



## FEZANA Age-Appropriate Lesson Plan

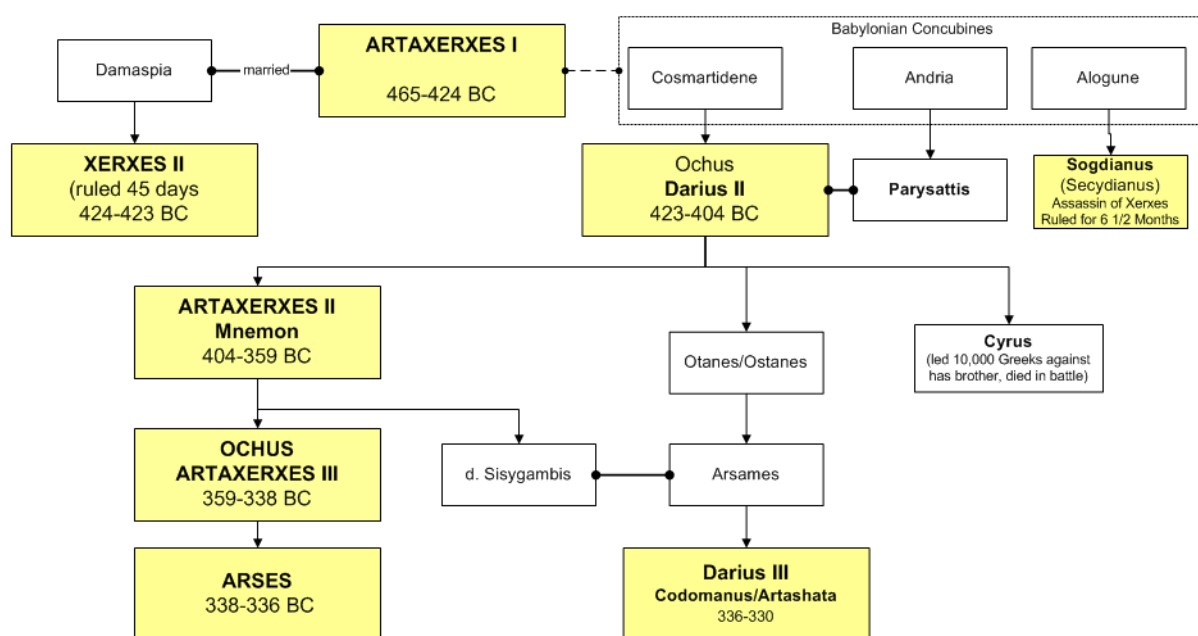
**Subject category (circle one):** Religion/Ceremony      Celebration **History**  
Prayer Gathas      Comparative Religion      Shahnameh

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

**Lesson # (if applicable):** Lesson 7

**Subject of the Lesson:** The Achaemenids- Darius III, the Last King

**Background knowledge for teacher:**



### Darius III Codomannus (336-330 BC) – The Last King of the Achaemenid Empire

Artaxerxes III of Persia and all his sons—except one, Arses—were assassinated by a powerful courtier named Bagoas. Bagoas placed Arses on the throne as a puppet king, but when Arses proved difficult to control, Bagoas had him killed in 336 BC. To maintain his influence, Bagoas then installed Codomannus, the last surviving legitimate heir. However, Codomannus, now ruling as Darius III, refused to be a puppet. When Bagoas attempted to poison him, Darius discovered the plot and forced Bagoas to drink the poison himself.

Darius III came from a distant branch of the royal family and had earned recognition through his bravery in battle. He was the son of Arsames and Sisygambis, making him a descendant of Artaxerxes II. At age 46, he became king of an empire in turmoil.



The Persian Empire was vast but unstable. Many of its governors, called **satraps**, were power-hungry and unreliable, and rebellions—like one in Egypt—further weakened Persian control. Darius's first major challenge was restoring order in Egypt, which he managed to do after about a year. However, a much greater threat was rising: Alexander the Great was coming for Persia.

### The Rise of Alexander the Great

At the same time Darius III became king of Persia, a young ruler named Alexander took the throne of Macedon, a kingdom in northern Greece. He inherited a powerful army and a well-organized government from his father, Philip II.

With Greece under his control, Alexander set out to complete his father's dream—expanding Macedonian power. In 334 BC, he launched an invasion of Persian-controlled Asia Minor, marking the beginning of a ten-year campaign that would change history forever.



