a display of khachkars — stone monuments with engraved crosses that are unique to Armenia

The Armenian language is a branch of the Indo-European language family and uses a unique alphabet created in the fifth century. Artsakh is home to Amaras Monastery, one of the first schools to teach the Armenian alphabet. The Artsakhtsi people (ethnically Armenian citizens of Artsakh) speak Artsakhean, a local dialect that has its roots in the Classical Armenian liturgical language of the fifth century, with loan words from ancient and medieval Persian, Turkoman, and Russian. There are an estimated 500,000 speakers of Artsakhean.



Population

A full understanding of the historic population is challenging, in part because the boundaries of Artsakh have changed throughout history and depending on perspective. Several 18th-century censuses found the population of the highlands to be a predominantly Armenian pocket within the larger Azerbaijani-populated Karabakh region (encompassing lowlands and the highlands of Arstakh). These figures are disputed between Armenian and Azerbaijani historians, not least because they failed to count nomadic Azerbaijani tribes who historically summered in the highlands.

The 1926 census of the Soviet Union found that 125,000 people lived in the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO), the name they gave to this region. The census recorded 89 percent of the population as Armenian and 10 percent Azerbaijani. Just over 60 years later, the population of NKAO had grown to almost 146,000 people, 76 percent of whom were Armenian and 22 percent Azerbaijani, along with thousands of Kurds, Russians, Greeks, and Assyrians. Non-Armenians were expelled from the region during and after the First Nagorno-Karabakh War in the 1990s. The 2015 census conducted by the Republic of Artsakh claimed 144,683 citizens, 99.7 percent of whom were Armenian. These demographic shifts obscure the fact that the sharp ethnic tensions we see today are not the result of close cohabitation but have arisen from a legacy of imperialism and the rise of nationalism and authoritarianism.

A land in conflict

The conflict over Artsakh has its roots in the breakup of the Russian Empire, the creation of Soviet states, and their ultimate dissolution. Armenia and Azerbaijan were created as independent countries after the fall of the Russian Empire and then quickly reconquered by the Bolshevik military in the 1920s. The Bolsheviks promised national self-determination within ethnic homelands, while keeping real power centralized in Moscow. The policy of “national delimitation” divided the Russian Empire into ethnically defined administrative units. Stalin defined a nation as “a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.” Existing nations like Armenia and Azerbaijan were organized as Soviet Socialist Republics under this framework.

In practice, borders were not so neatly drawn and were influenced by local-level advocacy from elites and nationalist movements. The result was a tiered hierarchy of territories with differing political power and autonomy. This is how Artsakh was designated and named the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) during the Soviet period (1923–1991). Although encompassed by the Azerbaijan SSR, this status allowed Nagorno-Karabakh to have its own regional legislature and administrative bureaucracy within clearly defined borders. Economic planning, security, political appointments, and external affairs, however, were all administered from Azerbaijan.

Historians debate whether these territorial administrative decisions made from Moscow were a calculated choice to keep the promised homelands fragmented and thus dependent, or the result of a messy, imperfect committee-driven process grappling with complex demographics. The answer may lie somewhere in the middle.

In the decades leading up to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Artsakhsis experienced economic and cultural marginalization and discrimination within Azerbaijan, including restrictions on teaching Armenian history and the degradation of cultural sites. Azerbaijani residents likewise allege discrimination by Artsakhtsi local authorities. A combination of Armenian emigration and settlement policies that encouraged Azerbaijani migration into the region resulted in dramatic demographic shifts that concerned many Artsakhtsis. Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev’s policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* (openness and restructuring) in the mid-1980s opened political space for organizing and protest, which the Artsakhtsis took full advantage of. Old grievances boiled into the public sphere, triggering escalating violence — including anti-Armenian pogroms in Azerbaijani cities and, eventually, Soviet military intervention — that set the region on the path toward full-scale war.

With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the prevailing international law practice of *uti possidetis juris* (Latin for “as you possess under the law”) saw newly independent Soviet states defined by their Soviet administrative boundaries, thus the inclusion of Nagorno-Karabakh within the new independent Republic of Azerbaijan. This *de facto* international rubber stamp occurred despite an earlier independence referendum (see timeline) and the competing principle of the right to self-determination. Although Artsakh operated as an independent breakaway state between 1994 and 2020, it was never recognized as one under international law.

**Artsakh**

The ancient Armenian name for the ethnically Armenian-dominant enclave. Citizens re-adopted this name for the self-declared republic in 2017, although it is still known internationally as Nagorno-Karabakh.

Artsakhtsi

Ethnically Armenian citizens of the region of Artsakh.

Authoritarianism

A concentration of power in a leader or an elite not constitutionally responsible to the people.

Enclave

A distinct territorial, cultural, or social unit enclosed within foreign territory.

Imperialism

The policy or practice of extending the power of a nation through either direct territorial acquisition or indirect control over the political or economic life of areas outside their border.

Nagorno-Karabakh

The name of the territory under the Soviet Union in the 1920s, and first used by the self-declared republic. It is the name most commonly used for the region internationally. It means “Mountainous Black Garden,” derived from three different languages (Russian, Turkic, Persian).

Nationalism

An ideology that elevates one nation or nationality above all others, placing primary emphasis on promotion of its culture and interests as opposed to those of other nations or nationalities.



MODERN HISTORICAL TIMELINE

- 1805** The larger Karabakh region (lowlands and highlands) — until now a vassal state of Persia and ruled by a Turkic tribe — becomes a protectorate of the Russian Empire. This is formalized at the end of the Russo-Persian war (1804–1813).
- 1915** The Armenian Genocide results in the death of 1.5 million ethnic Armenians within the Ottoman Empire. While Armenians living in the Russian Empire are spared, the genocide has a profound effect on their cultural identity.
- 1917–1920** The Russian Empire collapses under revolution, leaving a power vacuum in the Caucasus. Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia briefly unite in a federation before splitting into three independent states (May 1918). Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh becomes disputed territory between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and several small wars are fought over this time. In July 1918, local Armenians convene the First Armenian Assembly of Nagorno-Karabakh, declaring the region self-governing. Ottoman forces occupy parts of Karabakh through 1918. After the Ottoman defeat in WWI, British forces take over as the dominant regional power. Under sustained British and Azerbaijani pressure, the Artsakhtsis are forced in August 1919 to provisionally accept Azerbaijani administration, pending a final decision by the Paris Peace Conference. That decision never comes: The Paris Peace Conference and the Treaty of Sèvres leave the Armenia-Azerbaijan border unresolved.
- 1920–1921** Azerbaijan is taken over by Bolsheviks, followed by Armenia and Georgia. In July 1921, the Kavbiuro (Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party) votes to include Nagorno-Karabakh in the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) and to hold a referendum on the decision. Within 24 hours, the decision is reversed, and historians are still debating why. All of Karabakh is given to Azerbaijan with a promise of autonomy for the Armenian-populated areas.
- 1921–1990** A combination of Artsakhtsi emigration and Azerbaijani policies encouraging the settlement of Azerbaijanis into Nagorno-Karabakh results in demographic shifts. Armenian cultural and educational institutions face periodic restrictions, and Artsakhtsis complain of discrimination and under-development.

The First Nagorno-Karabakh War (1988–1994)

- 1988–1989** Artsakhtsis organize for union with Armenia through rallies, strikes, and civil disobedience. They are supported by the Armenian SSR. Moscow rejects the demands. Violence erupts. As the conflict escalates, Moscow places Karabakh under a special central administration for most of 1989 before returning the region to Azerbaijan while maintaining its autonomous governance. On December 1, 1989, the Armenian Supreme Soviet Republic's and Nagorno-Karabakh's National Council jointly declare reunification, but neither Azerbaijan nor Moscow recognize the legislative act.
- 1991** Violence is ongoing. Azerbaijan moves to end the autonomous status of Nagorno-Karabakh and bring it under direct control. Nagorno-Karabakh and the neighboring district of Shaumian hold a joint legislative session and declare independence as the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, a status later confirmed by a regional independence referendum that is boycotted by almost all Azerbaijani residents. With the final dissolution of the Soviet Union in December, both Azerbaijan and the self-declared republic emerge as separate entities, although the new republic is not recognized internationally.

- 1992** Full-scale fighting erupts. Both the Armenian and Azerbaijani militaries recruit mercenaries from Ukraine and Russia. Turkish, Afghan, and Chechen fighters support Azerbaijan. Armenia benefits from the use of former Soviet military stockpiles.
- 1994** An official ceasefire is negotiated by Russia in May 1994 between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, although sporadic fighting and accusations of ethnic cleansing continue against both sides. By the end of the war, Armenians claim 14 percent of Azerbaijani internationally recognized territory, including all of Nagorno-Karabakh and some neighboring districts. Hundreds of thousands of Armenian and Azerbaijani refugees are displaced, and the conflict claims the lives of 30,000 people.
- 1994–2020** The Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh functions as an independent state, although it is still internationally considered part of Azerbaijan. Skirmishes between Azerbaijan and the independent forces of Nagorno-Karabakh continue sporadically, notably in a four-day war in 2016. Voters in the Republic approve a new constitution in 2017, which includes renaming the territory the Republic of Artsakh as a means of asserting Armenian heritage. A permanent peace deal is elusive.

The film My Sweet Land begins in the summer of 2020.

The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War (2020)

- 2020** Azerbaijan, supported by Turkey, launches an offensive along the unofficial border of Artsakh on September 27. Intense fighting takes place in the region for 44 days. More than half of Artsakh's population is displaced by the conflict. Russia negotiates a ceasefire between Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Artsakh, which results in Azerbaijan regaining control of seven districts lost in 1994 and a significant portion of Artsakh itself. Artsakhtsis retain control of the rest, including the capital, Stepanakert, connected to Armenia via the Lachin Corridor.
- 2022** In October 2022, Armenia and Azerbaijan each sign the Prague Declaration, recognizing the importance of territorial integrity and sovereignty. In doing so, Armenia recognizes Artsakh as part of Azerbaijan.
- 2022–2023** In December 2022, Azerbaijanis blockade the Lachin Corridor, the only road access connecting Artsakh to Armenia and beyond. In April 2023, Azerbaijani forces create a checkpoint. The blockade leads to a humanitarian crisis through the restriction of food, fuel, and medicine. Azerbaijan launches a new offensive in September 2023 that lasts only one day and leads to the surrender of the self-declared Republic of Artsakh.
- 2023** Following the 2023 offensive, over 100,000 Artsakhtsis (nearly the entire population) flee Artsakh, resulting in a near-complete depopulation of the region's ethnic Armenian community. In November 2023, the International Court of Justice issues a provisional ruling that Azerbaijan must ensure citizens wishing to return are allowed to do so without intimidation. A 2025 peace agreement brokered by the United States between Armenia and Azerbaijan has moved toward normalized relations without addressing the return of citizens or accountability. The population continues to live in limbo. Satellite tracking as of July 2025 shows that almost 7 percent of Armenian cultural heritage sites in Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh are either destroyed, damaged, or threatened.



ARTSAKH: A HISTORY OF HOMELAND AND DISPLACEMENT



My Sweet Land begins in the summer of 2020. By this time, the region of Artsakh had declared independence and had been acting as an autonomous state since the end of the First Nagorno-Karabakh War in 1994, although it has never been recognized internationally. The film captures the beginning of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, which broke out in September 2020 after an Azerbaijani offensive along the former ceasefire-negotiated border. At the end of the first war, both the Armenian and Azerbaijani economies were devastated. By the beginning of the second war, Azerbaijan's economy was 10 times bigger than Armenia's due to global interest in its oil reserves.

