



## 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):** 8

**Subject of the Lesson:** Rostam Receives Help from Simorgh

**Background Knowledge for the Teacher:**

**The Simorgh Appears Before Zal**

Zal filled three braziers with fire and there he drew a feather from its brocade wrapping, fanning the flames in one of the braziers, he burnt a portion of the feather in the fire. Suddenly the air turned much darker. Zal peered into the night, and it seemed as if the fire and the Simorgh's flight were liquefying the air, then he caught sight of Simorgh, and the flames flared up. Fearful, with anguish in his heart, Zal sat and watched as the bird drew closer: next, he threw sandalwood on the braziers and went forward, making his obeisance to the Simorgh. Perfume rose up from the fires. Simorgh said to him:

"O king, explain to me what you desire that you have summoned me in smoke and fire". Zal answered: "May all the evils that have come to me from this baseborn wretch light on my enemies! The lionhearted Rostam lies grievously wounded, and my feet feel as though shackled by his sorrows. No man has ever seen such wounds and we despair of his life. And it seems that Rakhsh too will die from the arrow heads that torment him. Esfandiyar came to our country and the only gate he knocked at was the gate of war. He will not be content with taking our land and wealth and throne from us, he wants to uproot our family, to extirpate us from the face of the earth." Simorgh said: "Great hero, put away all grief and fear. Bring Rakhsh and noble Rostam to me here." Rakhsh and Rostam were brought to Simorgh. Simorgh saw and asked Rostam: "O mammoth-bodied warrior, tell me who has laid you low like this and wounded you? Why did you fight with Persia's prince, and face the fire of mortal combat and disgrace?" Zal said: "Now that you have vouchsafed us the sight of your pure face, tell me, if Rostam is not cured, where can my people go in all the world? Our tribe will be uprooted, and this is no time to be questioning him."

The bird examined Rostam's wounds, looking for how they could be healed. With his beak, he sucked blood from the lesion and drew out eight arrow heads. Then he tressed one of his feathers against the wounds and immediately Rostam's spirits began to return. Then Simorgh said: "Bind up your wounds and keep them safe from further injury for seven days: then soak one of my feathers in milk and place it on the scars to help them to heal." He treated Rakhsh in the same manner, using his beak to draw six arrow heads from the horse's neck and immediately Rakhsh neighed loudly, and



Rostam laughed for joy. The Simorgh then turned to Rostam and said: "Why did you choose to fight against Esfandiyar, who is famous for being invincible in battle?" Rostam replied: "He talked incessantly about chains; despite all the advice I gave him. Death is easier for me than shame."

Simorgh said: "To bow your head down to the ground before Esfandiyar would be no shame: he is a prince and a fine warrior; he lives purely and possesses the divine farr. If you swear to me that you will renounce this war and not try to overcome Esfandiyar, if you will speak humbly to him tomorrow and offer to submit to him (and if in fact his time has come, he will ignore your overtures of peace) then I will assist you."

Rostam was overjoyed to hear this and was freed of the fear of killing Esfandiyar. He said: "Even if it should rain swords on my head, I shall keep faith with what you say to me."

Simorgh said: "Out of my love for you, I shall tell you a secret: Fate will hurry whoever spills Esfandiyar's blood, he will live in sorrow, and his wealth will be taken from him; his life in this world will be one of suffering, and torment will be his after death. If you agree to what I say, and overcome your enmity, I shall show you wonders tonight and seal your lips against all evil words. Choose a glittering dagger, and mount Rakhsh."

Simorgh showed Rostam a pathway that led over dry land, over which the air seemed to be impregnated with musk. They followed the pathway. They reached the tamarisk tree rooted deep in the earth, its branches reaching into the sky and the Simorgh alighted on one of the branches. He said to Rostam: "Choose the straightest branch you can find, one that tapers to a point: do not despise this piece of wood for it holds Esfandiyar's fate. Temper it in fire, place an ancient arrowhead at its tip, and feathers to the shaft. Now, I have told you how to hurt Esfandiyar."

Rostam cut the tamarisk branch and returned to his castle, and as he came the Simorgh guided him, its talons clutching his helmet. Simorgh said: "Now, when Esfandiyar tries to fight with you, plead with him and try to guide him toward righteousness, and don't attempt to trick him in any way. Your sweet words might remind him of the ancient days, and of how you have fought and suffered throughout the world for Persia's' cause. But if you speak fairly to him and he rejects your words, treating you with contempt, take this arrow, having steeped it in wine, and aim it at his eyes, as is the custom of those who worship the tamarisk. Fate will guide the arrow to his eyes, where his Farr resides, and his death."

Simorgh took its farewell to Zal, embracing him as if they were warp and weft of one cloth. Filled with hope and joy, Rostam lit the fire and watched the Simorgh fly serenely up into the air. Then he fitted the arrowhead and feathers as he had been instructed.



### **Lesson for students:**

The teacher will use the information in the “Background Knowledge for the Teacher” section to go over the story. After reading the first story to the students, the students can work on the activity listed below.

### **Activity for Students:**

After reading, students will discuss what they think Rostam will do and how they believe Esfandiyar will react. Students will also discuss the lesson/moral of this section of the story. They can also discuss where the characters might have made changes to their actions to change the events of the story.

Suggested discussion questions:

- If Esfandiyar is invincible, why do you think an arrow through his eye will kill him? Is there a symbolism that you notice?
- Why does Rostam care so much about Rakhsh?
- Is it fair for Rostam to seek help from Simorgh?
- Why does Simorgh ask Rostam to make a last plea with Esfandiyar? What is the importance of this request?

### **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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