### The Battle of Granicus – Spring 334 BC

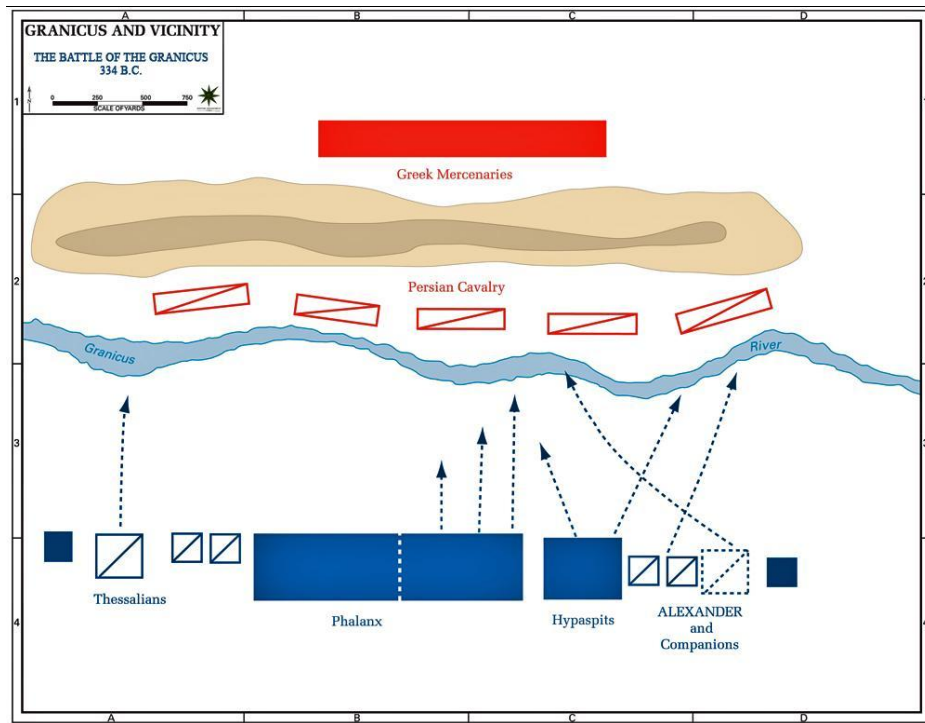
In 334 BC, Alexander led his army into Asia Minor, where he faced the Persians at the Granicus River. Darius III wasn't there, thinking his local governors or **satraps** could handle the invasion.

The Persians had a larger army and control of the nearby sea. One of their leaders, Memnon of Rhodes, advised a **scorched-earth strategy**—burning cities and supplies to weaken Alexander, but Persian nobles refused.



### The Battle:

1. Alexander's army lined up with infantry in the center and cavalry on the sides. He led the elite Companion Cavalry on the right flank.
2. A small Macedonian attack on the left made the Persians shift troops.



3. Alexander then charged the weakened Persian center, breaking through.
4. Persian nobles fought back, and Alexander was nearly killed, but Cleitus the Black saved him.
5. With their leaders dead, the Persians panicked and fled.

### Aftermath:

- Macedonian losses: 300-400 soldiers.
- Persian losses: Over 4,000, including 18,000 Greek mercenaries either killed or enslaved.
- Alexander took Sardis, a key Persian city, without a fight.

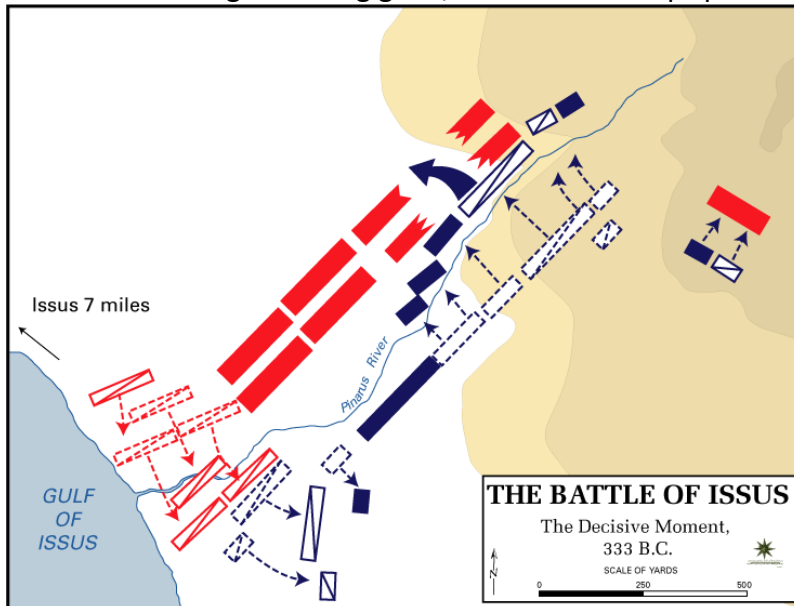
This victory proved Alexander's strength and opened the way for his conquest of Persia.