As we see in the film, the beginning of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War caused a massive displacement of Armenians. After 44 days of war, Azerbaijan had regained control of seven districts it had lost during the first war, as well as a significant proportion of Artsakh itself.

Two years later, in October 2022, Armenia and Azerbaijan signed a declaration recognizing each other's territorial integrity as defined by their Soviet borders. In doing so, Armenia recognized Artsakh as part of Azerbaijan. Two months later, Azerbaijan blockaded the Lachin Corridor, effectively cutting Artsakh off from the outside world and leading to a humanitarian crisis.

In September 2023, a one-day offensive led to the complete surrender of the Republic of Artsakh. Nearly the entire population of over 100,000 ethnic Armenians fled. International groups have characterized the events as ethnic cleansing. An American-negotiated agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan has normalized relations, but the status of Artsakhs living in exile has yet to be addressed. The government of Armenia has encouraged permanent resettlement in Armenia, but many still have hopes of one day returning to their homeland. They are Armenians with deep roots in Artsakh as it is their ancestral homeland.



<https://www.britannica.com/place/Ottoman-Empire>

The Armenian Genocide

The Armenian Genocide of 1915 is widely considered the first genocide of the 20th century. At the time, between 1.5 and 2 million ethnic Armenians lived across the Ottoman Empire. In the decades preceding the genocide, Armenians had been organizing politically and seeking greater autonomy within the empire, with sporadic violence erupting between Armenians and Turks. Fearing that Armenians would support an invasion of enemy troops during WWI, and amid a growing aim to solidify Muslim Turkish dominance in the region, authorities began the deportation of Armenians to desert regions of Deir-ez-Zor in what is now known as Syria. Tens of thousands of children were forcibly removed from their families and converted to Islam. Between 600,000 and 1.5 million Armenians were killed in massacres and individual killings, and through systematic ill-treatment, exposure, and starvation. Armenian cultural and religious sites were destroyed.

Many citizens in modern Armenia and the global diaspora can trace their roots to ethnic Armenians fleeing the genocide. It is the historic and cultural lens through which they view the ongoing conflict with Azerbaijan over the territory of Artsakh.

The Armenian Genocide garnered international attention and informed the thinking of Raphael Lemkin, who later coined the term *genocide* to refer to the deliberate destruction of a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. He championed the extension of legal protections to distinct groups, which was codified in international law through the UN Genocide Convention of 1948.

The Armenian Diaspora

The modern Republic of Armenia has a population of 3 million people. A further 7 million ethnic Armenians are estimated to live in a diaspora spread across more than 100 countries.

The Armenian diaspora has existed for centuries, with Armenian communities establishing themselves along common travel and trade routes. In modern history, there have been waves of migration, including after the Armenian Genocide, during the rise in tensions over Nagorno-Karabakh in the 1980s, and after the fall of the Soviet Union.

There have also been waves of migration *into* Armenia as repatriation was sought and actively encouraged for ethnic Armenians from Greece, Turkey, and several Arab countries. Despite strong cultural ties, many repatriated Armenians experienced economic hardship, cultural isolation, and Soviet state suspicion once they arrived. Many did not stay.

The diaspora comes together in communities around the world to actively support one another and keep their cultural heritage alive.



Useful Terms

Diaspora

A group of people settled far from their ancestral homelands.

Ethnic cleansing

The expulsion, imprisonment, or killing of an ethnic minority by a dominant majority in order to achieve ethnic homogeneity. Unlike genocide, this term does not have a recognized definition under international law.

Genocide

A term recognized under international law that refers to acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group.

Glasnost

A Soviet policy of the mid to late 1980s permitting open discussion of political and social issues and freer dissemination of news and information.

Homeland

The native land of one's parents, one's ancestors, or oneself; a state or area designated as a state for a people of a particular national, cultural, or racial origin.

Perestroika

The policy of economic and governmental reform in the Soviet Union during the mid-1980s.

Pogrom

An organized violent attack directed against a specific ethnic, religious, or social group.

Protectorate

A political unit or territory dependent upon another for protection.

Repatriation

Restoring or returning someone or something to the country of origin, allegiance, or citizenship.

Self-determination

The right of a people to organize as a state or otherwise freely determine how they will be governed as a nation.

Sovereignty

The power of a country to control its own government and decision-making without interference from the outside. Sovereignty includes the concept of territorial integrity, or the ability to protect their defined borders.

Soviet

(n.) A governmental council in a Communist country.
(adj.) Of, relating to, or characteristic of the Soviet Union or its people.

Vassal state

A nation whose sovereignty and independence are significantly limited by a more powerful state.



***“The homeland is the most important place where I want to live this life.
Maybe by the time I grow up, the lost lands will be ours again.
If there is the need, I will fight too. What else would I do? — Vrej***

DRIVING QUESTIONS

1. *How did decisions made by distant powers over the course of a century shape and reshape who gets to call Artsakh home?*
2. *How does this history shape Vrej’s life and relationship to his homeland?*

Personal Reflection

1. What would you miss most if you had to leave home and never go back? Would it still be your home?
2. In *My Sweet Land*, Vrej’s grandmother says, “When we were about to take a breath and live a little [after the 1990s war], it began again, in 2016. Another war, another escape. Wherever we escaped to, we never found our place. I don’t know what’s in this land that is so sweet. I don’t know... We always come back” (~4:50).

Vrej notes that his father lived through two wars and his grandmother three. Many people throughout Artsakh had been displaced numerous times. What do you think calls people to return to a home that has experienced so much conflict? What does it mean to belong to a homeland? How might it feel to leave?



Discussion Questions

1. Vrej's teacher asks the class how they can prove Artsakh is a country (~12:00). What does it mean to be a country? How would a people prove such a thing?
2. It is easy to assume that the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh is a result of longstanding ancestral animosity between different religious and cultural communities. However, until the late 20th century, Armenians and Azerbaijanis often lived in mixed communities or as peaceful neighbors. The displacement of both Armenians and Azerbaijanis caused by the territorial dispute means that there is little inter-mingling between cultural groups today. What effect might this isolation have on ongoing tensions? What could be done to decrease tension between Armenians and Azerbaijanis and build understanding about their respective cultures, experiences, and perspectives?
3. It is not only the people of Artsakh who feel the territorial conflict deeply. In the film, a speaker at a rally in Armenia says, "I quote to [the children] the word of the famous hero Monté: If we lose Artsakh, we will turn the final page of Armenian history" (~33:15). Why would the citizens of Armenia feel so threatened by the loss of independence in Artsakh?
4. The 1915 Armenian Genocide has a profound impact on the collective memory and cultural identity of Armenians. In what ways might that history and identity impact the ongoing struggle over Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh?
5. There are more than twice as many people who identify as ethnically Armenian living around the world as there are inside Armenia. How do diaspora communities preserve homeland identity?
6. Under international law, Artsakhtsis have a right to a degree of self-determination, and Azerbaijan has a right to territorial integrity and sovereignty. When these international legal principles conflict, there is no clear solution. Why might international law be written this way? Is it more important for borders to stay the same, or for people to get to choose which country they belong to?

Note to Teacher:

We have provided tiered questions throughout for various levels of learners. Earlier questions often feature simpler language and accessibility for younger learners (elementary and/or middle school) with later questions increasing in complexity for older learners (older middle school and high school and/or college). We also offer questions that focus on history, diaspora, international, and homelands so that you may select which themes and focus areas resonate best for your learners/unit.

Extension Activities

1. Every person that leaves their home and migrates elsewhere has reasons that push them away from home and reasons that pull them toward the place where they settle. These push/pull factors might be economic, political, social, environmental, security related, or about quality of life.

Choose one of the following options for this activity:

- a) **Personal migration stories.** If you know of a time when someone in your life moved from one country to another, or from one region to another within a country, research or ask about their experience. What pushed them to leave? What pulled them toward where they settled?
- b) **A documented case study.** Choose a specific, well-documented historical migration and research the push/pull factors behind it using historical sources. Below are just a few options for possible case studies.
 - i) The Great Migration, United States
 - ii) The Dust Bowl Migration, United States
 - iii) The Highland Clearances, Scotland
 - iv) Cuban exile migration
 - v) Vietnamese "boat people"
 - vi) Chinese Gold Rush immigration
 - vii) Irish Potato Famine
 - viii) Syrian refugee crisis
 - ix) Forced migration of Palestinians in 1948 known as al-Nakbah

Come together as a learning community to share the push/pull factors that you uncovered. What patterns show up across very different stories? What sources did you use and what was hard to find out or verify? Did anything surprise you?

2. Raphael Lemkin first coined the term **genocide** and advocated that the concept become part of international law. Conduct biographical research to learn more about Raphael Lemkin. As part of your research, consider:

- Why was he concerned with religious and ethnic persecution?
- What role did a) the Armenian Genocide and b) his own experiences play in shaping his thinking?
- How did he define genocide, and what actions did he take to advocate for the widespread adoption of the term?
- What were the results of his work?

Thinking about the concept of genocide more generally¹:

- Why was it important to give a name to the actions now labeled as genocide?
- Investigate how and when the term genocide has been applied (or avoided).
- Why might the international community hesitate to name an event a genocide?

3. The Caucasus Mountains have always existed at a crossroads of empires and interests². Break into groups and research external interests and influences that have played a part in the conflict over Artsakh. In addition to secondary sources, look at primary sources, such as government statements or speeches. Consider the role of Russia, Turkey, Iran, Israel, France, and the United States.

Note to Teacher:

It's best for students to try and identify patterns, but for your reference, some categories to look for may include energy and resources, religious or ethnic solidarity, military or regional positioning, arms trade revenue, historical legacy, diaspora domestic politics.

Come together as a larger learning community to synthesize your findings.

- Categorize each country's stake in the conflict. What categories of interest emerge? (E.g., resource interest or ethnic solidarity) Do any countries hold interests that are internally in tension with one another?
- Have their interests changed over time? Why?
- None of the countries in this list are primarily motivated by the Artsakhtsi or Azerbaijani populations' own relationship to this land. What does it mean for a homeland dispute to be negotiated by actors for whom it isn't home?

4. There are many regions of the world dealing with similar tensions between the right to self-determination (the right of a people to decide how they will be governed) and national sovereignty (the power of a country to determine how they will govern) and territorial integrity (the protection of a state's borders). Break into small groups to research case studies where these ideals have collided. Possible comparative case studies include Artsakh, Kosovo, South Sudan, Catalonia, Crimea, Scotland, Palestine, and Kashmir. See the handout **Homelands and Borders**.

- Collate your group's research findings and present them to the class.
- Class discussion: Looking across the research cases, can you identify what factors might predict whether a secession or claim of independence achieves international recognition? How does the international community balance the claims of self-determination and sovereignty?

¹ These questions are taken from: *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "Coining a Word and Championing a Cause: The Story of Raphael Lemkin."* <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/coining-a-word-and-championing-a-cause-the-story-of-rafael-lemkin>

² Explore regional interests in the conflict: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7NOMj7n6QAM>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5WqdoDoVh88>



HOMELAND AND BORDERS

Self-Determination Case Study Research

NAME: _____

International law protects two ideas that don't always agree with each other: a people's right to self-determination, and a state's right to territorial integrity and sovereignty. In this activity, your group will research a case where these two ideas collided.

[The Council on Foreign Relations](#) has a useful resource looking at self-determination and sovereignty.

