



## 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):** The Achaemenid Empire- Lesson 6

**Subject of the Lesson:** Xerxes' Reign

### Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

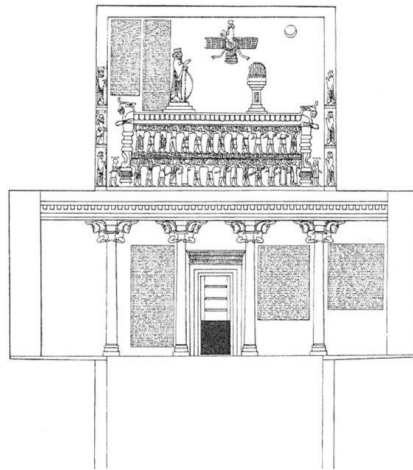
#### Background:

Darius' reign was full of military, political, economic, and social accomplishments. His two attempts to show Athenians a lesson for burning Sardis and meddling in Persian affairs were unsuccessful.

#### Darius' Death:

Darius was more than ever determined to conquer Greece for burning Sardis. He began to organize a great military force along with warships to invade Greece; however, in late 486 BCE after a highly productive reign of 36 years, he died. He was buried near Persepolis in Pars. Naqsh-i-Rustam had been a sacred area since the pre-Achaemenid era, Darius the Great was the first to choose Naqsh-i-Rustam as his burial place and his successors imitated his idea. The tomb was constructed like a cross, and an entrance led into the tomb chamber cut deep into the rock. In the panel above is a relief depicting the king standing on a three-stepped pedestal in front of an altar. Darius' hand is raised in a gesture of worship and above him is the image of the fravahar. This scene is supported by throne bearers representing the 26 nations of the empire. On the side there are the king's weapon bearers and the Persian guards. There is also a cuneiform script written in three languages, and the traces of pigment found to suggest that the stone relief had been painted.

The translation of the script at Darius' tomb talks about Darius declaring that the great God is Ahuramazda who created the world, created happiness for man, and gave Darius wisdom. It goes on to say that Darius is a friend of right and not of wrong. He doesn't wish for the weak to be harmed by the strong or vice versa. He is not a friend of one who lies or deceits. He is not hot-tempered and when angry, he has control over his thoughts and actions. He rewards those who are cooperative and punishes those who do harm. Before judgment he listens to both parties....(the complete translation is provided in a separate file and can be found at: <https://projects.swan.ac.uk/ancient-world/?p=895>).



The above three images show Darius' tomb at Naqsh-i-Rustam, Pars

### Xerxes Reign:

Before his death, Darius had designated his son Xerxes as his successor. Darius had three sons from his first wife, the daughter of one of the noblemen who helped him conspire against Gautama, and four more sons from his second wife Atossa, daughter of Cyrus the Great. Atossa had great influence on Darius and his court, hence the eldest of her sons, Xerxes was chosen to inherit the throne.

At first Xerxes did not show interest in following his father's plan to return to Athens, however his advisors and his brother-in-law Mardonius encouraged him to do so and add the rich beautiful and bountiful area to his empire. So, Xerxes went forth to complete his father's military preparation with both an army and a naval fleet against Greece.

However, he did have to postpone his venture to Greece for a few years, to take care of problems at home. Egypt had rebelled against the Persian Empire, and he needed to bring back this valuable satrapy. He accomplished this task by January 484 BCE. To discourage any more uprisings, he brought harsh punishments against the Egyptians such as confiscating lands that belonged to the temples and implementing stricter rules and penalties on the natives. He appointed his brother Achaemenes whom he could trust as the satrap of Egypt.

Soon after he brought Egypt under control, in 483 BCE when he was in Ecbatana, he received news that the Babylonian satrap Zopyras, had been murdered and a man by the name of Shamasheriba had declared himself king of Babylon. Xerxes sent his finest general, Megabyzus, who quickly captured the city and following the king's orders, implemented harsh penalties. Babylon's splendid outer fortification was torn down, temples and statues of local gods demolished, and the lands of the wealthiest citizens were taken and distributed among Persians.