### **The Battle of Issus – 333 BC**

After his victory at Granicus, Alexander moved to secure coastal cities, weakening the Persian navy. Meanwhile, Darius III gathered a massive army and marched to Issus, hoping to cut off Alexander's supplies. Instead of facing him head-on, Darius took a northern route, captured Issus, and blocked Alexander's retreat. Realizing the danger, Alexander quickly turned back to confront Darius.

Darius positioned his army on a narrow plain along the Pinarus River, limiting his advantage in numbers. His heavy cavalry lined the coast, Greek mercenaries held the center, and Persian infantry spread into the hills. Alexander placed his infantry in the center, cavalry on both sides, and led the Companion Cavalry on the right flank. The battle began with a Persian cavalry attack on Alexander's left, trying to break through. At the same time, Alexander led an infantry charge, breaking the Persian center. He then personally led a cavalry assault straight at Darius, forcing the Persian king to flee the battlefield. Seeing their king gone, the Persian troops panicked and ran.



With this victory, Alexander captured Darius's family, including his wife and daughters, but treated them with respect. Darius later offered land and wealth for peace, but Alexander refused. When his general Parmenion said, "I would accept, were I Alexander." Alexander famously replied, "So would I, if I were Parmenion." The victory at Issus cemented Alexander's reputation as an unstoppable force, bringing him closer to conquering Persia.

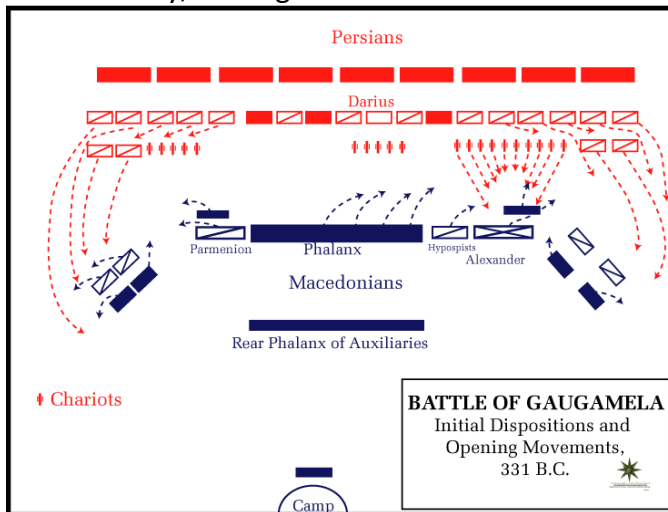
### **The Battle of Gaugamela – October 1, 331 BC**

After his victory at Issus, Alexander spent two years securing the Mediterranean coast and Egypt before marching into the Persian heartland. He crossed both the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers without opposition. Meanwhile, Darius III gathered a massive army of over 100,000 soldiers, including 42,000

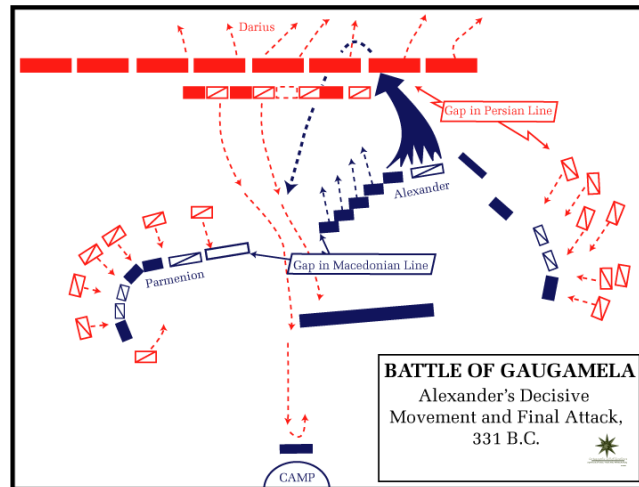


cavalry and 200 war chariots. To avoid another defeat in a narrow space like at Issus, Darius chose a flat, open plain near Gaugamela, even flattening the ground for his chariots.