Possible case studies of territorial conflicts:

- Nagorno-Karabakh / Republic of Artsakh (Azerbaijan)
- South Sudan (Sudan)
- Kosovo (Yugoslavia)
- Catalonia (Spain)
- Palestine (Israel)
- Kashmir (India, Pakistan, China)
- Crimea (Ukraine)

Vocabulary

Secede/secession	The formal withdrawal from a federation or political unit.
Self-determination	The right of a people to organize as a state or otherwise freely determine how they will be governed as a nation.
Sovereignty	The power of a country to control its own government and decision-making without interference from the outside.
Territorial integrity	The recognition of a state's borders and their ability to protect them.

Part 1: Assemble the Facts

Fill in what you find. If you come across a disputed fact, write both versions and note who claims each. Remember to record your sources.

Territorial Conflict:	
Fact	Your Research Findings
Group seeking self-determination	
State the cultural group lives in	
Why was self-determination sought? What arguments were made to support the claim? (E.g., decolonization, oppression, lack of representation, etc.)	
What arguments were made by the state or other groups against self-determination?	
Was internal self-determination sought first (autonomy, rights, representation within the country)? Explain.	
Was a referendum for independence held? What was the result? Was it internationally monitored?	
Was independence declared? Was it recognized by any other actors? If yes, which ones? What was the result?	
Was force used, either by a seceding territory, the state, or both?	
What outside powers were involved, and what were their interests in the result (economic, strategic, precedence)?	
Where do things stand today?	



COMING OF AGE – NARRATIVES AND REPRESENTATIONS OF HOME



Coming-of-age stories are a popular feature of many cultures' collective narratives. So many myths, stories, and folklore come back to these accounts of chronological change and growth and of how significant events in a history have implemented that. Film makers and writers have used varying genres to recreate this dramatic change from childhood to adulthood. There are many stories that focus on this time in a young person's life, including classic books such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Jane Eyre*, epic poetry like *The Odyssey*, and films like *Stand By Me*. It's a rich topic for poets, some of whom have been incorporated into the poetry anthology. The documentary *My Sweet Land* is a clear illustration of this, and can be studied in conjunction with the graphic memoir *Persepolis*, or with the poetry anthology collection provided here.

- A. The poetry anthology is roughly divided into two sections, focusing on both the idea of belonging and displacement, and more specifically on coming of age. There are nine different poems that explore these tensions. Students can focus on one poem or explore the collection and how it contrasts to their own experiences and to those of Vrej.
- B. *Persepolis*, by Marjane Satrapi (2001), evokes the story of a child coming of age in politically volatile times. The narrative is compelling, simply drawn and told, and it appeals to middle school students with its likeable and familiar protagonist, Marji. The themes of identity and development resonate with high school students. As teachers guide students reading this, students can be asked to pick out the chapters, scenes, or panels which speak to them the most, using the graphic terminology sheet to articulate how Satrapi speaks to them. Students should be encouraged to draw comparisons between the experiences of both protagonists, Marji and Vrej.

DRIVING QUESTION

How can art and /or storytelling express the tension within a person as they struggle to find a sense of belonging?

Personal Reflection / Pre-unit class writing

1. Why are multiple stories and voices valuable?
2. Where are you from, and where do you live? Are there any contradictions in your nationality and in your family's history?
3. How do you feel that you belong?

Discussion Questions

1. To what extent does the film focus on Vrej's experience and how much is it about his family's experience? How important is his family to his journey through the film?
2. To what extent can one's immediate family or caregiving community provide a sense of home? Does breaking away from your family or community mean leaving home?
3. How does the film show us what it is like to come of age during a war?
4. What makes a place home? Is it ever possible to find a new home, or does one's birthplace dictate what home is?
5. Reflect on another coming-of-age story that you've read or watched. What universal themes are present in that story and in Vrej's story as presented in *My Sweet Land*? What key differences exist between Vrej's life and the character who is coming of age in the story you selected?

Extension Activities

The driving question of this ELA unit is *How can writers, poets and artists tell stories to express the tension within a person as they struggle to find a sense of belonging?* The subsequent tasks build on this question. It is worth asking students this question at the start of the unit, and asking them to journal their developing responses over the course of the unit.

1. Poetry Anthology:

Use the poetry analysis resources linked below to discuss the driving question: *How do some of the poems express the tension within a person as they struggle to find a sense of belonging?* Students can be given [the anthology](#), the [poetry terminology sheet](#) and the guide on [how to read a poem](#), and work on identifying the terminology in their poem. In pairs, they could discuss the impact of these choices for about 15 minutes and then look at the [extra notes](#) provided and see what they agree with and what they would develop. Another approach would be to give them the notes on one of the poems, and then ask them to apply this analysis to one of the other poems.

- [Handout 3: Poetry Anthology](#)
- Handouts for Poetry Analysis Resources:
 - [Handout 4: Poetic Terms Sheet](#)
 - [Handout 5: How to Read A Poem](#)
 - [Handout 6: Discussion and Analysis](#)
- [Handout 7: How to Analyze a Poem in Depth](#)

2. After reading the literary texts, have students write a poem from the perspective of a speaker who has been forced to move to an environment where the culture is vastly different from his or her original one. With students who need more freedom in their creative output, give them a choice of text style that most effectively conveys the narrative. They could choose a poem, a graphic story, an essay or a more traditional short story.

3. Most of us are surrounded by adults and neighbors who have come from different places or whose community, care-givers, or family history involves migration. Lead a discussion on which members of their community your students could interview who have had these experiences. Encourage them to formulate questions to gain a greater understanding of the differences between their subject's life then and now. Time should be spent in class constructing a combination of closed and open questions so as to put the interviewee at ease, but also to get some meaningful comment.

4. Have students take a sequence of 3–6 minutes from the film that particularly represents the idea of home. They should then rework it in a different style. For example, they could sketch out the scenes in Satrapi's graphic style or write a monologue or poem or even produce a painting. Create a gallery in the classroom of the different texts and spend a lesson reading each other's work. Students should then look at what is gained and lost by the different representations. This could lead into extension activity #5 or work as a stand-alone activity.

5. Have a formal debate in class on this topic: "The documentary format is the most effective way to portray an individual's struggle with belonging." Divide students into groups of about five, and assign them the side they are arguing. The opposing students can use examples from their own creations, from the film, from *Persepolis*, and from the poetry anthology to support their claim. Groups should be given credit for using specific examples from any of the studied texts. Give students class time to prepare their arguments and then set up the formal debate at the end of the lesson.

6. A recommended task for the poetry is to get students to pick a still from the film that corresponds to one of the poems. This engages their creativity and allows them to make connections between the genres.



POETRY ANTHOLOGY

Section A: Representations of Home

These poems were selected because they reflect how individuals relate to a homeland they are disconnected from or literally cannot visit/access.

The poetry components also connect to the idea of home and belonging and displacement.

Where I'm From by George Ella Lyon

Originally Carol by Ann Duffy

Presents from My Aunts in Pakistan by Moniza Aviv

Search for my Tongue by Sujita Baht

A Palestinian Might Say by Naomi Shihab Nye

Words Whispered to a Child Under Siege by Joseph Sephano

“Where I’m From”

by George Ella Lyon

I am from clothespins,
from Clorox and carbon tetrachloride.
I am from the dirt under the back porch. (Black, glistening
it tasted like beets.)
I am from the forsythia bush, 5
the Dutch elm
whose long gone limbs I remember
as if they were my own.
I’m from fudge and eyeglasses,
from Imogene and Alafair. 10
I’m from the know-it-alls and the pass-it-ons, from perk up
and pipe down.
I’m from He restoreth my soul with a cottonball lamb and ten
verses I can say myself.
I’m from Artemus and Billie’s Branch, 15
fried corn and strong coffee.
From the finger my grandfather lost to the auger the eye my
father shut to keep his sight. Under my bed was a dress box
spilling old pictures,
a sift of lost faces 20
to drift beneath my dreams.
I am from those moments—
snapped before I budded—
leaf-fall from the family tree.

[Lyon, George Ella. “Where I’m From.” Scholastic, teacher.scholastic.com/writeit/PDF/lyon.pdf](https://www.scholastic.com/writeit/PDF/lyon.pdf)

(1993)



“Originally”

by Carol Ann Duffy

We came from our own country in a red room
which fell through the fields, our mother singing
our father’s name to the turn of the wheels.
My brothers cried, one of them bawling Home,
Home, as the miles rushed back to the city, 5
the street, the house, the vacant rooms
where we didn’t live any more. I stared
at the eyes of a blind toy, holding its paw.

All childhood is an emigration. Some are slow,
leaving you standing, resigned, up an avenue 10
where no one you know stays. Others are sudden.
Your accent wrong. Corners, which seemed familiar,
leading to unimagined, pebble-dashed estates, big boys
eating worms and shouting words you don’t understand.
My parents’ anxiety stirred like a loose tooth 15
in my head. I want our own country, I said.

But then you forget, or don’t recall, or change,
and, seeing your brother swallow a slug, feel only
a skelf of shame. I remember my tongue
shedding its skin like a snake, my voice 20
in the classroom sounding just like the rest. Do I only think
I lost a river, culture, speech, sense of first space
and the right place? Now, Where do you come from?
strangers ask. Originally? And I hesitate.

(1990)

[Duffy, Carol Ann. “Originally.” Scottish Poetry Library
https://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poem/originally/](https://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poem/originally/)



“Search for my Tongue”

by Sujata Bhatt

You ask me what I mean
by saying I have lost my tongue.

I ask you, what would you do
if you had two tongues in your mouth,
and lost the first one, the mother tongue,
and could not really know the other,
the foreign tongue.

You could not use them both together
even if you thought that way.

And if you lived in a place you had to
speak a foreign tongue,
your mother tongue would rot,
rot and die in your mouth
until you had to spit it out.

I thought I spit it out
but overnight while I dream,

munay hutoo kay aakhee jeebh aakhee bhasha
may thoonly nakhi chay
parantoo rattray svupnama mari bhasha pachi aavay chay
foolnee jaim mari bhasha nmari jeebh
modhama kheelay chay
fullnee jaim mari bhasha mari jeebh
modhama pakay chay

it grows back, a stump of a shoot
grows longer, grows moist, grows strong veins,
it ties the other tongue in knots,
the bud opens, the bud opens in my mouth,
it pushes the other tongue aside.

Everytime I think I've forgotten,
I think I've lost the mother tongue,
it blossoms out of my mouth.

(1988)

[Bhatt, Sujata. "Search for My Tongue".](#)

<https://genius.com/Sujata-bhatt-search-for-my-tongue-annotated>

“A Palestinian Might Say”

by Naomi Shihab Nye

What?	
You don't feel at home in your country,	
almost overnight?	
All the simple things	
you cared about,	5
maybe took for granted. . .	
you feel	
insulted, invisible?	
Almost as if you're not there?	
But you're there.	10
Where before you mingled freely. . .	
appreciated people who weren't	
just like you. . .	
divisions grow stronger.	
That's what "chosen" and "unchosen" will do.	15
(Just keep your eyes on your houses and gardens.	
Keep your eyes on that tree in bloom.)	
Yes, a wall. Ours came later but. . .	
who talks about how sad the land looks,	
marked by a massive wall?	20
That's not a normal shadow.	
It's something else looming over your lives.	

