



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): 9

Subject of the Lesson: Rostam Kills Esfandiyar

Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

Dawn touched the mountain tops and dispersed the darkness of the night. Rostam put on his armor, prayed to the world's creator, and, eager for combat, made his way toward the Persian army. As he rode, he called out exultantly: "Brave lion-heart, how long will you sleep? Rostam has saddled Rakhsh: rise from your sweet sleep and face Rostam's vengeance."

When Esfandiyar heard his voice, all worldly weapons seemed useless to him. He said to Pashutan: "A lion cannot fight with a magician. I didn't think that Rostam would be able even to drag his armor and helmet back to his palace, and now he comes here riding Rakhsh, whose body yesterday was a mass of wounds. I have heard that Zal is a magician, that he stretches out his hands toward the sun, and that in his mantic fury he surpasses all other magicians: it would be unwise for me to face his son." Pashutan said: "Why are you so hesitant today? Didn't you sleep through the night? What is it between you and Rostam that you must both suffer so much in this business? I think your luck is abandoning you; all it does is lead you from one war to another."

Esfandiyar dressed himself in his armor and went out to Rostam. When he saw his face, he cried out. "May your name disappear from the surface of the earth! Aren't you the man who fled from me yesterday, shorn of heart, soul, courage, life itself? Have you forgotten that you Sistani wretch, the power of my bow? It's only through the magic you've practiced that you're able to stand before me again: Zal's magic cured you, otherwise you'd be food for wild cats by now. But this time I shall fill you so full of arrows that all Zal's magic will be useless: I shall batter your body so that Zal shall never see you alive again."

Rostam replied: "Will you never tire of combat? I have not come to fight against you today, I have come humbly offering an honorable reconciliation. Fear God, and do not drive wisdom from your heart. Constantly you try to treat me unjustly, blinding yourself to wisdom's ways. By God Himself, by Zoroaster and the pure faith, by the sacred fire and the divine farr, by the sun and moon and the Zend Avesta, I swear to you that the road you are following is one of harm and evil. Forget the harsh words that have passed between us. I shall open to you my ancient treasures, filled with marvels I have gathered over many years: I shall load my own horses with wealth, and you can give them to your treasurer to drive before you. I shall ride with you, and if you so command me I shall come into the king's presence, and if the king then kills me or enslaves me I accept this as my due. Remember what



an ancient sage once said, never seek to have shame as your companion. I am doing everything in my power to make you give up your thirst for combat."

Esfandiyar said: "I'm not a fraud who looks one day for battle and the next day skulks in fear. Why do you talk so much about your wealth and possessions, washing your face with the waters of friendship. If you want to stay alive, submit your body to my chains."

Once more Rostam spoke: "Forget this injustice, prince. Don't sully my name and make your own soul contemptible; only evil will come of this struggle. I shall give you a thousand royal gems, along with turquoise and pearls. My lord, I shall open the treasuries of Sam and Zal before you and give you all they contain; I shall bring men from Kabolestan for you, fit companions for your feasting and fearless in war. And then I shall go before you like a servant, accompanying you to your vengeful kings' court. But you, my prince, should drive vengeance from your heart, and keep devils from dwelling in your body. You are a king, one who fears God, and you have other ways of binding men to you than by chains; your chains will disgrace my name forever. How can such an evil be worthy of you?"

Esfandiyar replied: "How long will you tell me to turn away from God and from my king? To disobey my sovereign lord and king is to rebel against God's justice and to merit hell. Accept my chain, or enmity and war—but bandy pointless words with me no more."

When Rostam saw that his offer of friendship had no effect on Esfandiyar, he notched the wine-soaked tamarisk arrow to his bow and lifted his eyes, saying: "Just Lord, who gives us knowledge, strength, and life, You know how I have sought to end this strife; you see my weakness and humility and his unjust demands: I pray that you see nothing sinful in what I must do."

Rostam hung back for a moment, and Esfandiyar taunted him: "Well famous Rostam, it seems your soul's grown tired of combat, now that you're faced with the arrows of Goshtasp, the lion heart and spear points of Lohrasp."

