



AFGHANISTAN UNVEILED Lesson Plan

Women's Rights in Post-War Afghanistan

pbs.org/independentlens/afghanistanunveiled

Grade level: 7–12

Estimated time: Two 45-minute class periods

Introduction:

In a country like the United States, it is difficult to help students understand that much of the world does not experience the level of security we might have. One such country is Afghanistan. In 1996, when the Taliban took over, most of the freedoms Afghan women had previously experienced were stripped away. They were forbidden from basic rights such as leaving their homes without a close male relative as a chaperone, or even visiting a doctor. When the Taliban was overthrown in 2001, the women of Afghanistan were fighting to regain the rights they had been denied. AFGHANISTAN UNVEILED will introduce students to some young, female Afghan journalists with the goal of sharing the stories of Afghan women. The lesson will use the film and several Web sites to expose students to women struggling to survive in post-war Afghanistan, the progress being made to secure the rights of women and some of the challenges that slow the process.

Lesson objectives:

The students will:

- Describe the severe restriction of women's rights during the Taliban's rule
- Understand the journalists' frustrations and desires to make the film
- Identify examples of progress made to increase women's rights
- Understand that although progress is being made, women across Afghanistan do not share the same freedoms

Materials needed:

- TV and VCR
- Computers with internet access
- AFGHANISTAN UNVEILED video

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Standards:

National Standards for History

<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/nchs/standards/worldera9.html>

The student understands how liberal democracy, market economies and human rights movements have reshaped political and social life. Analyze how feminist movements and social conditions have affected the lives of women in different parts of the world and compare women's progress toward social equality, economic opportunity and political rights in various countries. (Draw comparisons across regions.)

National Council of Teachers of English

<http://www.ncte.org/about/over/standards/110846.htm>

Standard 7: Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

Standard 9: Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

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Teaching Strategy:

1. As students begin to learn more about the rights of women in post-war Afghanistan, it is helpful for them to have an understanding of the religion and beliefs that guide the personal and political decisions of the Afghan people. Ensure students are familiar with basic history, terms, concepts and geography of the region. Begin by reviewing some common terms of Islam and beliefs of Muslims. If there are Muslim children in the class, elicit their help to explain some of these terms and concepts. Resources for this activity are the following Web sites from the PBS / Frontline "Muslims" Teachers Guide:

Beliefs and Daily Lives of Muslims

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/muslims/beliefs.html>

Glossary of Terms

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/muslims/glossary.html>

Create a worksheet for students to use individually or in small groups. Ask students to define the terms and answer the questions.

Terms: Allah, Arab, Hijab, Islam, Mosque, Muslim, Quran

Questions:

- Ask students to respond to the following questions:
- What is the difference between an Arab and a Muslim?
- What is Ramadan?
- What are the basic guidelines in a Muslim's daily life? What are they encouraged to do and to avoid?
- Read the section in the Daily Lives of Muslims about Role of Women in Islam. Is there anything listed in that section that is different from what you've heard or previously believed?

Discuss the terms and concepts with students spending additional time on those areas where students may need further explanation. After you feel like students have an understanding of the basic terms and concepts of Islam, begin to focus the class on the country of Afghanistan.

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2. How have the lives of women changed in post-war Afghanistan? Pose this question to students. Ask students to brainstorm what they think of when they think of Afghan women. Students will most likely identify images they have seen through the news of women wearing burqas, war, poverty, possibly trying to vote. Remind students that since 2001—when the Taliban was overthrown—the country has been rebuilding and moving toward a democracy and equality for Afghan women.

While the Taliban was in power, women were stripped of most of their basic rights. They could not work outside of their homes, travel without male chaperones, be seen by male doctors, or go to school. They were also required to wear burqas in public, the full body veil that even covered their faces. Since that time, things have started to change. Women are beginning to regain their rights. The number of women/girls in school has increased, many of the restrictions have been removed, and the constitution requires female representation from the provinces and states that “the citizens of Afghanistan— whether man or woman—have equal rights and duties before the law.” What does this mean, though? How have the lives of women changed? Look at a few segments of a film created by young Afghan women and hear what they have to say about their past and the challenges they continue to face.

3. Cue the AFGHANISTAN UNVEILED video to 25:44, the second segment highlighting Jamila Emami and her travels to Jalalabad. You will see Jamila in a blue outfit wearing a black headscarf walking through a door. While watching this clip, ask students what Jamila has to do prior to traveling to Jalalabad. **PLAY** the film and **PAUSE** at 26:03 when Jamila says, “This is a great opportunity for us to overcome this oppression by using our cameras.” Then pause to discuss.

Discuss Jamila’s father. What was his reasoning for allowing Jamila to take this journey? What does he believe his role is as a leader in his society? How does Jamila feel about being allowed to travel?

