Inquiry into Iran: Primary Source Analysis of CIA Documents

LESSON TITLE:  INQUIRY INTO IRAN: PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS OF CIA DOCUMENTS

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GRADE LEVEL: 8th-10th

OVERVIEW OF LESSON: This lesson gives students the opportunity to explore the complex relationship between Iran and the United States through the CIA’s involvement in the coup against Mossadegh. Using declassified CIA reports from 1953, students closely read, analyze, contextualize, and corroborate primary sources to better understand the events of 1953.

SUBJECT AREA: Humanities (History, Literature, Geography)

COUNTRY/REGIONAL FOCUS: Iran

TIME REQUIRED: 2 class sessions/ 60 minutes session

MATERIALS REQUIRED:

- Copies of selected CIA reports from *U.S. Intelligence and the Middle East* (attached)
- Copies of “The 6 Cs of Primary Source Analysis”

*Sources for the extended unit:

- *Iran Through the Looking Glass: History, Reform, and Revolution* (Choices Curriculum, Brown University)
- *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (Marjane Satrapi)

BACKGROUND:

This lesson falls within a larger unit on Iran, for which students are first introduced to the four historic empires of ancient Persia through readings, study questions, and activities (*Iran Through the Looking Glass: History, Reform, and Revolution*). Students then learn about 20th century Iran, with a focus on the Pahlavi Dynasty, and the history of foreign influence in Iran, specifically that of Great Britain and Russia (and, later, the U.S.), who were motivated by Iran’s natural resources and strategic geographic position that straddles Central Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and India. Students are then introduced to the CIA documents for the lesson herein. Later, students are assigned roles as Tehran University students in a 1979 debate about the future of Iran’s government as either a social democracy similar to those of the
U.S. and Great Britain, a socialist state like the Soviet Union, or an Islamic theocracy under the guardianship of the jurist, the Ayatollah Khomeini. After the debate and readings that fill in the events from the Islamic Revolution until recent times, students embark on an exploration of Marjane Satrapi’s graphic novel *Persepolis*.

The CIA documents are declassified cables and reports from the State Department and the CIA (from the database, *U.S. Intelligence and the Middle East*) in 1953 as Iran was embroiled in a political struggle between Mohammad Reza Shah, a U.S. ally, and Mohammad Mossadegh who wanted to nationalize oil and rid Iran of foreign influence and power. These primary sources give students a window into the concerns and goals of the CIA as the events of 1953 unfolded leading to the ouster of Mossadegh.

**CURRICULUM CONNECTION:**

This lesson connects to a unit on the Iranian Revolution and fits within the Humanities 8 course, where students analyze moments of conflict in order to see how identity informs choices and how understanding humanity expands our obligation to others. Our study of conflict also includes an examination of justice and reconciliation in the 20th century through case studies on World War I, the Holocaust, and Apartheid South Africa. Literature also includes World War I-era poetry, Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*, and Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. The study of geography and current events, along with core reading and writing skills, helps students explore an increasingly complex world, empowering them to be agents of social change.

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:**

- How do events of the past affect the present?
- How can we understand conflict between the governments of Iran and the U.S through a historical lens?
- How can we evaluate arguments for and against CIA intervention in foreign governments?
- How can debating different sides of an issue help us understand the choices we have as actors in history?

**LEARNING GOALS:**

- Students will become familiar analyzing primary sources to better understand the historian’s role of inquiry.
- Students will learn about the factors motivating the US in Iran in 1953.
- Students will evaluate and debate the actions of the CIA.

STANDARDS (applicable to the extended unit on Iran)

**Common Core State Standards**

**ELA->CCR Anchor Standards for Reading Key Ideas and Details**

**Key Ideas and Details:**
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- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R. 1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3 Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

Craft and Structure:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4 Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.9 Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.10 Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

ELA->CCR

Anchor Standards for Writing Text Types and Purposes:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Production and Distribution of Writing:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

ELA->CCR
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Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening Comprehension and Collaboration:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2 Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.3 Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

ELA->CCR

Anchor Standards for Language Conventions of Standard English:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.1 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.2 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

Knowledge of Language:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.3 Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.4 Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.5 Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

ELA Standards in History/Social Studies-Grade 9-10

Key Ideas and Details:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.
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- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

Craft and Structure:
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6 Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.8 Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claims.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9 Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity:
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.10 By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 9-10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

ELA Standards in History/Social Studies-Grade 9-10

Key Ideas and Details:
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.3 Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Craft and Structure:
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.5 Analyze in detail how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6 Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence. Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.
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CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

C3 Framework: College, Career and Civic Life for Social Studies State Standards (NCSS)

Geography

- D2.Geo.2.9-12. Use maps, satellite images, photographs, and other representations to explain relationships between the locations of places and regions and their political, cultural, and economic dynamics.

History

- D2.His.5.9-12. Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people’s perspectives.

Evaluating Sources

- D3.3.9-12. Identify evidence that draws information directly and substantively from multiple sources to detect inconsistencies in evidence in order to revise or strengthen claims.

PROCEDURE:

Day 1 (1 hour)

(10 minutes) Video Introduction: Explain to students that they are going to watch a short video about an Iranian who has strong feelings about the U.S. Show the video “Mr. Big Mouth” produced by The New York Times. [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/15/world/middleeast/iran-our-man-in-tehran.html?action=click&contentCollection=Middle%20East&module=RelatedCoverage&region=Marginalia&ampotype=article]  
This six-minute documentary features a local Iranian in Tehran. Interviewed by the journalist Thomas Erdbrink, he shows his disdain for the U.S.

(10 minutes) Discussion: Begin a short classroom discussion by asking students about their reaction to the main character? Why do they think he feels they way he does? Do they think this is typical of most Iranians? Can they tell the viewpoint of the producers of the video? Do they feel that the information and journalist in the video are trustworthy? Why or why not? What did they find most surprising, interesting, or thought-provoking? What new information does the film prompt them to want to discover?

Have students read through the events, taking note especially of the year 1953. Ask students: What surprises you about U.S.-Iranian relations? What questions do you have?

Homework: In a one-paragraph response, answer the following question: How would you describe the major points of conflict between U.S. and Iran?

Day Two (1 hour)

(10 minutes) In groups of 3-4 have students read and annotate the CIA documents. Have students write down their observations in the margins.

What observations do you have? What clues are in this document? Are there any names you recognize? What questions do you have?

(20 minutes) Then as a group, have students complete “The 6 Cs of Primary Source Analysis,” filling out answers or impressions for each of the following criteria:

CONTENT
Main Idea
Describe in detail what you see.

CITATION
Author/Creator
When was this created?

CONTEXT
What is going on in the world, the country, the region, or the locality when this was created?

CONNECTIONS
Prior Knowledge
Link the primary source to other things that you already know or have learned about.

COMMUNICATION
Point-of-view or bias
Is this source reliable?

CONCLUSIONS
How does the primary source contribute to our understanding of history?

(20 minutes) Student groups share their findings. What did they learn from reading and analyzing these documents?

(10 minutes) Final discussion. What are the main take away points from the groups’ presentations? What questions do you still have?
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ASSESSMENT:

- Assess students for active and thoughtful participation in classroom discussions.
- Assess students' grasp of the 6 C's of primary source analysis.
- Assess students' collaborative discussion according to your preferred methodology.
- Assess students' final written assignment in Iran test (attached) for clarity, structure of their argument, and appropriateness of language.

RESOURCES:


U.S. Intelligence and the Middle East, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013 <http://primarysources.brillonline.com/browse/us-intelligence-on-the-middle-east>