



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 5 Part 1

Subject of the Lesson: The Achaemenids- Xerxes I Part 1 of 2

Background knowledge for teacher:

Overview of Xerxes I- 524-485 B.C.



Xerxes the Great (Xerxes I) became king of Persia after his father, Darius I, died. Right away, he had to stop a pre-existing revolt in Egypt. After that, he prepared to invade Greece. He won early battles at Thermopylae, Artemisium, and Athens. However, Xerxes was defeated at the Battle of Salamis, and his army lost again at the Battle of Platea.

Xerxes returned to Persia and continued building many of his father's projects, keeping the empire strong. He was eventually killed by one of his palace guards.

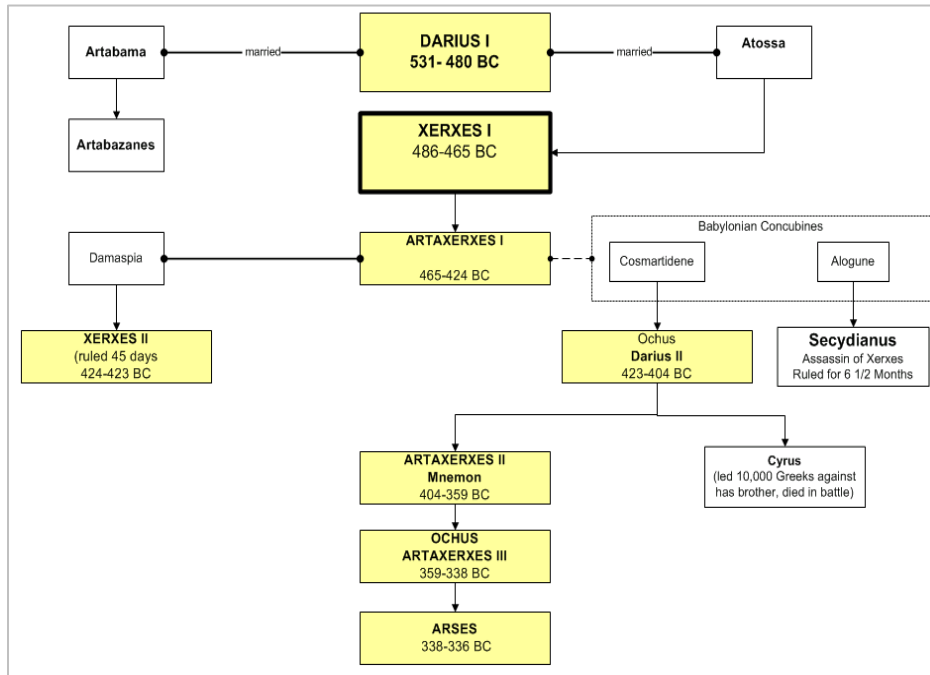
Some Greek historians described Xerxes as an unpredictable leader who made irrational decisions, but other historians have a more balanced view of him.

Ascension to the Throne

Xerxes was the son of Darius I and Atossa. Persian law required kings to choose a successor before going on major campaigns, so Darius chose Xerxes. Xerxes was not Darius' oldest son and traditionally shouldn't have become a king; however, Darius wanted a successor connected through two family lines—his family line, which was the Achaemenid dynasty, and his wife Atossa's family line, which linked to Cyrus the Great. When Xerxes became king, no one in the court, the royal family, or any part of the empire challenged his rule.

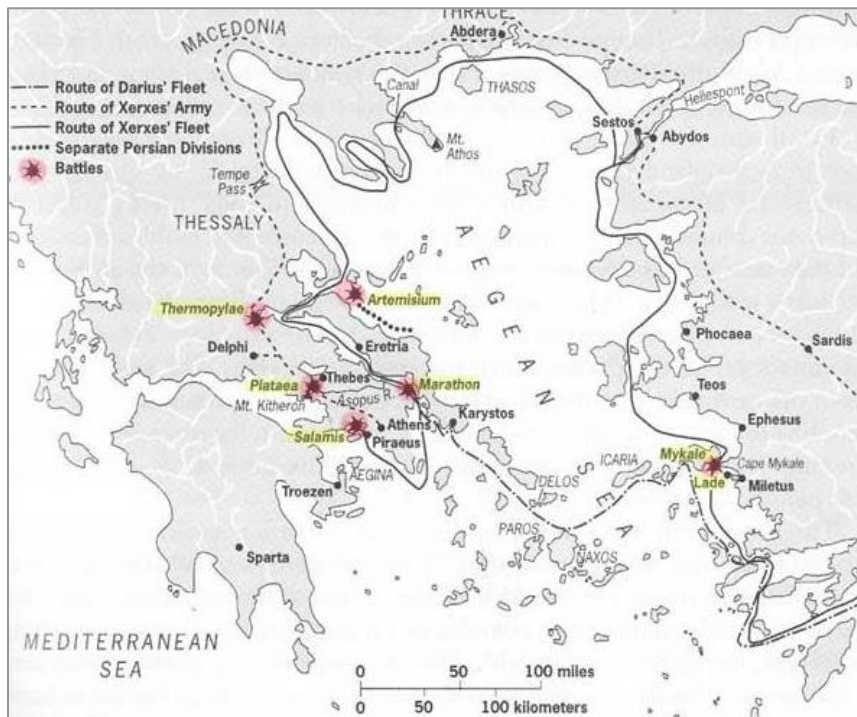
Xerxes' entire reign seemed to be driven by his father's unfinished business. Almost immediately after taking the throne, Xerxes had to deal with a revolt in Egypt that started

during Darius I's reign. After stopping the revolt, Xerxes made his brother Achaemenes the governor (satrap) of Egypt. Xerxes then returned to Persia to complete another task left by Darius I—the second Persian invasion of Greece.



