

**TITLE**

# EXPLORING THE HISTORY, CULTURE, AND SYMBOLS OF THE PARSI PEOPLE

GRADE LEVEL: 6-8

**DISCIPLINE:** World History

**TOPIC:** Parsi history and culture

**STANDARDS:** Common Core Standards: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.7 NCSS Standards: Culture and Cultural Diversity; Individuals, Groups, and Institutions, History

**OBJECTIVES:**

- Explain how the Parsi community exists both historically and contemporarily
- Compare and contrast the use of symbols in culture by discussing symbols relating to the Zoroastrian celebration of Nowruz and elements of students' own cultures
- Research, explain, and present the significance of symbols in their own cultures

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:**

- What is the history and culture of the Parsi community?
- How are symbols used in relation to the Zoroastrian celebration of Nowruz and elements of students' own cultures, and where can I find symbols in other cultures?

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- Digital student [workbook](#) (edit/print [here](#))
- [Trivia Game](#) (edited/ print [here](#))
- [Project worksheet](#) (edited/print [here](#))

**KIT INCLUDES:**

- [Student Workbook Slides](#)
- [Trivia Game](#)
- [Project worksheet](#)
- Glossary of Terms (page 4)
- Background Reading for Educator (page 4)

**CLASSROOM HOURS NEEDED:**

About 2 hours

**FINAL ASSESSMENT TYPE:**

Project and presentation

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## INTRODUCTION

The Parsi people are an ethnoreligious group living in India and are a community that is vibrant and has a rich history. Parsis practice Zoroastrianism, which originated in Ancient Persia and is one of the oldest religions in the world. In this lesson, students will explore the history and modern traditions of Parsis and Zoroastrianism by learning about the New Year, Nowruz. Students will practice analysis, research, and presentation skills by analyzing and explaining symbols relating to Nowruz and in their own cultures.

### Why teach about minority groups like the Parsi community?

Often, smaller communities are overlooked in world history, which leads to an incomplete view of certain (especially non-European) regions. Often, only the dominant group is mentioned, so minorities are unrepresented and forgotten by the wider world. Given that policy decisions often disproportionately affect minority groups, it's important that students are aware of the existence of groups other than the majority. Additionally, many widely practiced traditions, like Nowruz, originate from minority groups, and it is important to understand where they come from and their meaning. In this lesson, students will discover that there are more cultures, religions, and ethnicities than they were previously exposed to and will be prepared to understand the vast diversity of the world.

### LESSON INTRODUCTION (5 minutes)

Have everyone go around and say a holiday (from their own culture, if they are comfortable) and a symbol they associate with it (for example, Christmas/ Christmas tree, Hanukkah/ menorah, Lunar New Year/lanterns, Diwali/ oil lamps, Día de los Muertos/ cempasúchil).

## CONTEXTUALIZATION (15 minutes)

Give students the link to the [student workbook slides](#) and have them progress through slides 1-8, or present the slides to the class. Remind students to read/listen carefully to prepare for the trivia game. Provide students with the Glossary of Terms on pages 4-5 of the lesson plan.

### TRIVIA GAME (20 minutes)

Play the [Trivia game](#) to assess the class's overall understanding of the Parsi community. The goal of this assessment is not to award points, but to see how well the entire class has learned the material and if objective 1 has been met.

**NOWRUZ AND SYMBOLISM**  
(10 minutes)

Present Slides 12-15 of the student workbook slides and discuss questions on the slides as a class.

**PROJECT INTRODUCTION**  
(20 minutes)

- The project will assess objectives 1 and 2
- Discussion (student workbook slide 16):
  - What are some symbols you can think of in your own culture?
  - What do they represent?
  - What are some common meanings of symbols across cultures?
  - What purposes do symbols serve in culture?
- Present the instructions to the symbolism project on student workbook slide 17
- Provide project [worksheet](#) and materials to students

**PROJECT PRESENTATIONS**  
(25 minutes)

- Student presentation options:
  - Gallery: artwork and written "artist statement" explanations in paragraph form hung around the classroom and students peruse the gallery
  - Art compilation book - all the artwork and written artist statements are compiled into a book
  - Public speaking - students give a "guest artist talk" explaining their artwork and display their artwork (instead of a written artist's statement)

**CONCLUSION** (15 minutes)

- Discussion (student workbook slide 18):
  - Compare the symbols your peers presented to the Parsi/ Zoroastrian symbols. How are they similar or different?
  - Why is it important to learn about the culture, history, and traditions of different communities?
  - What is important about the Parsi community and traditions?

To help guide students through the discussion, read "Why teach about minority groups like the Parsi community?" on page 2 of this lesson plan.



## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- Ethnoreligious - a group of people with a common religion and ethnicity Zoroastrianism - a monotheistic religion that originated in Ancient Persia
- Asylum - protection for refugees
- Hindu - a follower of Hinduism, which is a religion and culture originating in South Asia Sanjan - a town in the state of Gujarat which was the earliest settlement of the Parsis in India Bombay - India's largest city (now called Mumbai)
- Gujarati - a language spoken in the Indian state of Gujarat
- Sari - a type of clothing worn by women in India Zarathustra - prophet who founded Zoroastrianism
- Avesta - the Zoroastrian holy book
- Ahura Mazda - the Zoroastrian God, name means "Wise Lord"
- Gathas - religious poems of personal expressions of Zarathushtra's belief in Ahura Mazda
- Ritual - a religious ceremony
- Consciousness - awareness about something
- Spenta Mainyu - Zoroastrian spirit of truth
- Getig - Zoroastrian name for the physical world
- Violation - breaking
- Angra Mainyu or Ahriman - Zoroastrian spirit of evil
- Humata - good thoughts
- Hukhta - good words
- Huvarshta - good deeds
- Pessimism - attitude in which one anticipates that the worst will happen
- Congregational religion - a religion in which the majority of people can/ do participate in ritual
- Laypeople - people who are not religious leaders
- Nowruz - Zoroastrian and Persian New Year
- Gahambars - six major Zoroastrian festivals
- Asha Vahista - Zoroastrian idea of the Highest Truth
- Sacred - connected to god and religion
- Haft chin - a table set up for Nowruz which includes items which symbolize Zoroastrian divine beings
- Divine - relating to God
- Prosperity - success, wealth, and good fortune
- Sofreh - a white tablecloth used on the Haft Chin table which symbolizes purity

### BACKGROUND READING FOR EDUCATOR

Book: Zoroastrianism World Religions Series  
[\*Norooz Zoroastrian New Year\*](#)  
[\*Persian New Year Nowruz: Haft Seen Table\*](#)  
[\*Parsi | Religion, History, & Facts\*](#)  
[\*Parsi Identity\*](#)



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