[Shibab Nye, Naomi, "A Palestinian Might Say".](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/149735/a-palestinian-might-say)

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/149735/a-palestinian-might-say>



“Words Whispered to a Child Under Siege”

by Joseph Fasano

No, we are not going to die.
The sounds you hear
knocking the windows and chipping the paint
from the ceiling, that is a game
the world is playing. 5
Our task is to crouch in the dark as long as we can
and count the beats of our own hearts.
Good. Like that. Lay your hand
on my heart and I'll lay mine on yours.
Which one of us wins 10
is the one who loves the game the most
while it lasts.
Yes, it is going to last.
You can use your ear instead of your hand.
Here, on my heart. 15
Why is it beating faster? For you. That's all.
I always wanted you to be born
and so did the world.
No, those aren't a stranger's footsteps in the house.
Yes, I'm here. We're safe. 20
Remember chess? Remember
hide-and-seek?
The song your mother sang? Let's sing that one.
She's still with us, yes. But you have to sing
without making a sound. She'd like that. 25
No, those aren't footsteps.
Sing. Sing louder.
Those aren't footsteps.
Let me show you how I cried when you were born.
Those aren't footsteps. 30
Those aren't sirens.
Those aren't flames.
Close your eyes. Like chess. Like hide-and-seek.
When the game is done you get another life.

Fasano, Joseph, “Words Whispered to a Child Under Siege”.
<https://poets.org/poem/words-whispered-child-under-siege>

Section B: Coming of age

These poems were selected because they focus on a writer reflecting on their own coming-of-age experiences.

Arms and the Boy by Wilfred Owen
An Easy Passage by Julia Copus
On Turning Ten by Billy Collins
To My Nine Year Old Self by Helen Dunmore

“Arms and The Boy”

by Wilfred Owen

“My Sweet Land reveals the way that the war robs boys of their childhoods”¹

Let the boy try along this bayonet-blade
How cold steel is, and keen with hunger of blood;
Blue with all malice, like a madman’s flash;
And thinly drawn with famishing for flesh.

Lend him to stroke these blind, blunt bullet-leads,
Which long to nuzzle in the hearts of lads,
Or give him cartridges of fine zinc teeth
Sharp with the sharpness of grief and death.

For his teeth seem for laughing round an apple.
There lurk no claws behind his fingers supple;
And God will grow no talons at his heels,
Nor antlers through the thickness of his curls.

(1918)

Owen, Wilfred. “Arms and the Boy”.
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47394/arms-and-the-boy>

¹ <https://hyperallergic.com/the-women-and-children-of-the-second-artsakh-war/>



“An Easy Passage”

by *Julia Copus*

Once she is halfway up there, crouched in her bikini
on the porch roof of her family's house, trembling,
she knows that the one thing she must not do is to think
of the narrow windowsill, the sharp
drop of the stairwell; she must keep her mind 5
on the friend with whom she is half in love
and who is waiting for her on the blond
gravel somewhere beneath her, keep her mind
on her and on the fact of the open window,
the flimsy, hole-punched, aluminium lever 10
towards which in a moment she will reach
with the length of her whole body, leaning in
to the warm flank of the house. But first she
steadies herself, still crouching, the grains of the asphalt
hot beneath her toes and fingertips, 15
a square of petrified beach. Her tiny breasts
rest lightly on her thighs. – What can she know
of the way the world admits us less and less
the more we grow? For now both girls seem
lit, as if from within, their hair and the gold stud 20
earrings in the first one's ears; for now the long, grey
eye of the street, and far away from the mother
who does not trust her daughter with a key,
the workers about their business in the drab
electroplating factory over the road, 25
far too, most far, from the flush-faced secretary
who, with her head full of the evening class
she plans to take, or the trip of a lifetime, looks up now
from the stirring omens of the astrology column
at a girl – thirteen if she's a day – standing 30
in next to nothing in the driveway opposite,
one hand flat against her stomach, one
shielding her eyes to gaze up at a pale calf,
a silver anklet and the five neat shimmering
oyster-painted toenails of an outstretched foot 35
which catch the sunlight briefly like the
flash of armaments before
dropping gracefully into the shade of the house. (2010)

[Copus, Julia. “An Easy Passage”.](#)

<https://genius.com/Julia-copus-an-easy-passage-annotated>

“On Turning Ten”

by Billy Collins

The whole idea of it makes me feel
like I’m coming down with something,
something worse than any stomach ache
or the headaches I get from reading in bad light-
a kind of measles of the spirit, 5
a mumps of the psyche,
a disfiguring chicken pox of the soul.

You tell me it is too early to be looking back,
but that is because you have forgotten
the perfect simplicity of being one 10
and the beautiful complexity introduced by two.
But I can lie on my bed and remember every digit.
At four I was an Arabian wizard.
I could make myself invisible
by drinking a glass of milk a certain way. 15
At seven I was a soldier, at nine a prince.

But now I am mostly at the window
watching the late afternoon light.
Back then it never fell so solemnly
against the side of my tree house, 20
and my bicycle never leaned against the garage
as it does today,
all the dark blue speed drained out of it.

This is the beginning of sadness, I say to myself,
as I walk through the universe in my sneakers. 25
It is time to say good-bye to my imaginary friends,
time to turn the first big number.

It seems only yesterday I used to believe
there was nothing under my skin but light.
If you cut me I could shine. 30
But now when I fall upon the sidewalks of life,
I skin my knees. I bleed.

(1995)

[Collins, Billy. “On Turning Ten”.](#)

<https://allpoetry.com/poem/14327210-On-Turning-Ten-by-Billy-Collins>



“To My Nine Year Old Self”

by Helen Dunmore

You must forgive me. Don't look so surprised, perplexed, and eager to be gone balancing on your hands or on the tightrope You would rather run than walk, rather climb than run rather leap from a height than anything.	5
I have spoiled this body we once shared. Look at the scars, and watch the way I move, careful of a bad back or a bruised foot. Do you remember how, three minutes after waking we'd jump straight out of the ground floor window into the summer morning?	10
That dream we had, no doubt it's as fresh in your mind as the white paper to write it on. We made a start, but something else came up - a baby vole, or a bag of sherbet lemons - and besides that summer of ambition created an ice-lolly factory, a wasp trap and a den by a cesspit.	15
I'd like to say we could be friends but the truth is we have nothing in common beyond a few shared years. I won't keep you then. Time to pick rosehips for tuppence a pound, time to hide down scared lanes from men in cars after girl-children,	20
or to lunge out over the water on the rope that swings from that tree long buried in housing - But no, I shan't cloud your morning. God knows I have fears enough for us both -	25
I leave you in an ecstasy of concentration slowly peeling a ripe scab from your knee to taste it on your tongue.	30

[Dunmore, Helen. “To My Nine Year Old Self”.](https://genius.com/Helen-dunmore-to-my-nine-year-old-self-annotated)

(2007)

<https://genius.com/Helen-dunmore-to-my-nine-year-old-self-annotated>

POETIC TERMS



We all study poetry, regardless of the English course we're enrolled in. Accordingly, it makes sense to have command of the language to describe poetic choices and their effects on the reader. Please note there are terms to describe types of poems, structural patterns, as well as figurative language and other literary aspects. Commit these terms to memory and look for these elements when you study poetry with your teacher and peers.

Some Types of Poetry

Lyric: A short poem with one speaker (not necessarily the poet) who expresses personal thoughts and feeling. In classical Greece, the lyric was a poem written to be sung, accompanied by a lyre.

Concrete poetry: Poetry arranged spatially to create a visual effect

Dramatic monologue: A narrative poem in which a single speaker is saying something to a silent audience. The person to whom the speaker talks must be inferred as one reads the poem.

Free verse: Poetry that has no regular meter or rhyme scheme

Some Verse Forms and Stanza Patterns

Quatrain: A four-line section of a poem

Refrain: Often known to non-literary students as the chorus — a line or lines repeated at regular intervals, most often at the end of a stanza

Stanza: A group of lines in a poem divided off from the others

Caesura: A pause in a line which may or may not be punctuated

Enjambment: When one line in a poem is "run on" to the next by an absence of any punctuation at the end of the first line

Couplet: Two consecutive lines of poetry that rhyme

Some Techniques of the Imagination

Figurative language: Language that should not be taken literally or in its exact meaning, but which refers to another idea (figures of speech)

Simile: A comparison using "like" or "as"

the child's eyes were like saucers
his feel felt as heavy as lead
she's as light as a feather

Metaphor: A comparison without the use of "like" or "as"

the patient was burning up with fever
his unkind words stung me
the road was a sea of mud
my mind was a blank page before the exam

Personification: Giving human qualities to something that is not human

your eyes speak eloquently of your love
trees whispering secrets in the breeze
the moon is a beautiful lady

Hyperbole: An exaggeration

a night of pure hell (also a metaphor)
he smiled from ear to ear
it will be a million years till I see you again
eaten alive by mosquitoes

Allusion: Reference to a person, place, or event which the reader already knows

Imagery: Using sense images to make the meaning more vivid and to evoke emotions in the reader

Sight: Visual imagery helps us "see" what is being described

Sound: Aural imagery helps us "hear" what is being described



Smell: *Olfactory* imagery helps us “smell” what is being described

The winter evening settles down smell of steaks in passageways.

Taste: *Gustatory* imagery helps us “taste” what is being described

Touch: *Tactile* imagery helps us “feel” what is being described
Life is a barren field, frozen with snow

Organic imagery: *Relating to the organs (heart, gut, knees shaking....)*

Symbol: A person, thing, idea, or action that stands for something else. It is usually something concrete that stands for something abstract. For example, a “heart” could be a symbol of love. The action of raising up two arms is a symbol of surrender.

Techniques of “Music”

Rhythm: The alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables

*But soft, what light from yonder window breaks?
For the moon never beams without bringing me dreams*

Rhyme:

Rhyme or end rhyme: The repetition of sounds at the end of the lines of a poem

Rhyme scheme: A description of the rhyme “plan” of a poem

Dreams by Langston Hughes

<i>Hold last to dreams</i>	a
<i>For if dreams die</i>	b
<i>Life is a broken-winged bird</i>	c
<i>That cannot fly.</i>	b

(Rhyme scheme: a b c b)

Half-rhyme: Rhyming of the first and last consonants, with a different vowel sound in the middle:

flip / flop *seen / sign*

Internal rhyme: Rhyme within the same line of poetry

For the moon never beams without bringing me dreams

Off-rhyme or slant-rhyme: A rhyme that is not full and perfect but contains echoes of parts of words

last / west *trade / trod*

Eye-rhyme: Words that look as though they would rhyme but they don’t:

great / defeat *compare / are*

Sound Devices

Assonance: The repetition of vowel sounds

The ploughman homeward plods his weary way

Consonance: The repetition of consonant sounds

What a world of merriment their melody foretells!

Alliteration: The repetition of beginning consonant sounds

Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before

Onomatopoeia: Words that imitate sounds

How they clang, and clash, and roar!

