

# Lesson Plan Two for the Study of RUMI RETURNING

as seen on PBS

## LESSON TWO

### A Migration Through the 13th Century Islamic World

*“Islam is dramatically changing in Rumi’s lifetime... Rumi is in the center, in the eye of the storm...”*

*Akbar S. Ahmed from RUMI RETURNING*

**Lesson Title:** A Migration Through the 13th Century Islamic World

**Grade Levels:** 6-12

**Subjects:** World History, Geography, Language Arts, and Arts (Art Connections, Dance, Music, and Visual Arts)

**Estimated Time of Completion:** 2-3 class periods

- I. **Instructional Objectives**
- II. **Standards**
- III. **Materials Needed**
- IV. **Procedures**
- V. **Assessment Suggestions**
- VI. **Extensions/Adaptations**

**I. Instructional Objectives:**

- Students will have the opportunity to learn about the 13th century Islamic world through the life and travels of the most popular poet in the United States and world by viewing the first part of **RUMI RETURNING** (to 22:35).
- Students will have the opportunity to learn about cultural and political aspects of the Turkic, Persian, and Mongol Empires.
- Students will have the opportunity to expand their comprehension of Islam, Sufism, and Sufi poetry.

**II. Standards:**

- This lesson correlates to the following national standards for world history, geography, language arts, and arts (art connections, dance, music, and visual arts) established by the Mid-Continent Research Regional Education Lab (<http://www.mcrel.org>).

**World History:**

- Understands the maturation of an interregional system of communication, trade, and cultural exchange during a period of Islamic expansion.
- Understands significant aspects of Islamic civilization.
- Understand major global trends from 1000 to 1500 CE.
- Understands the significance of Sufism.
- Understands the spread of Islam in Southwest Asia and the Mediterranean region.
- Understands cultural and political aspects of the Turkic Empires.
- Understands the rise of the Mongol Empire and its consequences for Eurasian peoples from 1200 to 1350.

**Geography:**

- Knows the location of places, geographic features, and patterns of the environment.

- Know the approximate locations of major political and economic cultures.
- Understands the physical and human characteristics of place.
- Understands why places and regions are important to individual human identity and the symbols for unifying or fragmenting society.
- Understands historic and contemporary economic trade networks.
- Understands the patterns of human settlement and their causes.
- Understands the symbolic importance of capital cities.

#### **Language Arts:**

- Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.
- Uses strategies to address writing to different audiences.
- Writes descriptive and narrative compositions.
- Writes persuasive compositions.
- Uses appropriate strategies to write personal correspondence.
- Gathers and uses information for research purposes.
- Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.
- Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.
- Uses a variety of criteria to evaluate and form viewpoints of visual media.
- Understands how images and sound convey messages in visual media.
- Understands the characteristics and components of the media.
- Understand the ways in which image-makers construct meaning.

#### **Art Connections:**

- Knows ways in which various arts media can be integrated.

#### **Dance:**

- Understands dance in various cultures and historical periods.

#### **Music:**

- Understands the relationship between music and history and culture.

#### **Visual Arts:**

- Understands what makes different art media, techniques, and processes effective (or ineffective) in communicating various ideas.
- Knows a range of subject matter, symbols, and potential ideas in the visual arts.
- Understands the characteristics and merits of one's own artwork and the artwork of others.
- Understands how various interpretations can be used to understand and evaluate works of visual art.

### **III. Materials Needed:**

- A copy of **RUMI RETURNING**, as seen on PBS.
- T.V. and VCR.
- **Map** of 13th Century world (to include Arab, Persian, Turkic, and Mongol lands) .
- Hand-outs: **List of Names**, **List of Place Names**, **Prayer/Poem by Rabi'a**, **Poem by Rumi: "Buoyancy"**.
- Computers with Internet access.

### **IV. Procedures:**

#### **Overview:**

- This lesson is based on the video **RUMI RETURNING**, as seen on PBS <http://www.pbs.org> . Students will have the opportunity to learn about the 13th century Islamic world through the life and

travels of the most popular poet in the United States and perhaps world by viewing the first part of **RUMI RETURNING** (to 22:35). Students will learn about cultural and political aspects of the Turkic, Persian, Arab, and Mongol Empires. Students will expand their comprehension of Islam, Sufism, Sufi figures, and Sufi literature (poetry).

