



FEZANA Age-Appropriate Lesson Plan

Subject Category (circle one): Religion/Ceremony **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 #: The Achaemenid Empire- Lesson 2

Subject of the Lesson: Conquest of Babylon and the Cyrus Cylinder

Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

Lesson Duration: approximately 1- 1.5 hours

In-Class Lesson Discussion – Teacher shares with students about Cyrus the Great and his contributions to the civilization.

After the conquest of Lydia and Anatolia Cyrus returned to the Persian heartland, Pars, and began the construction of palaces and other royal buildings at Pasargadae. Many of the skilled stone masons working on these palaces were Lydians and Ionian Greeks.

Adding to his empire and subduing unrest in the Iranian lands north and east of the great Dasht-e-Kavir salt flats including the land of Aria he marched to the east. He then moved northeast to the valleys of the Oxus River system which emptied into the Aral Sea. The Land of Bactria and the region of northwest India, known as Gandar, fell to the Persians. By 540 BCE through the conquest of these eastern lands, Cyrus nearly doubled the extent of his empire feeling confident to march to Babylon.

Conquest of the Babylonian Kingdom

After his conquest of the eastern part of the Iranian plateau, Cyrus reached Mesopotamia- rich plains within a few months. The Babylonian king Nabonidus gathered his own army to meet the enemy but his soldiers were no match for the war-hardened Persian force. By 539 BCE Cyrus' army took the city Opis on the Tigris River about a hundred miles north of Babylon, and about a week later his general Gobryas, led the Persian troops to the walls of Babylon.

Nabonidus did not have the support of the Babylonian people because he favored the moon god, Sin, and other deities over the traditional Babylonian god, Marduk. Due to the Babylonians' widespread defection, Gobryas entered and took control of the city without a fight. Persians were welcomed as liberators. Cyrus himself made a triumph entry into Babylon on October 29th. This day is now celebrated by many Iranians as the day to commemorate Cyrus and his humanitarian philosophy in ruling his kingdom.

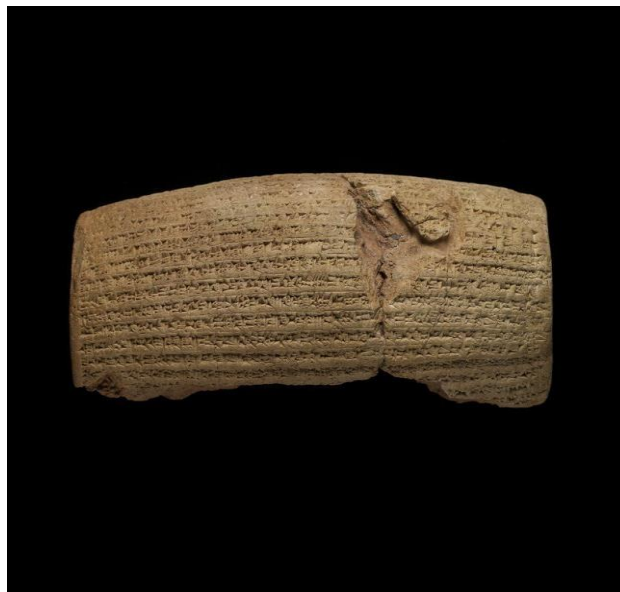


Cyrus & Human Rights

After conquering the Babylonians, Cyrus issued one of the world's first human rights charters. A cylinder containing this charter was discovered in 1878 during an excavation of ancient Babylon. This cylinder is called Cyrus Cylinder and is written in Akkadian language with cuneiform script. It is translated into six official languages of the United Nations and its provisions parallel the first four Articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In this charter, Cyrus promised to treat all the inhabitants of Babylon and the other kingdoms he conquered with respect. He swore that he would allow all inhabitants of his empire to practice their own religious and social customs without persecution. Cyrus also promised to punish anyone who acted cruelly to the religious and social minorities of his kingdom.

He forbade the seizure of farmers' lands and properties and made slavery of any kind illegal. Cyrus' commitment to fair and equitable treatment of his people is exemplary by modern standards and was unique during his time period.



Cyrus Cylinder

In the early sixth century BCE, King Nebuchadnezzar (Neo-Babylonian ruler) besieged Jerusalem twice. The first time he took 10,000 Israelites captive and all the gold vessels in Solomon's Temple (2 Kings 24:13-17) and the second time he destroyed the temple and took the poorest of Israelites captive (2 Kings 25:8-21).