Cacophony: A combination of harsh, unpleasant sounds or tones

My stick fingers click with a snicker

Euphony: A combination of soothing, pleasant, soft sounds or tones

O star (the fairest one in sight)

Repetition: Words or groups of words that are repeated

How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle

Anaphora: The repetition of an initial word or phrase

*This royal throne of kings, this sceptered isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars
This other Eden, demi-paradise.*

Additional Literary Terms

Abstract: An idea, concept, belief that does not have an actual existence: opposite of concrete

Ambiguity: A situation in which more than one meaning or interpretation is possible or expected (a part of human life—like most of our experiences)

Antithesis: Contrasting or combining two terms, phrases, or clauses with opposite meanings

Binary opposition: A pair of related terms or concepts that are opposite in meaning

Cadence: The patterning of rhythm in natural speech, or in poetry without a distinct meter

Colloquial: Ordinary everyday language and speech

Connotation: The implied meaning or a word or phrase, or the feeling attached to a word or phrase

Denotation: The dictionary meaning of a word or phrase

Dialect: A form of language in which the grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary associate it with a particular group of people

Diction: The author's choice of words

Irony: The opposite of what is meant or what is expected

Verbal irony: When a character says something which is the exact opposite of what he or she actually feels. When Hamlet says he is "but mad north-northwest" he means he is not mad at all

Dramatic irony: When a character on stage speaks lines which have another meaning to the audience, unknown to the character on stage. One of the best-known examples of this is in Shakespeare's tragedy *Macbeth* (1605-6), when Duncan the King of Scotland enters Macbeth's castle and remarks "This castle hath a fine and pleasant seat". The audience have just seen Lady Macbeth swear to kill Duncan that very night in the castle, so there is a huge and horrific irony in Duncan's praise of it which is totally lost on Duncan himself.

Juxtaposition: Two things being seen or placed close together with contrasting effect

Parody: A work written in imitation of another work, usually with the object of ridiculing or making fun of the original

Pun: A play on words that have similar sounds but different meanings

Theme: A general or universal idea explored by a writer (how the writing applies to life in general)

Tone: The mood, feeling, atmosphere or attitude expressed in the poem

Mood: The feeling a poem arouses in the reader (happiness, fear, sorrow)

Rhetorical question: A question solely for effect, with no answer expected. The answer is obvious. It is a means to emphasize and is stronger than a direct statement.

Oxymoron: A combination of two terms considered to be opposites or incompatible:

"delicious sorrow" "militant peace" "living dead"

Paradox: An apparent contradiction that reveals an unexpected valid meaning:

"The child is father of the man." (This paradox could be interpreted to mean that the experiences, innocence, and capacity for wonder we have in childhood shape and create the adults we eventually become)

Speaker: The voice of the poem. The persona who speaks the words of the poem, NOT the poet himself/herself

Syntax: The actual way in which words and sentences are placed together in the writing.



HOW TO READ A POEM

Reading poems is part of the ELA curriculum, and being able to analyze them in detail can help us to appreciate them. It is necessary to have a concrete approach to reading and analyzing poems. There are many approaches to reading and annotation, but **three readings** of the poem is a recommended approach to facilitate deeper understanding.

FIRST READING

1. **Read the poem all the way through** at your normal reading speed, silently.
2. Find the **definition of any unfamiliar words**.
3. Try to gain an **overall impression** of the poem. Don't stop to analyze individual lines or sections.
4. **Respond by jotting down** your immediate reaction to the whole poem. This reaction will be your first thoughts and feelings. These may change when you read it again.
5. Identify strong **connotations**.

SECOND READING:

1. **Read the poem again** – out loud if this is possible. Pay attention to individual words and the feelings/meaning they impart on the overall impact of the poem.
2. Read slowly and carefully – word by word, syllable by syllable – observing the punctuation. Do not stop at the end of every line unless it has some sort of punctuation. **Consider the meaning of the punctuation**.
3. Note the examples of sound devices in the poem – onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance, consonance, and rhyme. This will help you understand the proper phrasing and rhythm of the poem. Mark the examples of these devices on the poem so you don't forget them.
4. Think about **what the poem is saying**. Make a brief note on the paper.

THIRD READING:

1. Look carefully for **figurative devices** in the poem – metaphor, simile, personification, and symbolism. Mark these examples on the poem.
2. How do these devices help the **meaning of the poem**? Make brief notes on the paper.
3. Does the poem follow a particular pattern/type of poem – sonnet, narrative, lyrical, etc.? **Note the structure** (number of lines, stanzas, the “look” of the poem, rhythm).
4. Paraphrase the entire poem into prose. (Put it into your own words.) Translate the poetic devices. State the **concrete meaning**.
5. Try and understand the sense of the poem. What is it about? What is it trying to say about its subject?

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

1. Identify the speaker, audience, and purpose of the poem.
2. Guess the tone of the poem. (Hint: match tone and connotation. Note any change in tone.)
3. Analyze how the strong poetic devices contribute to the abstract meaning and theme of the poem.
4. Read the poem as many more times as you need to get a full understanding of it. It is surprising what you may discover each time you do. Every reading aids a deeper understanding of the poem.
5. Organize your notes.
6. If asked, write a detailed response to the poem.

Adapted from Paper One - How to Analyze Poetry Deeply, Cohen, Andrew & Giles, David YouTube, uploaded by IB English Guys, 1 Nov. 2021

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS



“Where I’m From” — Possible Discussion Points

Dominant Themes

1. **Identity:** The poem’s central theme is identity — specifically, how identity is formed from everyday experiences, family history, language, and place. The poem argues, through image rather than statement, that we are not just who we are now, but who we were formed by. We are, in a very real sense, assembled from our past.
2. **Family and belonging:** The poem posits that small details of family routines play a strong part in forming our sense of belonging. These details, more than nationality, religion, language, and gender are more impactful.

Authorial Choices

1. **Anaphora:** The repeated phrase “I am from” acts as a powerful refrain, emphasizing the accumulative nature of identity. Each repetition adds another layer to the speaker’s self-definition, creating a rhythmic, almost chant-like quality that reinforces the theme of origins.
2. **Metaphor:** The entire poem functions as an extended metaphor, where the speaker’s identity is constructed through the accumulation of “from” statements. Each item, person, or experience mentioned is not just a literal detail but a symbolic building block of her selfhood. The poem implicitly compares the formation of identity to the growth of a tree or the construction of a house, with each memory adding to the overall structure.
3. **Sensory language:** The language uses concrete nouns and descriptive adjectives to evoke the five senses which bring the speaker’s world to life. Sensory details abound, from the visual of “Black, glistening” dirt to the tactile memory of “cottonball lamb” and the taste of “fried corn and strong coffee.” These images are not merely decorative; they are the building blocks of the speaker’s identity, allowing readers to experience her past alongside her.
4. **Allusion:** Lyon employs allusions to specific places and family members to create a sense of groundedness and authenticity. References such as “the Dutch elm,” “Imogene and Alafair,” and “Artemus and Billie’s Branch” are specific to the speaker’s personal history and geography, making the speaker’s identity feel tangible and real.
5. **Assonance:** The repetition of vowel sounds within words in close proximity contributes to the poem’s musicality. This subtle device can draw attention to certain phrases and enhance their emotional weight. For example, in the line “the eye my father closed to preserve his sight,” the repetition of the long “i” sound creates a lingering, almost mournful quality, emphasizing the significance of the father’s action.
6. **Consonance:** In the phrase “from perk up and pipe down,” the repetition of the “p” sound creates a subtle, almost percussive rhythm, mimicking the sharp, direct nature of these common sayings.
7. **Enjambment:** The enjambment encourages the reader to move seamlessly through the poem, mirroring the way memories and thoughts can flow into one another.



“Originally” — Possible Discussion Points

Dominant Themes

1. **Identity and belonging:** The poem explores the complexities of identity, especially as it relates to the concept of home and belonging. The speaker grapples with the tension between their original home and the new environment they find themselves in.
2. **Childhood and change:** The poem posits that “All childhood is an emigration,” highlighting the inevitable changes and losses that come with growing up, regardless of physical movement from one place to another.
3. **Cultural displacement:** The poem delves into the emotional and psychological effects of moving from one culture to another, including the loss of language, customs, and a sense of place.

Authorial Choices

1. **Metaphor:** The red room serves as a metaphor for the womb or the original home, emphasizing the emotional and physical displacement that occurs upon leaving it.
2. **Structure:** The poem is divided into stanzas that reflect different stages of emigration and adaptation, guiding the reader through the emotional journey of the speaker.
3. **Tone:** The tone is reflective and somewhat melancholic, capturing the complex emotions associated with leaving one’s home and adapting to a new environment.
4. **Specificity:** The poem uses specific images like “pebble-dashed estates” and “big boys eating worms” to ground its abstract themes in concrete experiences, adding depth and relatability.
5. **Contrast:** The poem contrasts the familiar and the unfamiliar, the past and the present, to highlight the emotional complexities of emigration and change.
6. **Pacing:** The pacing of the poem, marked by its line breaks and stanzaic structure, mirrors the emotional ebbs and flows of the speaker’s experience, adding another layer of meaning.
7. **Repetition:** Phrases like “our own country” and questions like “Where do you come from?” serve as refrains that emphasize the poem’s central themes of identity and belonging.
8. **Dialogue:** The poem incorporates both internal and external dialogue, adding a layer of complexity as the speaker navigates their own feelings and the expectations or questions of others.
9. **Imagery:** Vivid imagery like “a skelf of shame” and “my tongue shedding its skin like a snake” enrich the poem’s thematic content and engage the reader’s senses.
10. **Ambiguity:** The poem ends on a note of hesitation, encapsulating the ongoing, unresolved nature of the speaker’s struggle with identity and belonging.

“Presents from my Aunts in Pakistan” — Possible Discussion Points

Dominant Themes

1. **Emigration and cultural identity:** The poem explores the complexities of identity, especially as it relates to the concept of belonging. The speaker explores the conflict between not quite belonging to either her birth country or her adopted country, of being “of no fixed nationality.”
2. **Childhood and adolescence:** The poem relives the awkwardness of needing to fit in to her English school, her “salwar kameez/ didn’t impress the schoolfriend.”
3. **Cultural displacement:** The poem looks at the way that two places exist simultaneously with neither one able to completely erode the other. A lot of the poem is about the young girl’s feelings – she likes the presents, but they don’t really suit her. And the more she thinks about it, the less at home she feels. At the end, it’s as if she feels homeless – she is stuck between two very different places.

Authorial Choices

1. **Symbolism:** The embroidered Pakistani clothes and her English denim and corduroy symbolise the different aspects of culture that make up her identity, and how they struggle to coexist in her.
2. **Structure:** The use of free verse helps to make the speaker’s voice sound informal, as if readers are listening in while she muses on her teenage years. Its 69 lines are divided into seven irregular stanzas. This flexible form makes the speaker sound thoughtful and informal as she recounts her teenage memories; it’s as if each new stanza marks a bend in the free-flowing river of her thoughts.
3. **Imagery:** The luscious imagery with which the speaker describes the titular presents from her Pakistani aunts captures her sense that the Pakistani side of her heritage feels at once beautiful and foreign to her.
4. **Auditory imagery:** The poem uses alliteration to evoke the sound of the clothing rustling like “satin-silken tops” to recall the way the clothes feel alien and dominant in her English home.
5. **Contrast:** The poem contrasts the differences between Pakistan and England to emphasise that they aren’t compatible, impacting her own ability to belong in England.
6. **Symbolism:** The clothes, the photographs, the lamp, and the fence all help to symbolize the sense of displacement. The speaker describes herself as looking through fretwork at the Shalimar Gardens, as if she’s an outsider looking at other people through a fence. She doesn’t fully belong in Pakistan anymore.



“Search for My Tongue” — Possible Discussion Points

Dominant Themes

1. **Language as cultural identity:** The poem explores the link between language and identity, describing the complexity of having a mother tongue while needing to learn a new language. The process of having two languages is a physical conflict.
2. **Immigration and assimilation:** The speaker’s “two tongues” can be understood as representing different aspects of the speaker’s identity. These languages — and especially her first language, her “mother tongue” — are inextricably connected to who she is, reflecting where she came from as well as the new culture of which she is a part.