1. **PRE-VIDEO:** Introduce **RUMI RETURNING** by telling students they are about to see a documentary about one of the most beloved writers and spiritual teachers in the world, respected in both the East (especially the Middle East and Southeast Asia) and the West, where he is now the most popular poet in the United States. This sage just celebrated his 800th birthday in 2007, which was designated The International Year of Rumi by UNESCO. In countries such as Iran and Afghanistan, children memorize couplets of Rumi's poetry as they would nursery rhymes, and in countries such as these and Turkey, adults might read his writings second only to the *Qur'an*.
2. Place the **Map of the 13th Century World** in a prominent location. Hand out the **List of Names** and the **List of Place Names** (with time cues). Are there place names on this list with which students are not familiar? Suggest that as they watch the film they make special note of the cities that the young Rumi visits.
3. **VIDEO:** Show the first part of RUMI RETURNING, detailing Rumi's early life through his family's migration fleeing the Mongols through the Arab and Persian Lands to Konya in the Anatolian Seljuk province of Rum (now in Turkey). (22:35)
4. **POST-VIDEO:** Write the date and place of Rumi's birth on the board: He was born September 30, 1207, in the city of Balkh, in the province of Khorasan, now northern Afghanistan. "Called the Mother of Cities, Balkh was over 3,000 years old when Rumi was young. It had already given birth to the Persian Prophet Zoroaster and nurtured a center of Buddhism. . ." (from **RUMI RETURNING**, (5:05) Have students mark these places on the Map. You may want to have students research Balkh and its history, especially its connection to the Silk Route, noting civilizations, languages, and religions/faiths that residents there would have come into contact during the 13th century.
5. You may want to have students research then discuss what else was happening during Rumi's lifetime (1207-1273). A potential resource is the Timeline located on the PBS web pages for the video *Islam: Empire of Faith* at <http://www.pbs.org/empires/islam/timeline.html>.
6. Ask students to describe Rumi's childhood was like. Discuss what it must have been like to be a war refugee with his family. You may want to watch this section of the film again: "As with many a Muslim child then and now, Mevlana's childhood was disrupted by the horror of war and the anxious searching of the refugee. A pervasive sense of cosmic homelessness, yearning to find its way home, would occupy his mind and poetry for Rumi's entire life." (13:06) You may want to have students research a few other poets they like or have studied in order to compare Rumi's output with theirs.
7. As they use the **List of Place Names** and their notes, ask students to participate in plotting the journey of Rumi's family on the **Map**. You might ask them to break into small groups to research some or all of these cities that Rumi visited and their significance, especially to Islam: Nishapur, Baghdad, Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem, Damascus, Aleppo, Larende (Karaman), Anatolia/Rum. (Those underlined are highlighted in the film..) You may want to have them report their findings to the class.
8. Discuss what Dr. Akbar Ahmed, Chair of Islamic Studies, American University, means by saying, "Islam is dramatically changing in Rumi's lifetime. The Crusades have been hammering the Muslim world from the West for centuries. And what is hammering the Muslim world from the East is the sudden explosion from the Gobi Desert. . . Rumi (was) in the center, in the eye of the storm." You may want students to research the Crusades and the Mongol invasions, and plot them on the **Map**.
9. Write these lines of Rumi's on the board: "Ignorance is God's prison; knowing is God's palace." (11:00) Ask students to discuss what these lines mean, as well as Dr. Ahmed's comments

about the “supreme position of knowledge or *ilm* in Islam.” (10:31)

10. For older and advanced students, hand out the **Poem by Rumi: “Buoyancy,”** and discuss its theme, analyzing its use of imagery, language, stylistic devices, etc.
11. Hand out the **Prayer/Poem of Rabi’a**. Discuss its meaning. Have students research this 8th century Sufi saint, who was born in Basra (now Iraq). For older and advanced students, you might want to lead a discussion about Dr. Ahmed’s statement that the great female Sufi Rabi’a is a “paradox.” How could a female saint be viewed as a “paradox” in Islam?

#### V. Assessment Suggestions:

- You may want to assess the students’ research of cities in #7, Procedures, or their oral reports to the class. You may suggest that students research other cities rich in history and culture listed on their **List of Place Names** and featured in **RUMI RETURNING**, such as Basra, Tabriz, or Ephesus.
- You may want to have students refer to their notes about the cities that Rumi visited with his family as they fled Balkh on their journey through the Arab and Persian lands to Konya. They can do further research and write one of the following: a descriptive composition about one or more of these places; a narrative composition about Rumi’s journey; a diary of Rumi’s travels as if written by him; or a letter about his journey as if written from him to a friend back in Balkh.
- Building on the discussion of Rumi’s childhood as a war refugee, you may want students to research war refugees: how many war refugees are there today, how many are children, and how many are Muslim children? In what countries are they located? Ask students to report their findings to the class.
- You may want to ask students to further research and explain Dr. Ahmed’s statement: “In 1258 Genghis Kahn’s descendents will attack, invade, and sack Baghdad, the heart of the Muslim Arab Dynasty, and a chapter in history will close. . .”(12:26) You may ask students to write a cause-effect composition explaining the effects of the Mongol invasion on Baghdad and the Muslim world or one emphasizing the reasons Baghdad was so important to the Muslim world.
- You may want to have students research how different faiths and cultures have (or have not) coexisted in the country of Rumi’s birthplace (Afghanistan) in recent and current times.
- You may want to ask students to further research Rabi’a al-Adawiyya (also called Rabi’a al-Basri) and write a biographical sketch of her.

