



FEZANA Age-Appropriate Lesson Plan

Subject category (Circle one): Religion/Ceremony Celebration **History** Prayer
Gathas Comparative Religion Shahnameh

Age Group (circle one): PreK-K Grades 1-3 Grades 4-5 Grades 6-8 **Grades 9-12**

Lesson (if applicable): Lesson 6

Subject of the Lesson: The Achaemenids- Remaining Kings

Background knowledge for teacher:

Highlights for Each Successive King

After Xerxes I, the Achaemenid Empire faced constant power struggles, assassinations, and instability. Artaxerxes I (465-425 BC), also called Longimanus, took the throne after his brothers were killed. He dealt with an Egyptian revolt supported by Athens and used a strategy of making Greek city-states fight each other to keep Persia in control. He also helped broker the **Peace of Callias (448/447 BC)** and continued major building projects. He is mentioned in the Bible (Ezra and Nehemiah) for allowing the revival of Judaism.

His son, Xerxes II (425-424 BC), ruled for only 45 days before being murdered, followed by Sogdianus, who was also assassinated. Darius II (424-404 BC) ruled Persia and Egypt with his wife and half-sister, Parysatis. He stopped a rebellion in **Media** but lost control of Egypt in 410 BC.

Artaxerxes II (404-358 BC), known for his great memory, defeated his brother Cyrus the Younger in 401 BC, but the war drained Persia's resources. Instead of fighting directly, he used money to keep Athens and Sparta at war. He also negotiated the **King's Peace**, forcing Sparta into a treaty with Athens, which helped Persia stay in control.

His son, Artaxerxes III (359-338 BC), was a harsh but effective ruler. By 342 BC, he reconquered Egypt and ended all revolts. To secure his power, he killed all his relatives, but in 338 BC, he was murdered by his commander, Bagoas.

The pattern continued when Arses (Artaxerxes IV) (338-336 BC) was also killed by Bagoas. This led to Darius III (336-331 BC) becoming king, but he had little experience in court politics. His reign would soon be tested by Persia's biggest challenge yet—Alexander the Great.

Artaxerxes I (465-424 BC): A Strategic and Influential King

Artaxerxes I, also known as Ardeshir in Persian, was the son of Xerxes I. His name means "one whose reign is based on truth." He was nicknamed "Longimanus" because his right hand was supposedly longer than his left. After his father was murdered, his older brother Darius was also killed. Another



brother, Hystaspes, was defeated in battle, leaving Artaxerxes as the only surviving male heir.



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During his reign, Persia faced another revolt in Egypt, which Athens supported. Instead of fighting directly, Artaxerxes funded Sparta to weaken Athens, forcing the Greeks to fight among themselves. Eventually, Athens, exhausted from war, negotiated the **Peace of Callias (449 BC)** with Persia, agreeing to stay out of each other's territories. Later, when war broke out between Athens and Sparta in 431 BC, both sides asked Persia for help, which further distracted them from Persian affairs.

Artaxerxes played a key role in rebuilding the Jewish community in Jerusalem. He sent Ezra, a Jewish priest, to oversee religious and civil matters and granted him access to royal treasuries (Ezra 7:11). Later, his cupbearer Nehemiah told him about Jerusalem's weak defenses. Artaxerxes provided soldiers, safe passage, and materials to rebuild the city's walls (Nehemiah 2:1).

"Artaxerxes Granting Liberty to the Jews" by Gustave Doré



Artaxerxes continued his father's Hall of a Hundred Columns project in Persepolis but later moved to Susa, where he spent most of his reign. A palace in Susa burned down toward the end of his life, and he retired to Persepolis. He later returned to Susa, where he died on the same day as his wife, Damaspia. He was buried at Naqsh-e Rostam.



Artaxerxes' resting place: Naqsh-I-Rustam, 12 km northwest of Persepolis

Xerxes II: A Short and Tragic Reign

After Artaxerxes I died in 424 BC, his son Xerxes II, born to Queen Damaspiia, became king. However, his reign was extremely short-just 45 days.

One night, after drinking heavily at a festival, Xerxes II was assassinated in his sleep. His killer was Sogdianus, his half-brother and the son of Artaxerxes I and a Babylonian concubine named Alogune.

Sogdianus: A Brief and Bloody Rule

After successfully assassinating his brother, Sogdianus secured his position as king in 423 BC, but his reign was short-lived.

Another half-brother, Ochus (Darius II), the son of Artaxerxes I and the Babylonian concubine Cosmartidene, overthrew and killed Sogdianus later that same year.

Darius II: A King of Alliances and Struggles

Darius II, originally named Ochus, took the throne in 423 BC and adopted the name Darius after becoming king. He ruled Persia and Egypt alongside his queen and half-sister, Parysatis.

During his reign, Darius II formed an alliance with Sparta to weaken Athens. He is also mentioned in the **Book of Ezra**, as he supported Jewish religious traditions and enforced Passover ceremonies at Ezra's request.