Then, as the Simorgh had ordered him, Rostam drew back his bow. Aiming at Esfandiyar's eyes he released the arrow, and for the Persian prince the world was turned to darkness. The tall cypress swayed and bent, knowledge and glory fled from him; the God-fearing prince bowed his head and slumped forward, and his Chinese bow slipped from his hand. He grasped at his black horse's mane as his blood soaked into the earth beneath him.

Rostam addressed Esfandiyar: "Your harshness has borne fruit. You were the man who said, I'm invincible, I can bow the heavens down to the earth. Yesterday I was wounded by eight arrows, and bore this silently: one arrow has removed you from combat and left you slumped over your horse. In another moment your head will be on the ground, and your mother will mourn you."

Esfandiyar lost consciousness and fell to the ground: Slowly he came to himself, and grasped the arrow: when he withdrew it, its head and feathers were soaked in blood. The news immediately reached Bahman that the royal glory was shrouded in darkness: he ran to Pashutan and said: "Our



expedition here has ended in disaster: his mammoth body lies in the dirt, and the world is a dark pit to him."

They ran to him, and saw him lying soaked in his blood, a bloody arrow in his hand. Pashutan said: "Who of our great men can understand the worlds' ways? Only God who guides our souls and the planets in their courses, knows its truth. One like Esfandiyar who fought for the pure faith, who cleared the world of the evils of idol-worship and never stretched out his hand to evil deeds, dies in the prime of youth, and his royal head lies in the dirt; while one who spreads strife in the world, who torments the souls of free men, lives for many years unharmed by Fate."

The young men cradled the fallen hero's head, wiping away the blood. With sorrow in his heart, his face smeared with blood, Pashutan lamented over him: "O Esfandiyar, prince and world conqueror, who has toppled this mountain, who has trampled underfoot this raging lion? Who has torn out the elephants' tusks, who has held back the torrent of the Nile? Where have your heart and soul and courage fled, and your strength and fortune and faith? Where now are your weapons of war, where now is your sweet voice at our banquets? You cleansed the world of malevolence, you were fearless before lions and demons, and all your reward is to reign in the earth. My curse on the crown and throne: may they and your faithless father King Goshtasp be forgotten forever!"

Esfandiyar said: "Do not torment yourself for me. This came to me from the crown and court: the killed body goes into the earth, and you should not distress yourself at my death. Where are Feraydun, Hushang and Jamshid? They came in the wind and were gone with a breath. My noble ancestors too departed and ceded their place to me: no one remains in this fleeting world. I have traveled the earth and known its wonders, both those that are clear and those that are hidden, trying to establish the ways of God, taking wisdom as my guide. Zal's son did not kill me by chivalrous means. Look at this tamarisk wood grasped in my fist: it was this wood that ended my days, directed by the Simorgh and by that wily Rostam. Zal, who knows all the world's sorcery, cast this spell."

Hearing his words, Rostam turned aside, his heart rang with anguish. He said: "Some evil demon has brought this suffering to you. It's as he said, he acted honorably. Since I have been a warrior in the world I have seen no armed horseman like Esfandiyar, and because in myself I was helpless against his bow and strength, I sought for help rather than yield to him. It was his death that notched my bow, and released, since his time had come. If fate had meant him to live, how could I have found the tamarisk? Man must leave this dark earth and cannot prolong his life by so much as a breath beyond his appointed time. I was the means by which the tamarisk arrow struck him down."

Esfandiyar said: "Now my life draws to the end. Come closer, don't leave me. My thoughts are different now from what they were. Listen to my advice and what I ask of you concerning my son, who is the center of my life. Take him under your wing and show him the path to greatness."

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 create a play about this section of the story. 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:

- Explain Farr (Refer to Jamshid’s story). What is the importance of *farr* in Shahnameh stories?
 - Who posses *farr* and when does *farr* leave a person?
 - Any person who is righteous, just, and can lead the people to better living possess the *farr* and the *farr* leaves a person once they become greedy, unjust, or think they are above God at which time they will lose their glory.
- Discuss Esfandyar’s last words to Rostam and analyze their meaning.
- Why Esfandyar did not talk to Rostam before the battle as he did while dying? Would it have made a difference?

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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