

Teaching with Film: Children of Heaven

About the Film:

Children of Heaven (Iran, 1997)

Director: Majid Majidi

Rating: PG

Length: 89 minutes

Language: Persian with English subtitles

Synopsis: When Ali loses his sister Zahra's school shoes, this young pair dream up a plan to stay out of trouble: they'll share his shoes and keep it a secret from their parents! But if they're going to successfully cover their tracks, Ali and Zahra must carefully watch their step on what rapidly turns into a funny and heartwarming adventure!

Where to Find Children of Heaven:

- Available for free at MESC resource library
- Available on instant streaming through Netflix
- Available for purchase on amazon.com

About the Lesson:

Grade Level: Elementary and Middle School.

Relevant Subject: Language Arts, Social Studies

Online Curriculum Guide: “Journeys in Film, Educating for Global Understanding” is a project of the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center, and offers a number of film-based lesson plans, including one called “Discovering Iran,” which focuses on “Children of Heaven.” There are 10 modules in the curriculum guide, including lessons on math, science, art and social studies.

Each module is available on line for \$4.00 each (<http://www.journeysinfilm.org/support-our-work/the-store/discovering-iran/>) or all ten for \$40.00. Lesson 3 is a free download and is included in this packet. Lesson 3 includes three separate lessons on the film’s plot and portrayal of family relationships. There are two worksheets for use with elementary and middle school students.

Lesson Plan: Children of Heaven

For Elementary and Middle School Students

Background Information: The film shows the daily life of two siblings in their home in southern Tehran, Iran. It is a great film for discussing cultural differences and universal values. For some background on Iran, visit:

<http://www.aifcpdx.com/educators-page>

<http://tehran.stanford.edu/>

<http://fis-iran.org/en/resources>

Materials:

- Film: Children of Heaven
- Copies of Iran and America: Similarities and Differences worksheet (below)

Pre-viewing Activity:

- Review information about Iran with your students.
- Have students turn to their neighbor and together imagine what life might be for children in Iran. Have them write down 2 similarities and 2 differences between life in Iran and their own lives in America.
- Ask students to come together and share their ideas. Write it down on the board and save it for a post-viewing discussion.

Watching the Film:

- Explain to students that they will be watching a film about a brother and sister living in a poor neighborhood in Iran.
- Distribute the Iran and America: Similarities and Differences worksheet below. Tell students that while they watch the film, they should take notes on what they see about home life, school, food and clothing in Iran.

After the Film—Discussion:

- Following the film, have students turn to their neighbors and share their observations about the four topics in Iran. Ask them to compare what they saw about home life, school, food and clothing to their own lives in Iran.
- Come together and discuss. Look at their earlier expectations and see how it compares.
- Lead the students in a discussion about the film, using the discussion questions below.

Children of Heaven
Iran and America: Similarities and Differences

During the film, take notes on the topics below. After the film, compare what you saw in the film to what it's like for you in American.

Remember: Children of Heaven shows us life in one small part of Iran. Just like in America, there are different customs and traditions in different parts of Iran.

WHAT IS SCHOOL LIKE...	
...in Iran:	...in America:
WHAT IS FOOD LIKE...	
...in Iran:	...in America:
WHAT DO THEY WEAR...	
...in Iran:	...in America:
WHAT IS THE ROLE OF PARENTS AND CHILDREN AT HOME...	
...in Iran:	...in America:

Children of Heaven: Discussion Questions

Written by Courtney Ferrari

Pre-viewing Questions

1. Ali is the main character in the film. What motivates Ali? Does his motivation change over the course of the film?
2. How do adults and children interact in the film?
3. What values are important in Iran?

Plot Questions

1. How does Ali lose his sister's shoes?
2. What risks does he take trying to get them back?
3. Why does Ali decide not to tell his parents about the lost shoes?
4. Why does Zahra agree not to tell their parents about the lost shoes?
5. How do the children hide their secret from their parents and other adults?
6. Why won't the father use the mosque's sugar in his tea?
7. In the mosque, Ali's father cries while listening to the service and preparing tea. Why do you think he's crying?
8. What does Zahra do when she sees her shoes on another girl (Roya)?
9. Why don't Ali and Zahra ask for the shoes back?
10. How does Zahra react when the blind man's daughter gets a new pair of shoes?
11. Discuss the scene in which Ali and his father go uptown for work. Why is the father so uncomfortable and how is Ali able to help him?
12. How does Ali get chosen for the race?
13. How does Ali differ from the other contestants in the race?
14. What do you think of the film's ending? Is it a happy ending?

Cultural Context & Personal Connections

1. The film was made in 1997, so it is modern but not current. Describe the city of Tehran, its geography, layout and neighborhoods to the extent that this is shown in the movie.
2. Describe the family's home: how is it placed in the neighborhood? What space is shared with neighbors? How is space within the home used? How is it decorated?
3. Describe the clothing worn in the movie: does clothing differ between age groups, gender? How is clothing different for home and school?
4. What similarities and differences can you identify between the children's schools and your school in the US?
5. How are the roles in Ali & Zahra's family similar to or different from your family in the US? Describe the role of each family member. What is each person expected to do or not do?
 - a. What are your jobs in your family? How do they compare to the jobs done by Ali and Zahra?
6. What examples do you see of food or drink? Are they familiar to you or unknown?
7. What types of games and sports do children play in the film?

Post-viewing Questions

1. Why do you think the film is titled as it is? What values does the filmmaker find important?
2. Who in the movie is most like you? Which character is most different from you?
3. Consider Ali's parents and their relationship with the children. What is the image of family life that this film portrays?
4. The film has many examples of rising action, each of which leads to a dilemma which Ali and Zahra must work out. Choose one of these scenes to describe. What is the problem and how do the siblings solve it? Do they solve the problem on their own or do they get help? From whom?