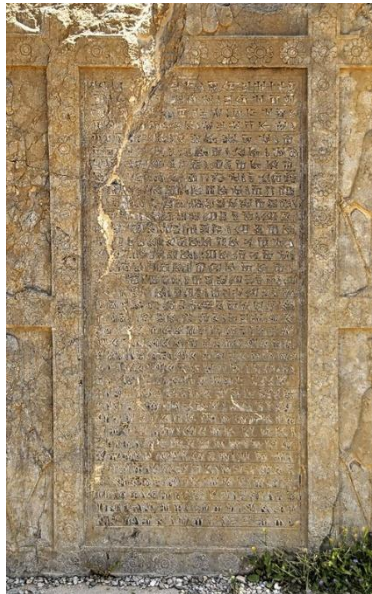
Despite his efforts to maintain control, Darius II faced challenges. He successfully suppressed a revolt in Media, but in 410 BC, he lost control of Egypt. After ruling for 19 years, he died in 405 BC, leaving behind a kingdom facing internal and external struggles.

Artaxerxes II: A King of Strategy and Power



Artaxerxes II, known as Mnemon for his sharp memory, became king after his father, Darius II, died. His rule was filled with challenges, including a rebellion by his own brother, Cyrus the Younger. With the support of their mother, Parysatis, Cyrus gathered 13,000 Greek mercenaries to fight for the throne. However, in 401 BC, Artaxerxes defeated and killed Cyrus at the Battle of Cunaxa. This conflict kept Persia's army busy, preventing an attempt to reclaim Egypt.

To weaken Sparta, Artaxerxes funded their enemies, including Athens, Thebes, and Corinth. Later, in 386 BC, he changed sides and helped negotiate the **King's Peace**, forcing Athens and Sparta into a treaty that favored Persia.



Artaxerxes was seen as an approachable king. He ordered his Queen, Stateira, to ride in an open carriage, so people could see her. The historian Plutarch described him as a kind ruler and brave warrior. However, power struggles within his family continued. According to a Greek doctor at his court, Artaxerxes executed his eldest son, Darius, for plotting against him, and his second son also died.

Artaxerxes left an inscription on a staircase at Darius' palace, which stated, "May Ahuramazda and the god Mithra preserve me, my country, and what has been built by me." This inscription honored the gods and served as a prayer for protection over his kingdom and accomplishments.

Artaxerxes II Inscription on his addition of the western staircase to Darius' Palace, Tachara, reads.

Artaxerxes III: A Ruthless but Powerful King

Ochus, the third son of Artaxerxes II, became king and took the name Artaxerxes III. To secure his throne, he ordered the deaths of all his relatives, no matter their age or gender. He was known as a harsh ruler, but he was also an effective leader.



During his 20-year reign, he reconquered Egypt, making it part of the Persian Empire again. However, his rule ended when he was poisoned by his own courtier, Bagoas, in 338 BC.

Artaxerxes IV: A Short and Tragic Reign

Arses, also known as Artaxerxes IV, became king in 338 BC. His rule lasted only two years before he was murdered by his courtier, Bagoas, in 336 BC.

Lesson for students:

Lesson Objectives / Learning Targets:

At the end of the lesson, students should understand the following...

- how the Persian Empire used diplomacy and financial influence to shape Greek affairs and maintain power in the region.
- how palace intrigue and competition for the throne led to instability and frequent leadership changes in the Persian Empire.
- the effects of poor succession planning on the Persian Empire, including its impact on leadership, stability, and long-term control.

Materials Needed:

- None

Vocabulary:

- **Peace of Callias:** A peace treaty, traditionally dated around 449 BCE, between the Persian Empire and Athens (and its allies) that ended the Greco-Persian Wars. It limited Persian influence in the Aegean and recognized Greek autonomy in Asia Minor.
- **Book of Ezra:** A book in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament that describes the return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple under Persian rule. It highlights the role of Ezra, a priest and scribe, in restoring Jewish law and worship.
- **King's Peace:** Also called the Peace of Antalcidas, this treaty ended the Corinthian War between Sparta, Athens, Thebes, and Corinth. It was brokered by the Persian King Artaxerxes II, who enforced Persian control over Greek city-states in Asia Minor while recognizing Sparta's dominance in Greece.

Activity for Students:



1. Have students answer the essential questions listed below.
2. After learning about the “remaining kings,” have students work collectively or in smaller groups to create a rap or song listing the order of the “remaining kings” and highlight any significance they had in history. Share this song as an example from the musical, *Six* about the six wives of King Henry VIII: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eggqtAo8WSI> (start at 1:25).
3. Have students perform their rap or song. Afterward, students will reflect on the activity by discussing which kings stood out most and what patterns they noticed in Persian leadership.

Essential Questions: Use the questions for class discussion.

- How did Xerxes ascend to the throne?
 - What role did his father, Darius I, play?
- Xerxes’ first major task was to suppress an Egyptian Revolt. Do you see a pattern emerging?
- What were some of the engineering accomplishments during Xerxes’ reign, and why were they important?
- What happened at Thermopylae and Athens? Why were these events important?

Sources: Mr. Xerxes Kotval’s material

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