#### V. Extensions/Adaptations:

- For arts, dance, or music classes, you may want to have students research the rich Turkish culture displayed in **RUMI RETURNING**. A potential resource is the Turkish Cultural Foundation website at <http://www.turkishculture.org>.
- For arts students, you may wish to emphasize Persian culture by having students study the genre of Persian miniatures, such as those seen throughout the film. Here are two sites where students may view Persian miniatures: <http://www.bridgemanlibrary.com> and <http://www.Persia.org/Images/Miniature/miniature.html>. Specifically, students might look at how personages such as Muhammad and Genghis Kahn are depicted in these pictures. Or they might study how Persian miniatures influenced the miniatures of the Ottoman and Mughal Empires.
- For advanced literature classes, you may ask students to research the language of Farsi and other renowned Persian poets, such as Omar Khayyam and Hafiz. Students might compare a poem of these two with one of Rumi’s.

## A POEM BY RUMI: "BUOYANCY"

Love has taken away my practices  
and filled me with poetry.  
I tried to keep quietly repeating,  
No strength but yours,  
but I couldn't.  
I had to clap and sing.  
I used to be respectable and chaste and stable,  
But who can stand in this strong wind  
and remember those things?  
A mountain keeps an echo deep inside itself.  
That's how I hold your voice.  
I am scrap wood thrown in your fire,  
and quickly reduced to smoke.  
I saw you and became empty.  
This emptiness, more beautiful than existence,  
it obliterates existence, and yet when it comes,  
existence thrives and creates more existence!  
The sky is blue. The world is a blind man  
squatting on the road.  
But whoever sees your emptiness  
sees beyond blue and beyond the blind man.  
A great soul hides like Muhammad, or Jesus,  
moving through a crowd in a city  
where no one knows him.  
To praise is to praise  
how one surrenders  
to the emptiness.  
To praise the sun is to praise your own eyes.  
Praise, the ocean. What we say, a little ship.  
So the sea-journey goes on, and who knows where!  
Just to be held by the ocean is the best luck  
we could have. It's a total waking up!  
Why should we grieve that we've been sleeping?  
It doesn't matter how long we've been unconscious.  
We're groggy, but let the guilt go.  
Feel the motions of tenderness  
around you, the buoyancy.

**Rumi** (from *The Essential Rumi* by Coleman Barks with John Moyne)

IF I ADORE YOU OUT OF FEAR OF HELL,  
BURN ME IN HELL!  
IF I ADORE YOU OUT OF DESIRE FOR PARADISE,  
LOCK ME OUT OF PARADISE!  
BUT IF I ADORE YOU FOR YOURSELF ALONE  
DO NOT DENY TO ME YOUR ETERNAL BEAUTY!

RABI'A AL-ADAWIYYA (ALSO CALLED RABI'A AL-BASRI) (717-801 A.D.)

## **NAMES of Rumi, His Father, His Son, and His Teacher**

### **Mevlana Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi**

Mevlana (or Mawlana or Mowlana) = Master

Jalal al-Din = Keeper of religion

Muhammad = the Prophet of Islam

Rumi = From the land of the Romans or West; non-native

**Bahauddin Valad** = Rumi's father; one of the great Sufi Shakhs in Balkh, Khorasan, Rumi's birthplace; called the Sultan of Scholars

**Sultan Valad** = one of Rumi's sons; established Rumi's legacy by developing the Mevlevi order of Sufism and formalizing the dance of the whirling dervishes

**Shamsuddin (or Shams)** = Rumi's Master Teacher; a wandering Sufi dervish from Tabriz (now in Azerbaijan); his name is Arabic for "sun"

## **LIST OF PLACE NAMES IN RUMI RETURNING**

- (3:12) Konya, Turkey
- (5:05) Balkh Khorasan
- (5:05) Silk Route
- (5:05) Persian Empire
- (8:56) Basra
- (12:12) Gobi Desert
- (12:26) Baghdad
- (12:26) Mongol Empire
- (15:39) Mecca
- (18:57) Medina
- (19:10) the Dome of the Rock (Jerusalem)
- (19:20) Damascus
- (19:23) Anatolian Seljuk province of Rum
- (19:55) Andalusia (Spain)
- (22:10) Troy
- (22:10) Ephesus
- (22:10) Smyrna
- (23:55) Tabriz
- (41:08) Sille, Turkey
- (41:22) Ottoman Empire of Turkey