Iranian Poetry Lesson/ High School

Objectives: Students will be able to...
- Cite textual evidence to support analysis of common themes within three poems
- Compare and contrast the development of similar themes between three poems
- Analyze and evaluate how three poems treat similar themes and topics

Standards:
9-10.RL.2.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what a text says explicitly as well as inferences and interpretations drawn from the text.

11-12.RL.2.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what a text says explicitly as well as inferences and interpretations drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

11-12.RL.2.2 Compare and contrast the development of similar themes or central ideas across two or more works of literature and analyze how they emerge and are shaped and refined by specific details.

11-12.RL.4.2 Analyze and evaluate works of literary or cultural significance in history (American, English, or world) and the way in which these works have used archetypes drawn from myths, traditional stories, or religious works, as well as how two or more of the works treat similar themes, conflicts, issues, or topics.

Approximate Length: two 45-minute class periods

Materials Needed:

Copies of the following poems for each student:
- Ahmad Shamlu's New York Times obituary
  (https://www.nytimes.com/2000/07/29/arts/ahmad-shamlu-74-poet-and-iranian-dissident.html)
- "In This Blind Alley" by Ahmad Shamlu
  (https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2010/07/in-this-blind-alley.html)
- "Untitled 2" by Tupac Shakur
  (https://www.poetrysoup.com/famous/poem/untitled_2_21354)
- "I sit and Look Out" by Walt Whitman
  (https://www.poetrysoup.com/famous/poem/i_sit_and_look_out_13382)
- Comparing Poems.pdf

About the Lesson:

This lesson introduces students to Iranian poet Ahmad Shamlu. Students then read Shamlu's poem, "In This Blind Alley," and compare/contrast it to poems by American poets Walt Whitman and Tupac Shakur.

Procedures:

1. Think-Pair-Share: Write the word "oppression" on the board. In pairs, ask students to discuss write a working definition to share with the class.
2. Show the opening scene to "Argo" the movie. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_6RGeqNFaQM).
3. Hand out copies of Ahmad Shamlu's obituary. You can have students take turns reading it aloud, or in pairs. Ask student to discuss the following line from the poem: "Mr. Shamlu has come more and more to view poetry as a mirror which the thinking poet, in an uncertain world, holds up to his own soul." Do they agree with this analogy? Why or why not?
4. Distribute copies of Shamlu's poem "In This Blind Alley." Before reading the poem, explain to students that Shamlu wrote this poem in response to the oppressive theocratic government, led by Ayatollah Khomeini, that took control after the abdication of the Shah. Explain to students that there was a government "crack down" against anything considered a threat to the new regime, and that many people were imprisoned or murdered. This still continues today in Iran, as seen by the 2017 protests. (Teacher may wish to show students a news clip or news article about the protests).
5. Ask students to read the poem quietly and take notes on any phrases or lines that stand out to them, including literary devices that may have been discussed in class.
6. Ask students to pair-up with a new partner to discuss the poem together. How did the poem make them feel? Which lines from the poem did they like most? Why?
7. Hand students "Untitled 2" by Tupac Shakur, "I Sit and Look Out" by Walt Whitman, and the Comparing Poems.pdf. Either alone or with their partner, have students read the other two poems and complete the chart. When all are finished, discuss the poems as a class or have students work in small groups to compare their notes.
8. Have students write an essay comparing or contrasting the poems. One of the following prompts may be used:

   Write an essay in which you identify common theme(s) between the poems.

   How do the authors of each poem use word choice to develop theme?

   Write an essay where you explain how the use of concrete details reveals both the poem's literal and metaphorical meaning.

   Extension: Have students find poems by other authors that share common themes or ideas with the poems presented in this lesson.

Further Resources:

https://www.bbc.com/news/topics/c34k51rkynrt/iran-protests

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/01/03/tens-of-thousands-of-people-protested-in-iran-this-week-heres-why/?utm_term=.c22ebcea2817