Authorial Choices

1. **Dual language use:** The poem is written in English and Gujarati to physically represent the struggle that she is writing about. This suggests that the mother tongue is not easily erased and remains a part of her. The alienation to the English reader reminds us of how language can exclude and disorient.
2. **Metaphor:** The whole poem is written as a metaphor with the tongue representing her language. Thus the tongue being forked or stunted reflects the difficulty of speaking two languages. By the end of the poem, the tongue is compared to a plant, “a bud.... blossoms” reflecting the beauty and flourishing nature of her original language.
3. **Metaphor:** Flowers, and especially the new buds of flowers, represent new life, and the reemergence of life after a period of dormancy. The image of the flowering plant, then, is highly significant in the poem. These images of buds and blossoms suggest that the speaker’s native language has never truly died at all.
4. **Symbolism:** The dream in the poem reflects the speaker’s ultimately unshakable connection to her native language. Dreams are understood to come from the deepest levels of someone’s consciousness. As such, they often symbolize the unconscious or subconscious levels of a person’s thoughts. The fact that the speaker dreams in Gujarati, then, implies that this language lives at a deep level of her consciousness and her existence. Something so deeply connected to her identity, the poem suggests, can’t truly be lost.
5. **Structure:** The poem is written in three stanzas. The first and third stanzas are written in English, while the middle stanza is written in Gujarati, the speaker’s native language. This structure suggests that for the speaker, Gujarati is, in a sense, at the center of her identity.
6. **Narrative perspective:** From the beginning, when the speaker addresses a “you,” to the middle of the poem, when she speaks in Gujarati, the speaker seems to be addressing the reader — and herself — as though in conversation. Since the poem itself is *about* communication and self-expression, these qualities are important to its meaning.
7. **Consonance:** The repeated /t/ sounds in “rot,” “spit,” “it,” and “out” convey the violent finality the speaker fears experiencing with the loss of her native language. The poem uses sound echoes to connect words together and create music and meaning.

“A Palestinian Might Say” — Possible Discussion Points

Dominant Themes

1. **The emotional impact of a *home*:** The idea of homes and the emotions connected to the homes. A reader learns that a home is a place we decide to belong, regardless of where we live.
2. **The random unpredictability of displacement:** The poet wants others to understand the sadness and desperation that comes with having your home taken away. “You don’t feel at home in your country, almost overnight?”

Authorial Choices

1. **Allusion:** The wall in the poem alludes to the 37-mile barrier on the West Bank of Gaza erected by Israel.
2. **Metaphor:** The shadow that the literal wall casts also represents the uncertainty of living in Palestine and for the Palestinian diaspora. The limitations and threats embodied by the wall extend beyond the physical proximity of the wall itself, extended as a “shadow” into everyone’s lives.
3. **Narrative perspective:** The second-person perspective and use of direct address and questions directly challenge the readers to participate in the poem. This forces us not only to consider what we would do if our familiar routines and objects were taken off us, but also what role we play as bystanders in the global conflict.
4. **Personification:** The land is described as looking “sad.” The humanizing of the land emphasises the importance of place and home as being more about where your house is, but as being a connection to the land itself.
5. **Structure:** The poem is written in three stanzas. The first and third stanzas are written in English, while the middle stanza is written in Gujarati, the speaker’s native language. This structure suggests that for the speaker, Gujarati is, in a sense, at the center of her identity.
6. **Enjambment:** The poem’s structure has no regularity in line length and the enjambment reinforces the sense of displacement as it indicates the lack of assurance and security.



“An Easy Passage” — Possible Discussion Points

The poet uses patterns of imagery, for example, light and dark, up and down, present and future, female and male. The key word is, of course, “halfway” — a metaphor for the stage of their lives. The tone is conversational, but with lyrical and vivid moments, for example, “the long grey eye of the street” and the “warm flank of the house.”

Dominant Themes

1. **Childhood and change:** The poem cleverly describes the balance of the girl’s physical development – between up and down, indoors and outdoors – to convey her stage in life. Opposites are described, things are on the cusp: sun is contrasted with shade; hard maleness and soft femaleness; all designed to suggest the poise of the moment. The key word is, of course, “halfway” — a metaphor for the stage of their lives.
2. **Adolescence vs. adulthood:** Adolescence, in this poem, is a time of uncertainty that is both dangerous and exhilarating. “An Easy Passage” follows a teenage girl’s precarious climb as she tries to sneak back into her house, contrasting her exciting and perilous struggle with the monotonous routines of adulthood. The girl might be in danger of getting hurt or in trouble, but she’s also exploring her sense of agency and pushing boundaries. Meanwhile, the lives of nearby adults are marked by dreary certainty and a desire to be somewhere else. In this way, the poem expresses nostalgia for adolescence and its blooming sense of freedom, daring, and possibility — which, the poem implies, get dampened by the predictability and constriction of adulthood.

Authorial Choices

1. **Structure:** The poem is one long stanza, conveying a sense of continuation and transition, a process that has no breaks. Lines are enjambed to reinforce this sense. There is no rhyme scheme.
2. **Narrative perspective:** The voice is that of a third-person narrator, commenting in a detached way on the girls’ escapade. It is a free verse poem, with long flowing sentences. It is written in the present tense, but the focus is on the girl’s future.
3. **Symbolism:** The girl’s tricky journey back through the window of her house represents the line she is getting ready to cross from adolescence into adulthood. Her being “halfway there” and getting ready to “lean in” with the “length of her whole body” suggests that she’s on the cusp of adulthood and getting ready to make a major transition.
4. **Symbolism:** The house into which the girl tries to sneak represents the comforting world of her childhood. The girl is starting to test the waters of adulthood, but she hasn’t left her childhood behind entirely. She’s still positioned “on the porch roof” of the home, which represents her straddling the line between being a kid and being a grown-up. To her, it seems, the world of childhood is safe but also a bit restrictive. And while the girl’s toes sparkle in the sunlight, the house is a place of “shade” — suggesting that it shields her from both the harsh light and the excitement of the outside world.
5. **Contrast:** The poem contrasts the exhilaration of adolescence with the dull, “drab” lives of adults around them. The color of the girls’ world contrasts with “the long grey eye of the street.” By illustrating how vastly different the girls’ lives are compared to the monotonous adult world grinding on around them, the poem hints at a longing for the intensity of adolescence. The speaker asks, “What can [the teenage girl] know / of the way the world admits us less and less / the more we grow?” In other words, the speaker suggests that growing up isn’t “an easy passage” — and that the girls are lucky to be blissfully unaware of the disappointments that await them.
6. **Imagery:** The image of the girl’s “shimmering [...] toenails” which “catch the sunlight briefly” before disappearing “into the shade of the house” suggests the fleeting nature of adolescence.

“On Turning Ten” — Possible Discussion Points

Dominant Themes

1. **Childhood, growing up and change:** The poem examines the pain, discomfort, and loss of innocence that comes with growing up. The young speaker considers the prospect of turning 10 with discomfort, viewing this “first big number” as marking an end to the period of youthful bliss he’s enjoyed up until now. Much of the pain of entering adolescence, the poem suggests, is that it forces the speaker to abandon the fantastical, magical world of childhood — and to face the harshness of adult (or, at least, 10-year-old) reality.
2. **Memory and nostalgia:** The speaker of “On Turning Ten” paints his childhood as a time of magic and happiness that’s soon to be lost upon the arrival of his adolescence. Of course, this speaker is about to turn 10 — and thus remains well *within* the childhood that he’s already looking back on with such longing.

Authorial Choices

1. **Humor:** The reader understands that there are much worse things in life than turning 10, making the speaker’s point of view seem amusingly melodramatic at first. Such intense nostalgia, the poem suggests, can limit people’s perspectives, leading them to pre-emptively mourn the past without enjoying and appreciating the present.
2. **Symbolism:** Light in the poem symbolizes innocence and vitality, and it illustrates the speaker’s shifting perspective upon growing up.
3. **Symbolism:** The speaker’s unused playthings, specifically his tree house and bicycle, symbolize the fact that the speaker is leaving his childhood behind. Note how the speaker isn’t playing with either item in the poem, but rather looking at them from within his house.
4. **Alliteration:** In making the poem’s language more musical and striking, this alliteration also adds to the poem’s playful irony. In the opening stanza, /s/ sounds connect “spirit,” “psyche,” and “soul” — and, in doing so, draw attention to the deep, internal distress the speaker feels upon getting older. Another interesting example of alliteration appears at the beginning of the third stanza, with the tight repetition of /w/ and /l/ sounds.
5. **Structure:** “On Turning Ten” is written in free verse, meaning it doesn’t stick to a set meter. This adds to the casual, conversational style of the poem. Readers get the sense that the speaker is talking to them directly. There’s nothing overly formal or complicated here: just a simple, natural rhythm that fits right with the fact that the poem’s speaker is still a child.



“To My Nine Year Old Self” — Possible Discussion Points

Dominant Themes

1. **The joy and innocence of childhood:** Though the speaker intimately understands the young girl she addresses, and though they share the same past, the speaker realizes by the end of the poem that she no longer possesses the innocent joys of childhood she once had. Indeed, the speaker realizes that she and her nine-year-old self are entirely different people.
2. **Memory and nostalgia:** The speaker paints her childhood as a time of magic and happiness that’s soon to be lost. Childhood is something precious, the poem implies, and something that mustn’t be tainted by the painful realities of adulthood.

Authorial Choices

1. **Symbolism:** Scars are marks left on the skin after an injury has healed. Scars can also be metaphorical in nature, such as mental scars from emotional trauma. In “To My Nine-Year-Old Self,” scars symbolize the adult speaker’s physical and emotional deterioration, as well as the younger self’s resilience and physical fitness.
2. **Simile:** In stanza 3, the speaker, using a simile, compares the “fresh[ness]” of a dream in her younger self’s mind to “the white paper to write it on.” This “white paper” symbolizes innocence, youth, and potential. Readers can think of “white paper” as a kind of blank slate, something full of potential and promise because it does not have any marks on it yet.
3. **Contrast:** This blank slate may also be associated with youth and innocence, as a blank slate has not yet been tainted by anything; it remains pure, untouched. The speaker associates this innocence, youth, and hope with her nine-year-old self. Both are essentially blank slates, full of potential, unmarked by the trials of time. This contrasts with the speaker’s adult self, which has been scarred and “spoiled.”
4. **Metaphor:** The physical act of jumping out a window after waking up suggests a fearless, enthusiastic, energetic, and playful attitude. However, rather than jumping out onto the grass outside, the speaker’s younger self jumps “into the summer morning.” The “jump,” therefore, transforms from a physical act to a metaphorical one. This jump reflects the younger self embracing and living fully in the moment of this “summer morning.” As summer is a time of warmth and happiness, the younger self is embracing this joy.
5. **Structure:** The poem is made up of six stanzas of varying lengths and is not written using any particular meter, rhyme scheme, or traditional form, however. Rather, the poem is structured as a dramatic monologue composed in free verse. The general lack of structure resonates with the free-spirited nature of the speaker’s nine-year-old self.
6. **Dramatic monologue:** The poem is framed as a dramatic monologue delivered by the speaker to her childhood self.

“Arms and The Boy” — Possible Discussion Points

Dominant Themes

1. **Corruption of innocence:** The poem’s central theme focuses on the conflict of a young boy’s innocence being corrupted by the coming war. His youth and vulnerability are emphasised with the brutality and cruelty of the bayonet.
2. **Unnaturalness of violence:** Owen illustrates how manmade weapons can turn boys into creatures of destruction, while all the time expressing the wrongness of this.

