



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 # (if applicable): Lesson 7

Subject of the Lesson: Rostam and Rakhsh

Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

The time came when the old champion Sam died. Now that the king's most heroic warrior was dead, Iran's enemies to the east, in Turan, saw their chance. The Turanian king's son, Afrasyab, was a fiery prince, mighty in battle, with great strength and cunning, and he hated the royal house of Iran like a wolf hates its hunter. He gathered a great army, stormed into Iran, and placed on his own head the crown that the Great King Feridun had once worn.

Meanwhile, Zal was no longer the white-maned boy who had once leaped from cliff to cliff near the Simurgh's nest. He had grown old. The nobles of Iran came to Zabulistan to fetch him. "Why are you, the champion of the world, living here in idleness," they said, "when the enemies of Iran are attacking us?" Zal shook his head, "In my warrior days, as you well know, there are no fighters that compared to me. Look at me now. My back is bent with the weight of age. But I have a son! He is a lion in courage and as tall and strong as a tree. I'll find a horse that's worthy to carry him and I'll fill his heart with anger at the misery which evil Afrasyab has brought to Iran. Rostam will drive the Turanians back to their lairs. Rostam will be your new champion!"

Zal commanded that herds of horses should be brought to him for inspection from far and wide. He made them run past Rostam so that the young hero could choose the best. Rostam picked out one after another and pressed his hands down on their backs, but each one buckled under his great strength till its belly touched the ground.

At last, a herd from Kabul galloped by. Among them was a magnificent gray mare, with ears as sharp as daggers. Behind her trotted a huge foal. He was as golden as saffron, with markings the color of roses. Without a word, Rostam made a noose in his rope, ready to lasso the foal. But the herdsman called out to him, "Hey, whoever you are! Don't take a horse that doesn't belong to you!"

"Whose is he then?" asked Rostam. "No one knows for sure," the man answered, "but there are stories told about him already. He is known as Rakhsh. He's as quick as fire, and as bright as water. He's been ready for the past three years to saddle, but every time a horseman comes with a rope to catch him, the mother attacks like a dragon. She could rip the skin from a leopard and tear the heart from a lion."



Rostam threw the noose and caught the foal round the neck. At once, the mare charged at him, wild as a raging elephant, ready to snatch the head from his shoulders with her powerful teeth. Rostam gave a roar and hit the mare on her neck. She rolled over in the dust and lay still. But then she leaped up and ran from him to rejoin her herd.

Rostam tightened the noose, drawing the foal closer. He pressed on Rakhsh's back with all the strength of his mighty hands, but the young horse seemed barely to feel the pressure. "I have found you. You are the horse for me," said Rostam. He leaped onto Rakhsh's back, and the horse raced off with the speed of the wind.

Lesson for students:

Teachers should begin the lesson by asking students what they remember about the previous story. If students do not remember anything, review some key points about it. The teacher will use the information in the "Background Knowledge for the Teacher" section to go over the next story in the Shahnameh. After reading the rest of the story to the students, the students can work on the activity listed below.

Activity for Students:

After reading the story, the students will create a short 4-5 question quiz for their classmates to answer about the story.

Sources:

1. *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings* retold by Elizabeth Laird
2. *Shahnameh: The Epic of the Kings* by Abolqasem Ferdowsi (Translated by Reuben Levy)

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