



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 8

Subject of the Lesson: The Decline of the Achaemenid Empire

Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

Background:

Xerxes the fourth Achaemenid king and son of Darius the Great organized a great army and naval fleet to go conquer and add Greece to the Persian Empire. After the success of his army conquering Eretria and Athens, his naval fleet was defeated by the Greeks. Xerxes left his army at Athens to defend the area, however, his army was not successful, and the Persians were not able to keep the conquered land for more than a year. Xerxes abandoned any further attempt in conquering Greece and spent the rest of his reign improving and extending the Persepolis Palace in addition to defending the Persian Empires' borders. He was assassinated by a few of his trusted commanders and his young son, Artaxerxes was placed as the fifth king of the Achaemenid Dynasty.

Artaxerxes' reign:

The vile manner of Xerxes' assassination and the sinister events that followed months and years after his death led to the decline and eventually fall of the Achaemenid Empire.

Darius (named after Darius the Great, Xerxes' father), Xerxes' eldest son was blamed for Xerxes' murder but did not actually do so. He was blamed and then killed so that he would not be named king, thus allowing his 18-year-old brother, Artaxerxes, to take the throne. Artabanus (captain of Xerxes' royal guard) and Megabyzus (Xerxes' trusted general), Xerxes' true assassins, did so to make Artaxerxes a puppet king for their own benefit. Sometime later, Artabanus felt confident enough to forcibly take the crown and kill Artaxerxes; however, before doing the deed, he was killed by Megabyzus.

Artaxerxes had a long reign but proved to be weak willed and an incompetent ruler. Artaxerxes was an example of the kings who followed him. One weak king after another led to the weakening and eventual fall of the Persian Empire.

Reason for the Fall of the Achaemenid Empire:

The later Achaemenid kings were weak rulers and lacked strong military and statesmanship which brought stability and attracted the loyalty of strong and capable generals. They kings were self-absorbed and unable/unwilling to deal effectively with some of the serious problems



that faced the Empire leading to political instability, lack of structural integrity, and reputation as the region's superpower. Weak leadership caused the decline of the Achaemenid Empire as some examples below illustrate:

1. Disruption or chaos caused by frequent internal power struggles lead to the weakening of the Empire's central power
 - a. Example 1: When Artaxerxes died in 424BCE his son Xerxes II became king only to be murdered by another son Soghdianos, who was pushed aside by another son Ochus in 423BCE assuming the title of Darius II.
 - b. Example 2: Cyrus, son of Darius II was given the satrapies of Asia Minor as a 16-year-old in favor of its then capable governor. When Darius II died in 404BCE, his eldest son Arsaces became king taking the name Artaxerxes II. Cyrus prepared to kill Artaxerxes II and grab the throne; however, his attempt was discovered. Instead of being executed he was pardoned and re-instated as the satrap of Asia Minor. He gathered an army and made a second attempt to gain the throne and was defeated and killed in battle.

2. Lack of strong and committed generals to the king and the Empire

- a. Example of a strong general maintaining the power of empire:

In 457BCE, Egypt, with help from Athenians, rebelled against Persian rule. Megabyzus a strong Persian general met and defeated the uprising and secured Persian borders. Persia's power and dominance could only be maintained as long as strong generals led the armies and remained loyal to the king and the central power.

- b. Example of the weakening leadership and lack of strong generals in the Persian army.

A small group of Greek soldiers who helped Cyrus, (one of Darius II's sons) attempt to forcibly take the crown, defeated, headed back to Greece with the Persian army in pursuit. They faced many obstacles such as food shortage, constant attacks by Persian troops, and a long way to reach home.

Despite all these obstacles, they made it home. This success was in part due to lack of strong leadership in the Persian army. This Greek success known as the "March of the Ten Thousand" planted the seed of confidence that they can stand against the superpower of the region. This proved to be fatal for the Persian Empire.



3. Too much authority and lack of supervision by the king to those serving under him who were often interested only in increasing their own wealth and power.

Example:

Economic decline: From satrapies silver flowed to the central government. The silver was then supposed to be melted and stored. A portion to be made into coins and be given back to the satrapies. However, little or none was given back. Instead, it was spent on foreign soldiers or statesmen. Taxes were demanded in silver and gold, coined money became a rarity, and inflation and rapidly rising prices made the situation intolerable.

4. The use of more and more Greek mercenaries rather than soldiers from within the Empire.

A Persian soldier would fight to defend his homeland and family. As such, he will fight with vigor, whereas a mercenary fights for money and if a battle is on the downside may easily abandon the fight and run.

5. Loss of interest in expanding the realm

Expanding the Empire was a way to keep the army in shape and gaining victory was a way to increase the Empire's wealth.

6. Increasing discontent among the subject people, especially those far from the heartland.

Constant revolts in the eastern part of the empire went unaddressed by the king and that brought instability in economics and insecurity for the people.

Lesson for students:

1. Make a PowerPoint of the lesson to present to the students.
2. Make the class into teams and give each team one of the reasons leading to the decline of the Achaemenid Empire.
 - a. Have them discuss the reason amongst themselves.
 - b. To present the lesson, the teacher can introduce the lesson then each team will talk about their portion leading the decline of the Achaemenid empire to the class.
 - c. The teacher should then wrap up and summarize.

Activity for Students:

1. The activity can be combined with #2 under "Lesson for Students". The teacher can open the discussion as they are summarizing the lesson for the students
 - a. What are the characteristics of a strong leader?
 - b. How should the kings train their sons/daughters to rule the country?



- c. What could be Zarathushtra's advice to the later Achaemenid kings?
Possible answer: Zarathushtra teaches us not only to care for ourselves but to take care of the community as well. The kings following Xerxes cared only about their own power and did not have the interest of the country in mind. Cyrus the Great or Darius the Great can be used as examples of capable leaders in contrast to the later Achaemenid kings' lack of conviction and vision.
- d. Discuss Vohu Khshathra (good dominion or good rule).
Just as an individual needs to
- protect oneself from viruses entering the body, a good leader needs to protect the borders of his/her country.
 - Set a goal for progress, a leader needs to have a vision and a goal to advance his/her country.
 - Set a good example of conduct for his/her children, a leader needs to do the same for his/her army generals, governors, and people.
2. Discuss the lessons learned from the decline of Achaemenid Empire to be used in current world affairs.
- a. When inflation and increase in taxes are implemented, how do people react?
- b. Should the leader/s of the country address people's discontent? Why or why not?
- c. How does the assassination of a US president affect the morale of the people?
- d. Does the US allow non-citizens to serve in their intelligence departments? Why or why not?
Sample answer: No. Only US citizens can serve in the country's intelligence agency. This is because the US can be more secure in the loyalty of a US member rather than one from another country.
- e. Who serves in the US army? Compare this to the later Achaemenids hiring mostly Greek soldiers.
Sample answer: US non-citizens can serve in the army, but they must have a green card, be a permanent resident, or have permission to work in the US. The US does not hire individuals from other countries to serve in the army. In times of war, they may recruit intelligence from other countries or partner with them for the same goal, but the bulk of their armed forces is as explained above.

Sources:

1. The Persian Empire by Don Nardo
2. <https://immigrationforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/VNA-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

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