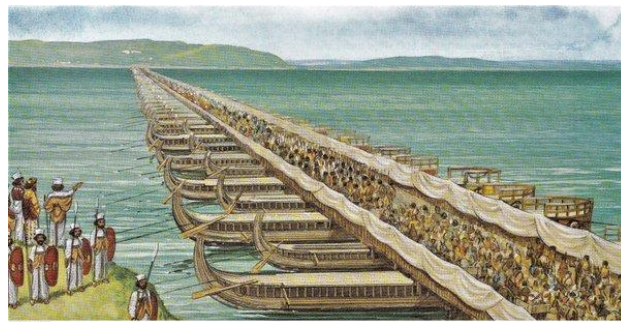
These two actions show that Xerxes took swift action against disobedience and implemented harsh punishments. Like his father, he practiced patience and had a thorough approach to war preparation. Xerxes ordered engineers and laborers to construct an impressive boat bridge over Hellespont (Dardanelles Strait) to facilitate the crossing into Europe. Even more ingenious was a project that began two years prior to the bridge. Demonstrating his foresight, Xerxes ordered a canal to be dug at Mt. Athos Peninsula going around the highlands at the south of the mountain. This was done to eliminate any risk of losing another fleet ship, which was the case during Darius' reign causing him to abandon his first attempt at conquering the Athenians (mentioned in Darius Enters Europe lesson). Later, he could use this canal as a trade route from Greece. The canal was wide enough for two warships.



The Mt Athos canal.



Above: Xerxes canal at Mt. Athos



Above: Xerxes bridge of boats to cross Europe

Xerxes being a capable military planner, was a harsher ruler than his father. Most of such evidence comes from Greek sources which may have been exaggerated. There are written accounts mostly by Herodotus for example, that Xerxes punished laborers building the boat bridge due to a setback caused by a storm. One of Xerxes' inscriptions below is evidence of his intolerance for the worship of old gods.

*And among these countries (in rebellion) there was one where, previously, daevas had been worshipped. Afterward, through Ahura Mazda's favour, I destroyed this sanctuary of daevas and proclaimed, "Let daevas not be worshipped!" There, where daevas had been worshipped before, I worshipped Ahura Mazda.*

*(<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Xerxes-I>)*

### The Persian March to Athens:

Xerxes marched to Athens with the largest army the old world had ever seen. In spring of 480 BCE Xerxes military approached the Hellespont (Dardanelles Strait). Herodotus describes the Hellespont crossing this way:

"The infantry and cavalry went over the upper bridge-the one nearer the Black Sea; the pack animals and underlings by the lower one toward the Aegean. The first to cross were the Ten Thousand [immortals], all with wreaths on their heads, and these were followed by mass of troops of all the nations. Their crossing occupied the whole of the first day. On the next day...came the sacred horses and the sacred chariots, and after them Xerxes himself with his spearmen and his thousand horsemen. The remainder of the army brought up the rear, and at the same time the ships moved over to the opposite shore...The crossing occupied seven days and seven nights without break."



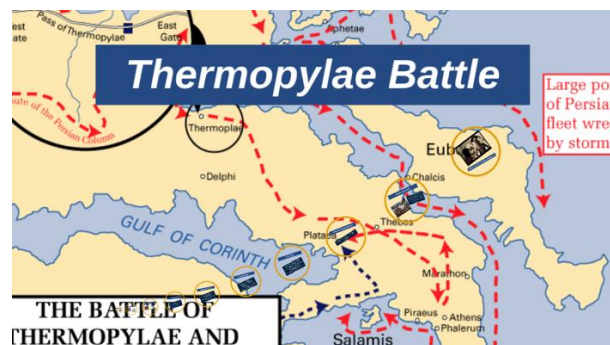
Above image showing Hellespont

As Xerxes' massive army moved through northern Greece, the city-states along the way submitted without a fight. This was to be expected as his Greek advisors had told him that the most powerful

city- states (Athens and Sparta) are in the southern area. They also told him that the Thermopylae pass in the northwest of Athens was the best avenue through the mountains of central Greece because it was close enough to the sea to allow his troops easy access to their ships.

When the Persians reached the pass in July 480 BCE, they found the pass blocked by a group of Greek soldiers (hoplites). Now, prior to the Persians invading Greece, the Greek city-states were not united but rather quarreled often. Therefore, a conference was held for each representative of the 31 city-states to bring unity, so they have the strength to fight their common enemy- The Persians. The Athenian politician, Themistocles, reasoned that if they damage the Persian naval fleet, the army would be depleted of needed support and supplies hence they aimed to keep Xerxes' troops in the north as long as possible while they prepared a united Greek fleet. The decision was to hold off the Persian army at Thermopylae as it was a very narrow crossing and hence better controlled and protected. Xerxes first tried to pass the soldiers (hoplites) through a battle, but the Persians were unsuccessful and could not bypass them.

Xerxes found another solution. He paid a large sum of money to a local to show his troops a goat route through the mountains so that they could arrive behind the Greek soldiers (hoplites) and surprise attack them. When the Greeks realized that they were going to be ambushed, their leader, dismissed most of the soldiers to save them for future fights, he along with a number of soldiers stayed to hold off the Persians as long as they could.