Authorial Choices

1. **Personification:** The blade is personified as having “malice,” cruelty and a hunger for blood, thus reinforcing the upcoming conflict of World War 1 and the way young boys were killed.
2. **Contrast:** The contrast of the boy’s youth with the cruelty of the weapons makes up the majority of the poem.
3. **Alliteration:** The repeated plosive /b/ sounds (“blind, blunt bullet”) emphasises the potential violence and destruction of the bullets.
4. **Juxtaposition:** The poet juxtaposes the terrible armaments of the last two stanzas to the true nature of this young man. He should not be dealing with the bayonet or bullets. Rather, his teeth should be “laughing round an apple.” He is not a beast or a monster. There are no claws on his hands or “talons at his heels.” The boy should not, but likely will, be made into a creature of destruction.
5. **Rhyme:** The half-rhymes Owen uses are purposefully jarring, and so this poem is formally uncomfortable to read, fitting its stark subject of the corruptive influence of war on those drawn into it.
6. **Enjambment:** The enjambment encourages the reader to move seamlessly through the poem, mirroring the way memories and thoughts can flow into one another.



HOW TO ANALYZE A POEM IN DEPTH

Analysis of a Poem

SUBJECT • Topic • Speaker	• What is the subject or topic of the poem? • Who is the speaker? • What is the speaker’s attitude towards the topic?	
PURPOSE • Theme • Message	• What is the poet’s purpose in writing this poem? • What message does the poet want to communicate? • What is the poet or speaker’s tone?	
EMOTIONS • Mood • Feeling	• What is the predominant mood of the poem? • Does the mood change during the poem? • What emotions or feelings does the poet seek to evoke?	
CRAFT • Techniques		
	FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE	• What examples of metaphor, simile, personification, symbol, or hyperbole can you find? • How can you unpack these and develop them? How does the figurative language add to the effect?
	IMAGERY	• What striking examples of imagery do you notice? • What can you picture? • What can you hear or smell? • Are these images violent, pleasant, frightening? • Look for visual, auditory, olfactory, or tactile imagery.
	LANGUAGE	• How would you describe the poet’s choice of words – vivid, shocking, sentimental, clichéd, etc.? • Is the language appropriate to the subject or theme? • Is the language colloquial or more formal? • What effect does the language have on the overall effect of the poem?
	MUSIC SOUND RHYTHM	• Does the poem have a regular or irregular rhythm? • Is the rhythm slow or fast? • Does it change? Why? • What effect does the rhythm have on the overall effect of the poem? • What are the sound features of the poem? • What specific words have interesting sounds? • Does the poet use onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance, consonance? • Does the poet use rhyme or repetition? • What effect do the sound features have on the overall effect of the poem?
	STRUCTURE	• How is the poem structured? • Is it a conventional form such as sonnet, etc.? • Does it have stanzas with a regular number of lines? • Do sections deal with different ideas or themes? • Is there a progression in the ideas? • Is there a repetition of ideas? • What is the effect of the structure on the overall effect of the poem?

Adapted from *Appreciating Poetry*, Sadler, Hayllar, Powell (Macmillan, South Yarra, 2001) and *Paper One - How to Analyze Poetry Deeply* - SPEC FILMS, Cohen, Andrew & Giles, David YouTube, uploaded by IB English Guys, 1 Nov. 2021



CROSS-MEDIA CONNECTION – PERSEPOLIS

DRIVING QUESTIONS

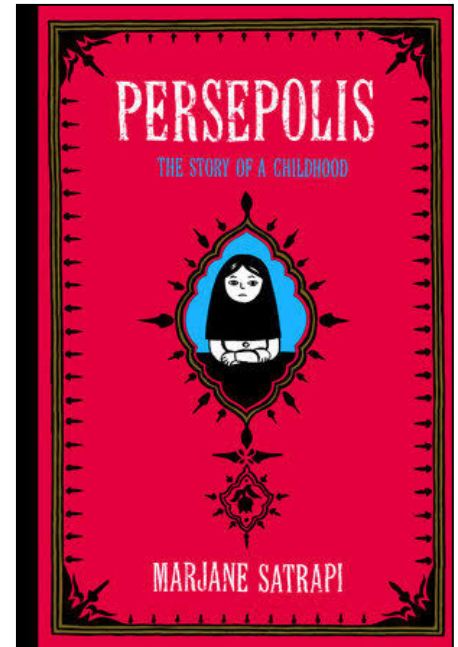
What value is there in studying graphic novels?

How can they effectively represent conflict?

Exploring *Persepolis* alongside *My Sweet Land* can enhance student exploration of key themes and storytelling representations around coming of age, belonging, home, displacement, etc.

Read the novel *Persepolis* with the students. The novel is available online [here](#).

In reading the book, students should be exploring the ways in which Satrapi uses authorial choices to illustrate and represent Marji's struggle. Students can be put into groups and focus on an assigned or chosen chapter to present their opinions to the class. Presentations can be individual or responses can be written. Giving students the graphic terminology will help their explanations develop analysis and critical thinking skills. This [Graphic Novel Analysis Worksheet](#) can be used. The questions below, from the worksheet, can guide student engagement with *Persepolis*.



Questions to Guide Student Engagement with Persepolis — To be applied to any panel

1. Which panel (or sequence) stands out to you as representing Marji's conflict? (Number the panels left to right, top to bottom, and indicate the page. E.g., p. 5, panel 2.)
2. What size is the panel in relation to the rest of the page?
3. Are there any features of formatting that you can identify? For example, is it the same size as the other panels on that page? Is there a border? Is it a splash or a bleed?
4. Is the panel typical of Satrapi's style? (E.g., She generally uses 4–6 panels per page with clearly defined borders. On page 71, the panel is a splash, which is unusual.)
5. What text is used in your panel, if any? Are captions or speech bubbles used?
6. What techniques were used to present Marji's sense of conflict?
7. Does the panel focus more on Marji's personal development or on the conflict within Iran? How is this shown?
8. Are there any other choices that are interesting?
9. What do you think was the main purpose of this panel?



Extension Activities for *Persepolis*

1. Have students reflect on their own sense of identity and conflict with a task wherein they recreate Marji's split identity panel (page 6, panel 1) with a simple sketch of themselves and aspects of their identity that conflict. These could relate to a time in their life or aspects of their identity.
2. Have students create a similar panel for Vrej, using Satrapi's simple black and white style. This task can allow students to understand how autobiography can be expressed visually.

Supporting Materials

1. [Persepolis slides](#)
2. [PDF of Persepolis](#)
3. [Glossary of Graphic Novel Terms](#)
4. [Blank Comic/Graphic Novel Panels](#)

GRAPHIC NOVEL ANALYSIS



To be applied to any panel

1. Which panel (or sequence) stands out to you as representing Marji's conflict? (Number the panels left to right, top to bottom, and indicate the page. E.g., p. 5, panel 2.)
2. What size is the panel in relation to the rest of the page?
3. Are there any features of formatting that you can identify? For example, is it the same size as the other panels on that page? Is there a border? Is it a splash or a bleed?
4. Is the panel typical of Satrapi's style? (E.g., She generally uses 4–6 panels per page with clearly defined borders. On page 71, the panel is a splash, which is unusual.)
5. What text is used in your panel, if any? Are captions or speech bubbles used?
6. What techniques were used to present Marji's sense of conflict?
7. Does the panel focus more on Marji's personal development or on the conflict within Iran? How is this shown?
8. Are there any other choices that are interesting?
9. What do you think was the main purpose of this panel?



GRAPHIC NOVEL ANALYSIS

To be applied to any panel

1. Which panel (or sequence) stands out to you as representing Marji's conflict?
(Number the panels left to right, top to bottom, and indicate the page. E.g., p. 5, panel 2.)

Page 117, panel 9



2. What size is the panel in relation to the rest of the page?

The panel is one of the smallest on the page. The previous panels all get smaller. This can help us see the larger panels as being bigger factors in Marji's decision to smoke.

3. Are there any features of formatting that you can identify? For example, is it the same size as the other panels on that page? Is there a border? Is it a splash or a bleed?

It is the same size as the last four panels on the page. There is a mixture of text and image. The background is black. Marji is looking directly at the reader and is in the foreground of the picture.

4. Is the panel typical of Satrapi's style? (E.g., She generally uses 4–6 panels per page with clearly defined borders. On page 71, the panel is a splash, which is unusual.)

It is on the smaller side of her usual style. The size helps to develop the idea that so many different parts make up Marji's conflict in adolescence.

5. What text is used in your panel, if any? Are captions or speech bubbles used?

There is a speech bubble and a caption. The caption is at the bottom which means we are more likely to read the bubble/direct speech first. The caption is her older self narrating her past and the speech bubble is what the younger Marji was thinking at the time. Therefore we get to see the juxtaposition of Satrapi's past and present.

6. What techniques were used to present Marji's sense of conflict?

The cigarette is used as a symbol of rebellion. It is smoking, so the white lines draw our attention to how important this moment was. The fingers holding the cigarette, are drawn almost as a victory sign. This shows how significant the moment was to Marji at the time. Her posture and eye contact are assertive.

7. Does the panel focus more on Marji's personal development or on the conflict within Iran? How is this shown?

The use of black and white is visually interesting as there are no shades of gray, and no color. This could show that Marji looks at her life in a very black and white, simple way, even though she writes about complex issues.

8. Are there any other choices that are interesting?

This panel focuses on Marji's development. This is shown by having her dominate the space, and by all of the words emphasising herself, such as the repetition of "I."

9. What do you think was the main purpose of this panel?

In using a cigarette to say that she is a "grown up now," Satrapi shows us the tension in what a child believes being a grown up means. Her young self is unaware, and this is funny. The moment is not specific to a time or place, but is rather focusing on a universal stereotype of teenage growth, so it emphasises how we are united rather than separated by national issues.

GLOSSARY OF GRAPHIC NOVEL TERMS



Bleed: An image that extends to and/or beyond the edge of the page.

Border: The drawn boundary around a panel. Can also be called a **frame**.

Borderless panel: A panel without a defined boundary.

Captions: These are boxes containing a variety of text elements, including scene-setting, description, etc. Also known as “**Voice-overs**” as they are direct information from the narrator.

Emanata: This term refers to the teardrops, sweat drops, question marks, or motion lines that artists draw besides characters’ faces to portray emotion.

Graphic weight: A term that describes the visual heaviness of the use of shading.

Gutter: The space between framed panels.

Frame: The lines and borders that contain the panels.

Foregrounding: Placing the dominant image in the foreground, close to the viewer – usually to establish an emotional connection to the viewer, or to emphasise the importance of the object or person.

Midground: Allows centering of image by using natural resting place for vision. The artist deliberately decides to place the image where a viewer would be most likely to look first. Placing an image off-center or near the top or bottom can be used to create visual tension, but using the midground permits the artist to create a more readily accepted image.