In 538 B.C.E Cyrus permitted about 40,000 Jewish people in exile to return to their homes in Jerusalem and ended the Babylonian Captivity. Once they had returned to their homeland, Cyrus used the funds



he had acquired in conquering Babylon to rebuild the sacred temple of the Jewish people. In addition, he sent them home with the things that were taken from them (Ezra 1). Cyrus is mentioned 23 times in the Bible and in the books of Isaiah, Ezra, 2 Chronicles, and Daniel. Cyrus is the only non-Jewish person the Bible refers to as the Messiah or the anointed one (Isaiah 45).

Cyrus' act of humanity was not limited to Jews but to everyone. At a time when a conqueror would burn the conquered city, kill, and take captive the people, Cyrus not only freed the captives, returned their stolen property and despite his own religious beliefs, he paid respect to the belief of Babylonian people by building their temples and returning their gods to the temples. He improved the city and finished building the city wall.

The US founding fathers, especially Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), John Adams (1735-1826) and Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), were strongly influenced by Cyrus the Great's legacy of governance.



Cyrus and the Satraps

In addition to his fair treatment of conquered peoples, Cyrus also helped to establish one of the most efficient government bureaucracies in the Ancient World. Cyrus appointed 26 Satraps or governors, in each territory that he conquered. They normally were members of the royal family or of Persian nobility. The satraps were responsible for collecting taxes and were the supreme judicial authorities; they were responsible for internal security and raising and maintaining an army.



(Picture: Ender BAYINDIR / Getty Images)

Pasargadae

In 6th-century B.C.E, Cyrus the Great founded Pasargadae, the first dynastic capital of the Achaemenid Empire, in Pars, homeland of the Persians. Its palaces, gardens and the tomb of Cyrus are outstanding examples of the first phase of royal Achaemenid art and architecture and exceptional testimonies of Persian civilization. Particularly noteworthy ruins in the site include: the tomb of Cyrus II; Tall-e Takht, a fortified terrace; and a royal ensemble of gatehouse, audience hall, residential palace, and gardens. Pasargadae was the capital of the first great multicultural empire in Western Asia. Spanning the Eastern Mediterranean and Egypt to the Hindus River, it is the first empire that respected the cultural diversity of its different peoples.



Pasargadae



(<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1106/>)

Cyrus' death and his legacy

With the conquest of Babylon, Cyrus added all of southern Mesopotamia, and most of Palestine to his kingdom. Now his empire stretched from the shores of Aegean Sea in the west to India in the east. Out of the four superpowers in the area, only one, Egypt, was not under Persian rule. In the late 530 BCE, Cyrus gave his son Cambyses (kamboujeh in Persian) the task of raising and training a huge army to conquer Egypt.



In about 530 BCE while campaigning in the east, near Aral Sea, he died shortly after suffering a battle wound. His body was carried back to the Pasargadae and placed in a simple but elegant tomb surviving today to as a monument to one of the most ambitious, talented, and humanitarian rulers the world has ever known. Many Iranians visit his tomb specially on October 29th and during Nowruz to honor his legacy.

Bausani, ascholar of Islam, Arab, and Persian history says the following about Cyrus, “His religious tolerance, the moderation with which he treated the defeated ...and his considerable ability as an army leader explains the universal praise that was accorded Cyrus the Great even by Babylonians and Greeks.”

Xenophon, the Athenian born soldier, historian, and contemporary of Plato, and a student of Socrates, shares a fictional childhood story of Cyrus and accounts of Cyrus’ leadership in his book, *Cyropaedia* (written in 370 BCE). He believes this about Cyrus, “this man to be deserving of all admiration” and adding “Cyrus was most handsome of person, most generous of heart, most devoted to learning, and most ambitious, so that he endured all sorts of labor and faced all sorts of danger.”

The copy of *Cyropaedia* displayed at the Freer and Sackler Galleries, in Washington D.C., is a testament to Jefferson's thorough examination of the book. Jefferson not only studied the book in detail, but also advised his family to read it, according to Massumeh Farhad, Freer and Sackler's chief curator.