Greek Invasion

After stopping the revolt in Egypt, Xerxes had to decide whether to follow his father's plan to invade Greece. His two main advisors were his uncle Artabanus, who was cautious and conservative, and Mardonius, one of Darius's most trusted generals. Mardonius wanted to



invade Greece, but Artabanus was against it.

After much thought, Xerxes decided to prepare for the invasion. Remembering his father's failure to take Athens, Xerxes wanted to be thorough. He made extensive plans, including digging a canal through the Peninsula of Mount Athos, building a huge bridge across the Hellespont, and storing supplies along the road to Thrace for what would be the largest army the world had ever seen.

Building the Canal at Athos

In 480 B.C., Xerxes ordered his men to build a canal through a peninsula in northern Greece near Mt. Athos. This was one of the biggest engineering projects of its time.

The canal was important for Xerxes' plan to invade Greece. Twelve years earlier, the Persian fleet had been destroyed in a storm while sailing around the tip of the peninsula. Xerxes wanted to avoid this problem by building the canal.

It took three years to build the one-and-a-quarter-mile canal. It was 100 feet wide at the surface, just wide enough for two warships to pass. The sides sloped inward, making it about 50 feet wide at the bottom and 45 feet deep. Workers had to dig the canal by hand, using baskets to move the earth.



When the canal was finished, the Persian fleet sailed safely through to the Aegean Sea, joining

the troops that had taken the land route from the north. The ships then sailed on to Greece. Xerxes' soldiers attacked the coast and advanced deep into Greek territory. The canal was soon abandoned and never used again, as it was only built for the invasion.

Today, the remains of the canal, buried under centuries of silt, show remarkable military strategy, workforce management, and civil engineering.

Xerxes Bridges over the Hellespont

To move his army to Greece, Xerxes had bridges built across the Hellespont (Dardanelles). The first bridge was destroyed by a storm, but the second attempt worked. Xerxes built two bridges side by side lashing 360 ships for one and 314 for the other. The bridges were about 3 kilometers long, with wooden planks and dirt forming a road.



The army crossed the Hellespont in seven days, with the northeast bridge used by soldiers and the southwest bridge for animals and baggage. After the crossing, the bridges were abandoned and later destroyed by another storm.

With the bridges in place, Xerxes' army marched across the northern coast of the Aegean Sea into Macedonia. Cities that surrendered were spared destruction and treated to lavish feasts. Each morning, Xerxes' forces moved on, taking everything of value from the cities they left behind.

Battle of Thermopylae

In 480 BC, the Greek general, Themistocles, suggested that the Greeks block the Persian army at a narrow mountain pass called Thermopylae and their navy at the nearby Straits of Artemisium.

A Greek force of about 7,000 men went to block the pass. The Persians, who were estimated to be between 70,000 and 300,000 strong, faced the Greeks. Despite being vastly outnumbered, the Greeks managed to hold off the Persians for seven days, including three days of actual fighting.

King Leonidas I of Sparta led a small Greek force to block the only road the Persians could use to advance. After two days of fighting, a local named Ephialtes told the Persians about a secret path that led behind the Greek lines. Knowing they were outflanked, Leonidas sent most of the



Greek soldiers away and stayed behind with 300 Spartans, 700 Thespians, 400 Thebans, and a few others. All of them were killed in a heroic last stand.

Athens

Meanwhile, the Greek navy, commanded by Themistocles, was at Artemisium when they heard about the defeat at Thermopylae. Since the Greeks needed both Thermopylae and Artemisium to win, they retreated to Salamis Island. The Persians then took over the regions north of Athens and captured the empty city of Athens.

Lesson for students:

Lesson Objectives / Learning Targets:

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

- Xerxes' rise to the throne was carefully planned by his father, Darius I, who selected him as his successor.
- As king, Xerxes focused on continuing his father's work. He worked on major projects, such as building bridges across the Hellespont (now the Dardanelles) and digging a canal through the Athos Peninsula. These projects were important for his plan to invade Greece.
- The Battle of Thermopylae and the capture of Athens were major successes for the Persians, helping to strengthen their empire.

Materials Needed:

- Bridge Model
 - Popsicle sticks, rope, glue, paper, paper clips, scissors, hole punch (Of course, teachers may select other materials they deem appropriate)

Vocabulary:

- Canal

Activity for Students:

1. Have students answer the essential questions listed below.
2. Make a model of the bridges Xerxes' men built. Encourage students to think creatively about how they want to create the boats and the bridge.



Set criteria for the model(s): For example, the model must be at least 12 inches, the model must float on water, and the ships must be connected to one another.

Use any accessible source of water or container to test students' models in.

3. Have students mark on the map the route of Xerxes' army and navy to Greece and the main points of battles.

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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