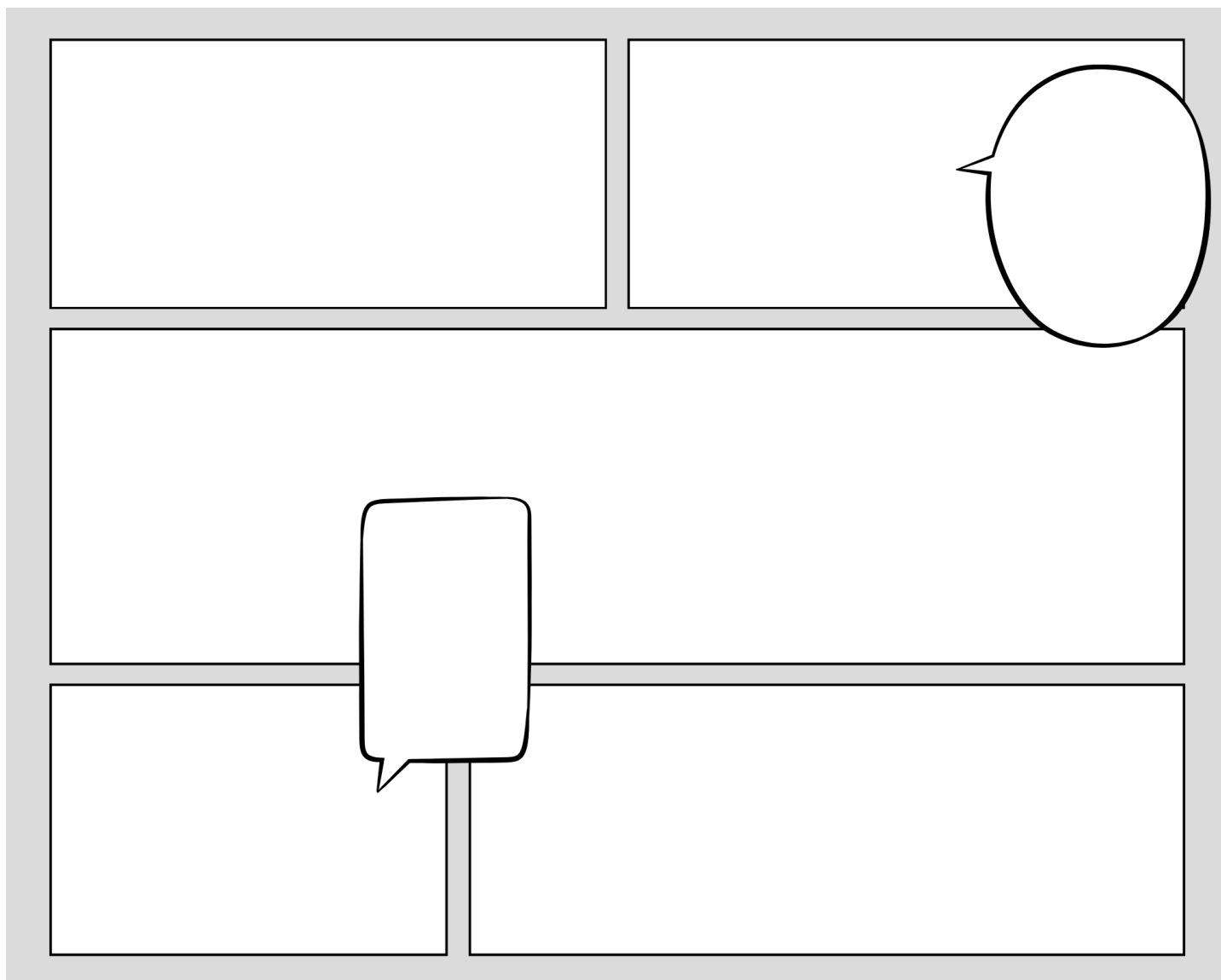
Panel: A distinct segment of the comic, containing a combination of image and text in endless variety. Panels offer a different experience than simply reading text: the spatial arrangement allows an immediate juxtaposition of the present and the past.

Special-effects lettering: This is a method of drawing attention to text; it often highlights onomatopoeia and reinforces the impact of words such as **bang** or **wow**.

Speech bubbles: These enclose dialogue and come from a specific speaker’s mouth; they vary in size, shape, and layout and can alternate to depict a conversation.

Splash: A panel that spreads across the entire width or height of the page. It differs from a bleed, as the image is still contained within the border.

BLANK COMIC / GRAPHIC NOVEL PANELS





TITLE:





Media literacy is the ability to access, understand, evaluate, and create all forms of communication. Often when we think of media literacy, we might only think of television or the news or film, but media is expansive and includes social media as well. Media literacy is linked with critical thinking and effective communication.

Media analysis involves considering who made the media content, what techniques/approaches were used in creating it, what values and/or motivations are behind the media's creation, what audience the media was created to appeal to, and what the purpose of the created content is.

DRIVING QUESTION: *What is media literacy and why is it important?*

Personal Reflection / In-Class Writing

1. Why and how should we analyze media?
2. Why are multiple stories and voices valuable?

Discussion Questions

1. What various forms of media can you think of?
2. What media do you consume regularly?
3. What is literacy?
4. What types of literacy are there?
5. What does media literacy mean to you?

A documentary film is a nonfiction film.

Typically, this means the film is not scripted. However, documentary filmmaking can involve a writing process, often in the form of an outline. The documentary filmmaking process can take many years and involves a high level of research in the pre-production phase (the phase before the film team begins shootings). In recent years, attention to the ethics of documentary filmmaking has become important. This means consideration by the film team for the subjects of the documentary, with an emphasis on respect for their privacy and establishing a clear understanding of the film's goals. Understanding the approach of the documentary filmmaker is an important aspect of media literacy.

These questions are also available in our [Media Analysis Worksheet](#), which can be completed in the classroom individually or in small groups with a note taker if that is preferable to open discussion.



Extension Activities

1. Have learners write a film review for the film. They may want to use the notes from their [Active Viewing Worksheet](#) (if this was used) and it may be helpful to have them complete the [Film Review Worksheet](#) as well to prepare and organize their thoughts before they begin writing. They may also want to consult the [Glossary of Film Terms](#).
2. Sareen Hairabedian, the director of the film, selected a documentary film as her form of media to tell a story about Artsakh. She selected Vrej as the central subject of her film, but there are other ways a creator could have chosen to tell a story about Artsakh. Have learners use the [Different Kinds of Media Worksheet](#) to explore alternative ways that a story of Artsakh could have been told. Learners can include narrative filmmaking or could explore a different subject as the focus for a film about Artsakh.
3. The loss of innocence for children in Artsakh is a clear theme of *My Sweet Land*. Being raised between conflicts and then in the midst of a conflict has created an experience for Vrej and his younger siblings that is highly nationalized and militarized. Have learners explore this through the [Crafting a Story Worksheet](#). They can complete it individually or in small groups. Or the questions on this worksheet can

be used for deeper classroom discussion. Alternatively, learners could write an essay about the representations of militarism shown in the film and the influence of this militarism on children.

4. It is likely that unless a learner has a personal connection to Armenia or lives in a community with individuals with connections to Armenia, they probably have not heard of Artsakh. Typically, learners consume media that reflects their own lived experience, or if they consume media that is reflective of a community outside of their own, they may focus on one community rather than watching diverse media content. It can be interesting to have learners track their media viewing habits for a week or two. Share the [Windows and Mirrors Handout](#) with learners to use as they track their media. Remind them of the expansive definition of media (music, video games, film, social media, etc.). For windows, learners will list media that represents a community or lived experience that is different from their own. For mirrors, they will list media that is reflective of their own community and lived experience. You could encourage students to do this at different times throughout the semester and encourage them to extend their media consumption to include representations that are atypical for them and can increase their understanding of others.

MEDIA ANALYSIS



1. Who created this? Does the filmmaker approach this film objectively or subjectively? Please support your answer with examples from the film.

2. What storytelling techniques and filmmaking approaches were used in this film? (Please reference the glossary of film terms as you consider this question.)

3. What values and/or motivations influenced the making of this film?

4. What audience do you think this film was primarily made for? How might different people and/or different audiences understand the message of the film differently?

5. What do you think was the main purpose of this film (the reason it was created)? Consider objective and subjective points of view as you explore this question.

6. What is the primary point of view in this film? How present is the filmmaker?

7. How do the editorial choices made in the film influence its presentation of the reality that Vrej was facing?



DIFFERENT KINDS OF MEDIA

Directions: In each section of the graphic organizer below, list as many examples of media as you can. Try to be as specific as possible. Under “More,” place any media that does not fit into the other categories.

Social Media	Print Media
Moving Images	More

CRAFTING A STORY: COMING OF AGE IN CONFLICT

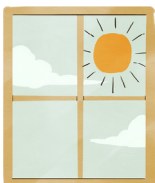


1. What story did you feel the filmmaker, Sareen Hairabedian, wanted to tell through this film? Why do you think she chose to focus primarily on Vrej? What are the essential moments that move the film forward? What role does this conflict, impending and then happening, play in the film?
2. What role does nationalism and/or militarism play in the film? What other themes are central to this film?
3. What role do Vrej's younger siblings play in the film? How does Sareen Hairabedian focus on their experiences?
4. What role does Vrej's grandmother play in the film, and the elder generation in general?
5. In the choices that Hairabedian has made, do you think her story highlights militarism or the disruption of childhood that happens because of conflict? Is she portraying both? Is she highlighting something else?
6. How did Vrej change over the course of the film? (Consider his opinion of guns, his experience at the military training camp, his dialogue with his family, his final words to the filmmaker.)
7. What lasting point or feeling did the film leave you with? How did the film change you, the viewer?



MY MEDIA: WINDOWS AND MIRRORS

Think about the TV shows, movies, music, books, games, and short form entertainment you enjoy. Fill the window with examples that include representations of people, places, and cultures that are different from your own. Fill the mirror with examples that reflect versions of yourself back to you. Reflect on the responses. Is it balanced? If not, can you add media to balance the two? Ask friends, classmates, and community members for suggestions.



Windows

date	media	how it is a window

Inspired by Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop's inclusive reading pedagogy



Mirrors

date	media	how it is a window



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Armenian History/Studies

There are several useful short YouTube videos on the history of the region and roots of the conflict, including by [USC Institute for Armenian Studies](#) (5:41) and [Vox](#) (9:25).

[The Genocide Education Project](#) has numerous teaching resources relating to the 1915 Armenian Genocide.

Learn more about the Armenian Genocide: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's [Holocaust Encyclopedia](#).

Learn more about the Armenian diaspora around the world through the [Armenian High Commission for Diaspora Affairs](#) and [Repat Armenia](#).

Artsakh and the South Caucasus Region

Learn more about the history and culture of Artsakh through [Americans4Artsakh](#). Armenian culture more generally can be explored through the [Armenian Museum of America](#).

Learn about the destruction of cultural heritage: [Caucasus Heritage Watch](#).

The difficult plight of refugees from Artsakh living in Armenia can be explored through [Crisis Group](#), [Caucasus Watch](#), and the [Smithsonian Center for Folklife & Cultural Heritage](#).

The text of the U.S.-negotiated 2025 [Joint Declaration](#). Dutch think tank [Clingendael](#) has a thorough brief on the 2025 peace deal.

The [Stockholm International Peace Research Institute](#) has several resources that track arms sales to either side in the conflict.

Various statements and speeches about the conflict can be found through the [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe](#) website. Go to resources and search Nagorno-Karabakh.

Filmmaking/Media Literacy

[Dartmouth Libraries](#) online resources to learn more about documentary filmmaking.

[Media Literacy Now](#)

[National Association for Media Literacy Education](#)

[National Council for Social Studies Media Literacy Resources](#)

Nationalism

[OER Project Resources](#) for teaching about nationalism.

[The Council on Foreign Relations](#) has a useful article discussing nationalism around the world.



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Educating for Global Understanding

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We create educational resources that spark community discussions and/or promote proactive learning for youth, parents, educators in K-12 and higher education, home-schoolers, and other learning communities. We also **create impact materials for libraries and community organizations.**

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Our resources focus on cultivating human empathy and compassion, developing a deeper knowledge of global issues and current challenges, and encouraging civic engagement.



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