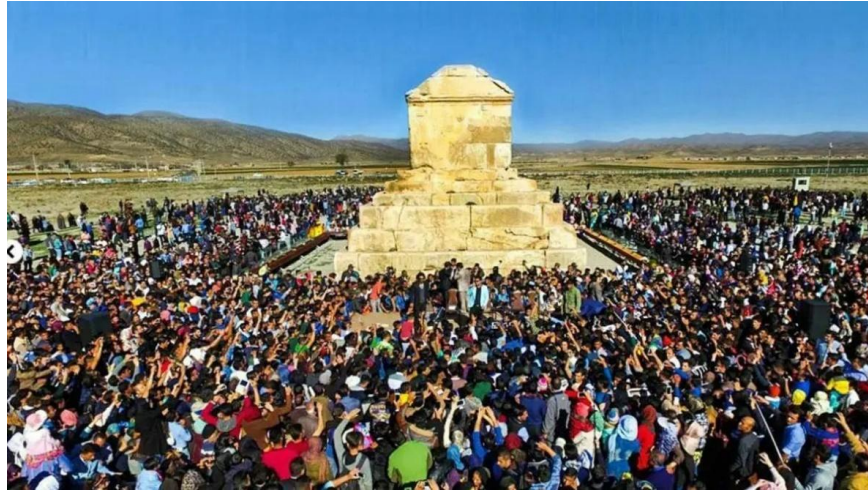
Ms. Farhad recounts that Jefferson, in a letter, asked his grandson to study *Cyropaedia*.

"He wrote, 'when you start learning Greek, the first book you should read is *Cyropaedia*.'"

“Cyrus went down in history as one of the most benevolent conquerors of all time, allowing his subjects to live—and worship—as they pleased.”



<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/cyrus-the-great>



Lesson for student:

1. Make a PowerPoint of the lesson to present to students or present the lesson to class using maps and photos.
2. Important topics to cover:
 - a. Reminder: There were 4 superpowers in the region. In the previous lesson, Cyrus conquered two of the four (Media and Lydia) and in this lesson he conquered Babylonia and made plans for his eldest son to conquer Egypt. Why did he want all the superpowers of the region under one rule?
 - b. Extent of Persian Empire during Cyrus' reign
 - c. Cyrus' humanitarian acts in Babylon
 - d. Cyrus Cylinder as the first Human Bill of Rights
 - i. The importance of its message
 - ii. It's similarity to the first 4 articles of Universal Declaration of Human Rights
 - e. Cyrus in the Bible- Have a student read Isaiah 45
 - f. Cyrus' influence on the founding fathers and his legacy to this day
 - g. How is Cyrus' method of leadership similar to the teachings of Zarathushtra?
 - i. You can use Yasna 44.16 as an example:
Oh Mazda, show me the wise and soul healing leader who is brave and victorious and can protect your teachings. Please give the gift of good mind and clear insight to this leader and other good people.
 - ii. Did Cyrus establish Khshathra (good dominion)? How?
3. YouTube videos to enhance the lesson.
 - a. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iokGgmrOj4Q>
 - b. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTAgTCXja4Q>
 - c. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2FfzJMZrVQ>



Activity for the students:

1. Give students a blank map of the Middle East and have them write the name of the current countries. Have them color the area which included the Persian Empire at the time of Cyrus. Then discuss which current countries were included as part of Persian Empire during Cyrus.
2. Bring playdough or clay and have students
 - a. Carve out the name Kourosh as shown in the You Tube video (2:22- 4:22): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iokGgmrOj4Q>
 - b. Make a sample Cyrus Cylinder
3. Write your own Cyrus Cylinder
 1. What would you include?
 2. How does your decision relate to your belief?
 3. Does it reflect what is happening in your environment?
 4. What would Zarathushtra write?

Sources:

1. <https://www.worldhistory.org/xenophon/>
2. <https://overviewbible.com/cyrus-the-great/>
3. The Persian Empire by Don Nardo
4. <https://www.humanrights.com/what-are-human-rights/brief-history/>
5. <https://www.kavehfarrokh.com/ancient-prehistory-651-a-d/achaemenids/cyrus-the-great-and-the-founding-fathers-of-the-united-states/>
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-21747567>
7. ii) Encyclopedia Iranica Online
8. Encyclopedia Britannica

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