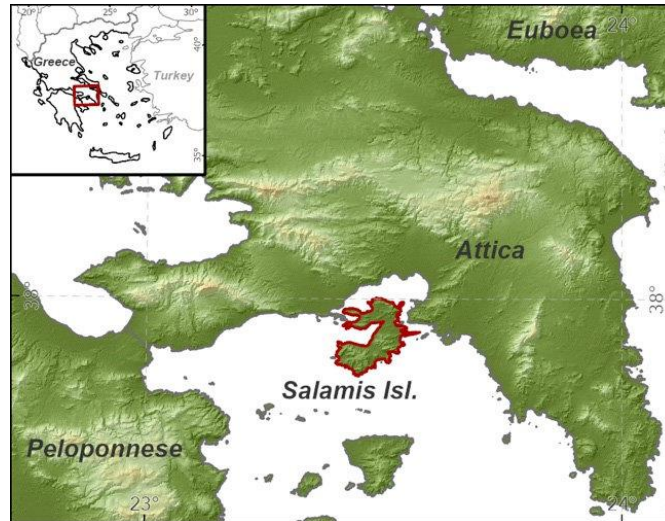


Above left: Thermopylae pass

Around September 17, 480 BCE, Persians entered Athens finding the city deserted. The Athenians had evacuated to the nearby island of Salamis and other locations. It is said that in revenge for the Greeks burning Sardis, Xerxes ordered the burning of temple on Acropolis.

In addition to his own naval fleet, Artemis (Artemisia) client queen of the Persian Empire added 5 ships to Xerxes' fleet and took command of the ships. Artemis advised Xerxes not to attack the Greeks in the narrow channel between Attica and the island of Salamis where the Greek navy had taken refuge, but Xerxes did not take her advice and his naval fleet was ambushed and crushed. During the battle, Artemis proved herself a capable naval commander and was able to save her 5 ships and return home.

Artemis fought well enough at Salamis for the Athenians to offer a reward of 10,000 drachmae (about the weekly wage of 2,000 skilled artisans) for her capture.



Above: Narrow area between Attica and Salamis where Persian navy was defeated

Xerxes put one of his best commanders Mardonius in charge of Athens, armed with most of his land army, they returned to Persia. To Xerxes' surprise in the following summer (479 BCE) the Greeks had almost destroyed all of Mardonius army. Xerxes was forced to abandon the European Campaign. Although unsuccessful in Greece, the Persian Empire itself had not been defeated nor threatened.

There are a few factors to consider causing the ultimate defeat of the Persians:

1. The Greek soldiers (hoplites) were consistently superior to the Persian army. They had more effective armor and shields and they were better trained in combat at close quarters.
2. The Greeks had a psychological edge. They were fighting for their own liberty and preserving their homeland. The bulk of the Persian army consisted of conscripts from the empire's subject lands, many of whom had little loyalty to the king and did not fight wholeheartedly.

Greece's Gain from Persia's Expedition into Greek Territories

1. Victory over the great Persian empire, made the Greeks believe more than ever that their culture was superior to others and destined for great things.
2. Upon Persia's retreat, Athens organized a political-military alliance of more than 150 city-states to defend Greece in the future. Such a united front was unprecedented for the Greeks. The Persian excursion into Europe brought the Greek city-states closer together in cooperation. This league soon became detrimental to Xerxes. Even though their activities were limited to the coast of Asia Minor (home to the Ionian Greeks, under Persian rule), Xerxes was forced to constantly send the military to this area, wasting material resources and men that could have been used better elsewhere.

## Persepolis:

The years following Xerxes' expedition to Greece were unremarkable except for the still-growing royal palace of Persepolis.

Persepolis was one of the capitals of the Persian Achaemenid Empire, its construction had begun by Darius the Great (522-486 BCE) and was destroyed in 330 BCE by Alexander of Macedonia. The name comes from the Greek Perses-polis meaning the Persian City; however, the Persians called it Parsa.

It was a spring/summer royal residence and seemed to have been intended as a ceremonial center where representatives of subject states would come to pay their respects to the king.

The complex was comprised of nine structures, three of which were built by Darius (The Apadana, Trachara-Palace of Darius, Council Hall, and the Treasury building which was begun under Darius). The other six were completed by Xerxes I (r. 486-465 BCE) and Artaxerxes I (r. 465-424 BCE). In addition, there were residential buildings, marketplaces, and structures that the archaeologists still need to identify.



Reconstruction of the Apadana (Mohawk Games-copyright)

Persepolis stored artifacts and archives, and the royal treasury which were sacked, plundered, and burned in 330 BCE by Alexander's (l. 356-323 BCE) invasion of Persia.