Darius positioned himself in the center with his best infantry, placing cavalry on both flanks and war chariots in front. Alexander divided his forces, taking command of the right flank, while his general Parmenion led the left. The Macedonian phalanx stood strong in the center. As the battle began, Alexander moved his army to the right, forcing Darius to react. The Persians sent cavalry to block this maneuver, leaving a gap in their formation. Seeing the opportunity, Alexander charged through the gap straight at Darius. As the Persian left flank collapsed, Darius fled the battlefield, leading to a full Persian retreat. The Macedonians captured immense treasure, war elephants, and Darius' personal chariot and bow. Some accounts even suggest that many Persian soldiers were already demoralized and ran away, making it less of a battle and more of an attack on deserters.



While Greek and Macedonian historians portrayed Darius as a coward, other details challenge this view. Darius had fought numerous battles and duels in his first year as king to consolidate power. Unlike many Persian rulers who let generals command in battle, Darius personally led his army against Alexander twice and was preparing for a third battle when he was betrayed. After Gaugamela, instead of fleeing, he waited in Ecbatana for reinforcements—a risky move that ultimately cost him his life. He also traveled slowly, carrying treasure to raise a new army in the eastern provinces. Some argue his retreat was not cowardice but a strategic decision to prevent the Persian monarchy from falling into Alexander's hands.



In the end, Darius was betrayed by his own general, Bessus, who stabbed him and left him to die. Alexander pursued Darius for 12 days but arrived too late. Saddened by his enemy's fate, he gave Darius a royal burial. Bessus, who declared himself the new king, was captured, humiliated, and executed.

After the battle, Alexander marched to the Persian capitals, taking the riches of Susa, Persepolis, and Pasargadae. At Persepolis, his men burned the royal palace—some say in revenge for Persia's invasion of Greece, others say it was done in a drunken celebration. By 330 BC, most Persian leaders surrendered to Alexander, marking the true end of the Persian Empire.

#### **Lesson for students:**

#### **Lesson Objectives / Learning Targets:**

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

- Understand Darius III's weaknesses as a leader and how that affected his ability to rule and fight against Alexander.
- Learn about Alexander's background, Macedonia's role in Greek politics, and his military strengths.
- Identify and explain the key battles of Granicus, Issus, and Gaugamela in Alexander's conquest.
- Discuss how Darius III's decisions, including his retreats and leadership style, influenced these battles.





### **Materials Needed:**

- **Battle Maps & Troop Formations:** Images provided in the *Teacher Materials* section for each battle, showing troop positions and attack strategies.

### **Vocabulary:**

- **Satrap:** Provincial governors in the Persian Empire. They were appointed by the king to rule over different regions, collect taxes, and maintain order.
- **Scorched-earth strategy:** A military tactic where retreating forces destroy crops, buildings, and resources to prevent the enemy from using them. This weakens the invading army by depriving them of food and shelter.
- **Phalanx:** A tight, rectangular battle formation used by Greek and Macedonian armies. Soldiers stood shoulder to shoulder with their shields overlapping and long spears pointing outward, making it difficult for enemies to break through.

### **Activity for Students:**

1. Have students answer the essential questions listed below.
2. After learning about Darius III and the three major battles he fought against Alexander the Great—the Battle of Granicus, Battle of Issus, and Battle of Gaugamela—students will be divided into three groups, with each group assigned one battle to analyze. Using provided materials, including battle maps and primary/secondary sources, students will research key details and prepare a presentation for the class. Each group must include the date and location of their battle, the commanders and troops involved, the battle formations and strategies, the turning points, and the final outcome.
3. Each group will present their battle to the rest of the class. During their presentations, students must use the battle maps to illustrate troop movements and key strategies. To make their analysis more engaging, groups may choose to present their findings as a news report, a dramatic reenactment, or a war briefing from a general's perspective.
4. After all presentations, the class will discuss what factors contributed to the Persian defeats and whether Darius III made critical mistakes or if Alexander's leadership was simply superior.

### **Essential Questions: Use the questions for class discussion.**

1. What is succession planning?
  - Why is it important? Which kings practiced it, and which did not?
  - As we follow the kings through time, what pattern emerges?
  - What possible impact can this trend have on the stability of an empire?
2. Was Darius III a good king?
  - What were his advantages?
    - i. Experienced general, legitimate heir
  - What were his disadvantages?
    - i. Internal power conflicts, lack of courtly experience



**Sources:** Mr. Xerxes Kotval's material

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**Edited by:** Hilda Kasravi

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