Jamila takes this journey to Jalalabad and beyond, visiting locations they had not planned. Instruct the students to watch the next segment and contrast the freedoms Jamila has as compared to the women she visits.

PLAY until you see the two journalists on the river as they begin their return to Kabul then **PAUSE** the tape at 34:57. Ask students how Jamila and her companions felt at the end of this trip. How have they been inspired? What did they see? What did they learn? Was their experience what they expected? What is meant by Jamila stating, “We can never again plead ignorance”?

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4. Provide students with the opportunity to learn more about the history of Afghanistan. Ask them to log onto the AFGHANISTAN UNVEILED Web site. Look at:

Women in Afghanistan: Afghan Women's Rights

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/afghanistanunveiled/women.html>

Timeline

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/afghanistanunveiled/timeline.html>

The Journey

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/afghanistanunveiled/detect.html>

Bookmarking the three Web pages for students will be helpful. Create a worksheet or put the following questions on the overhead. Allow students time to work individually or in pairs to respond to these questions.

- How old is Afghanistan?
- What was Afghanistan like for women prior to Soviet occupation?
- What happened when the Taliban took over in 1996?
- What happened in 2001 to change Afghanistan?
- What are some of the challenges for women who want to participate equally in public life?
- What steps have been taken to ensure the rights of Afghan women?
- With what countries does Afghanistan share borders?

Through the discussion of these questions, students should begin to comprehend that there have been extreme changes in the matter of two generations. The changes they are studying—the stripping of rights and the attempt to regain them—are not all long-standing traditions. In the 1950s, women were gaining rights and that trend continued as more women were educated and participating in many occupations. Remind students to keep these facts in mind as they watch the next segment of the film.

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5. The next segment of the film focuses on a trip to Badakhshan. Mehria Aziz travels to this conservative city and confronts some of the expectations of the men there. Ask students again to focus on the differences between the journalists and the women they meet. PLAY the segment starting where you left off at 34:57 to 40:20, and PAUSE when you hear Mehria say, "We are the first women video journalists in our country and our presence both intrigues and enrages." At this point Mehria hasn't had the opportunity to talk with any women, but what has she faced? Why does she say she will not wear the chadri (burqa), the full body veil? How do the men react to her presence?

Many rural Afghan women do not share the same opportunities and freedoms that are available to those in the larger cities. During the next segment, ask students to identify reasons some women don't share many freedoms. PLAY the tape and PAUSE at 42:04 when you hear the women in full veil say, "This is why we still observe the veil of Islam." Lead a discussion with your students. Why do these women wear the veil? How is their life different? Legally, they have equal rights, but what prevents them from taking advantage of those rights?

The next segment focuses on another area of Badakhshan. As you watch this segment, focus on the filmmakers' experiences—what do the journalists gain by participating in the project? PLAY the video and watch to the end. After STOPPING the tape, ask students what the journalists gain through their participation in creating this film? How are they growing through this process? How are the freedoms they enjoy in Kabul helping the women around Afghanistan?

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Assessment:

Using the information from the Web site, information in the film and additional resources, break the students into small groups. Give each group one of the following issues to investigate. The task of each group is to answer the question regarding each issue and jigsaw, creating new groups composed of students each representing a different topic. Allow time for them to go around the new group and share what they have learned.

- How is life different for women in Kabul as compared to the more rural areas of Afghanistan?
- How do the filmmakers feel about their role as journalists?
- What are the differences in the opinions and attitudes of men the journalists encounter.
- What are the new laws that have been put in place to protect and support women in Afghanistan?
- What prevents many of the women from refusing to wear the burqa (chadri) and equally participating in Afghan life?

Extensions:

Afghanistan is not the only country where the rights of women are of international concern. Investigate women's issues around the world at Women, War, and Peace Web site at <http://www.womenwarpeace.org/>. The site is hosted by the United Nations Development Fund for Women.

In an essay using information from their study, students can predict what they believe will happen in the future in Afghanistan. Will women achieve equality? Will the conservative traditions prevent them from reaching that goal? What situations would have to exist to support the changes that have started to continue?

Online resources:

An extensive list of online resources is available in the Learn More section of the Independent Lens Web site for AFGHANISTAN UNVEILED at <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/afghanistanunveiled/more.html>



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About the author:

Traci Osterhagen-Brock is an educator in Portland, Oregon. She has taught English, language arts and global studies at the middle and high school levels. She was also a training specialist for the National Teacher Training Institute, helping teachers integrate technology and media into their instructional practices. Currently she is working as a freelance writer and trainer and supports teachers in creating applied learning projects. She earned a B.A. in English and an M.Ed. in secondary education from the University of Florida.