Limestone and mudbrick were the main building materials used at Persepolis. After natural rock had been leveled on the plain, and the depressions filled in, tunnels for sewage were dug underground through the rock. A large, elevated cistern was carved at the eastern foot of the mountain behind the platform to catch rainwater for drinking and bathing.

The grand dual entrance to the palace was a masterpiece of symmetry and the steps were so wide that the Persian royalty could ascend or descend the stairs on horseback.

The great palace complex built by Xerxes I was entered through the Gate of All Nations, flanked by two monumental statues of lamassu (bull-men). The gate opened onto a grand hall 82 feet long with four columns 60 feet high supported by cedar roof. It was here where the representatives of nations subjects gave their tribute to the king.



All Nations Gate of Persepolis  
(dynamosquito-CC BY-SA)



Xerxes I Relief  
Jona Lendering (CC BY-SA)

The rock motifs of the representatives of Persian satraps were carved along the stairways bringing gifts to the king, all in a line of harmony and peace.







Above: The twelve-rose petal, the lotus flower, and the evergreen tree are common motifs found at Persepolis



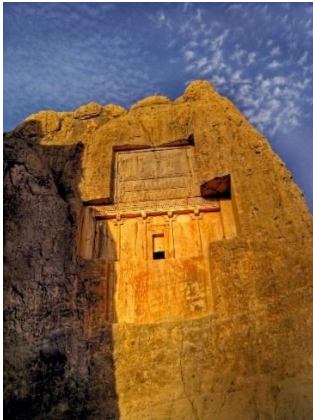
Above left image: The lion and bull are another important motif at Persepolis.

Above right image: The image that today we call fravahar is also found at Persepolis

### Xerxes' Death:

In 465 BCE, Artabanus the powerful captain of the royal guard, backed by the once trusted general Megabyzus, engineered a successful assassination plot, and killed Xerxes. Soon after the conspirators placed Xerxes' eighteen-year-old son Artaxerxes on the throne.

Xerxes was buried at Naqsh e Rustom near his father, Darius the Great.



Above images: Xerxes' tomb at Naqsh-i-Rustam

### Lesson for students:

1. Make a PowerPoint of the lesson to present to students using photos, maps and relevant YouTube videos.

Suggested videos on Persepolis:

- a. Reconstruction of Persepolis

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NhboQlZ-18c&t=15s>

- b. Persepolis Palace

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwFVq-FPpuU&t=12s>

2. Make the lesson into sections and divide the class into groups giving each group a section to present to class. Some of the important points to be discussed can be:
  - a. Atossa's influence in court
  - b. The engineering of the Mt Athos canal and bridge of boats- the amount of time it took for the army to cross and the amount of weight the bridge had to support.
  - c. The advantages of Greek soldiers (hoplites) vs. Persian cavalry and soldiers
  - d. Artemis' role in the naval battle (emphasizing the role of women)
  - e. Does Xerxes' attitude depict his religious beliefs? Why? Why not?  
(Emphasize that a person's actions don't always depict the religion that person associates with).
  - f. How do Xerxes' actions compare to that of his father and that of Cyrus the Great. How would you evaluate these three leaders?
  - g. How do you think the manner of Xerxes' death will affect the future of the Persian Empire?
  - h. Persepolis had a sewage system 2500 years ago. When did we have a sewage system in US?  
Answer: First sewage system in US was built in the late 1850's.
  - i. What do the motifs on Persepolis say about the Achaemenid kings?



### Activity for Students:

1. Make a model of the bridge boats in class.
2. Make a model of a section of Persepolis in class
3. Have students choose and draw one of the motifs on Persepolis
4. Have students mark on the map the route of Xerxes' army and navy to Greece and main points of battle.
5. Have students discuss what separates Cyrus the Great from the other Achaemenid leaders they've studied so far.
6. Break the class into groups and give each group a copy of Darius' tomb inscription (translation provided as an accompanying document to this lesson). Have students highlight:
  - a. Which sections of the document showcase Darius' Zoroastrian beliefs?
  - b. What kind of ruler do you find him to be?
  - c. What are the most important values for Darius according to the document?

### Sources:

1. <https://oi.uchicago.edu/collections/photographic-archives/persepolis/royal-tombs-and-other-monuments>
2. The Persian Empire by Don Nardo
3. <https://projects.swan.ac.uk/ancient-world/?p=895>
4. <http://pcwww.liv.ac.uk/~xenophon/sancisi-xerxes.pdf>
5. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Xerxes-I>
6. <https://www.encyclopedia.com/women/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/artemisia-i-c-520-bce>
7. <https://www.worldhistory.org/persepolis/>

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