



UNIT PLAN

CREATED BY MELISSA CABALLERO



THE MANY ASSASINATIONS OF SAMIR, THE SELLER OF DREAMS BY DANIEL NAYERI

WITH PAINTINGS BY DANIEL MIYARES
A UNIT PLAN BY MELISSA CABALLERO

BEFORE YOU BEGIN: A MINI AUTHOR STUDY

Daniel Nayeri is an award-winning author of nine books for children and young adults. It may be helpful to have students conduct a mini research activity to get to know the author. Have students identify five key details about his life and his works. Students may present their research in creative ways using platforms like Flipgrid, Canva, or Google Slides.

BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

This novel takes the reader on an exciting journey through the Silk Road, filled with mischief, mayhem, and love. Before students delve into this rich text, it may be helpful to provide students some background knowledge on what the Silk Road is and the rich history behind it. Educators may find the Bibliography on pg. 207 helpful for their own personal learning.

*This unit plan was created with consideration to the rigorous national and next-generation standards for English Language Arts and Social Studies. Students should support their ideas with textual evidence where appropriate.

RESOURCES TO FURTHER UNDERSTANDING OF THE SILK ROAD:

- TED ED The Silk Road: [TED ED Silk Road History](#)
- The Silk Road Facts for Kids: [History For Kids.Org](#)
- The Silk Road with Tim and Moby: [Silk Road Brain POP](#)
- Silk Road: [Britannica for Kids](#)
- Ancient Civilizations: [Silk Road \(National Geographic Education\)](#)
- The Silk Roads and Trades - The Story of China Today: ([PBS Learning Video](#))
- Maps (Visual Resources): [Asian Art.Org](#)
- Historical Origins of The Silk Road: [History of the Silk Road](#)

Along the Silk Road and throughout the story, the reader is introduced to the culture of the caravans that traveled this often-treacherous route. The following resources may help students understand some of what is shared by Omar as he navigates his place within the caravan's culture and his relationship with his master, the Seller of Dreams.

CULTURES AND RELIGIONS ALONG THE SILK ROAD:

- Crash Course Geography: ([Cultures and Religion](#))
- History Crunch: ([Silk Road Info Graphic](#))

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES & ANTICIPATION GUIDES (BEFORE READING—FOR ANTICIPATION)

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The novel *The Many Assassinations of Samir, the Seller of Dreams* follows the story of a young boy who is trying to survive while in the company of Samir, a talented storyteller. The way in which Samir tells his stories are a testament to how folklore spread along the Silk Road. As a starting point, it may be helpful to introduce the meaning of folklore as a genre to students.

Characteristics of folklore:

- Shared orally.
- Shared across generations and passed on.
- Highlight lessons and morals.
- Highlight consequences.
- And others...

TEXT ARTWORK AS AN ANTICIPATORY ACTIVITY

The novel is organized by chapters and titles; however, each chapter is preceded by a painting that often foreshadows the events within the chapter. The narrator frequently describes the image while describing the events in each chapter. It may be helpful to have students predict the events of the chapter by analyzing the image and how it may relate to the chapter's title.

TO OPEN THE NOVEL, YOU MAY CHOOSE TO BEGIN WITH THE FIRST PAINTINGS BEFORE THE STORY BEGINS.

- Based on the title of the novel, what predictions do you have about the story?
- What do you notice and wonder about who and what is present in this painting?
- Based on the artist's color choices, what is the mood of this image? What makes you think so and how might that lead to the plot of the story?
- If you could ask anyone in this image a question, what would you ask and why? Explain.



1. Have students read the inside jacket of the novel after making predictions and analyzing the image. Engage students in discussion around whether this confirms or adjusts their thinking.
2. Have students analyze the opening quote by Jonas Lindsay. Students may discuss or summarize the ideas in the quote based on their understanding of the Silk Road in the eleventh century.

TEA PARTY STRATEGY ACTIVITY OPTION (ACTIVITY TEMPLATE ATTACHED IN RESOURCES)

As described by Kyleene Beers in her book *When Kids Can't Read: What Teachers Can Do*, the Tea Party protocol offers students a chance to consider parts of the text before they read it. It encourages active participation and attentive listening with a chance to get up and move around the classroom. It allows students to predict what they think will happen in the text as they make inferences, see causal relationships, compare and contrast, practice sequencing, and draw on prior knowledge.

The link below can be used to access helpful information and samples of how this activity can be executed in a classroom.

<http://rbcomprehensionstrategies.weebly.com/tea-party.html>

Teacher will model what it means to make inferences.

An inference involves using your prior knowledge about a text or topic, along with clues from the text, to make a prediction about what is happening or will happen.

Inference = Clues from the Text + What I Already Know

Teacher will discuss introducing Tea Party procedures and let students know that they will be using this activity to make inferences about Daniel Nayeri's novel *The Many Assassinations of Samir the Seller of Dreams*. Students can be asked to examine the book cover, jacket, etc. to make inferences but should not read the synopsis of the book prior to completing any anticipatory activities.

- ❑ Select names of individuals in the book, locations, phrases, brief quotes, etc. taken from the first few sections of the book

THE GOAL

- ❑ Help students make informed inferences about the key details of the text's unfolding.
- ❑ Get students thinking about the potential setting, plot, central ideas, and people present in the text.
- ❑ Get students thinking about potential cultural, societal, and personal conflicts as they relate to the text.

ANTICIPATION ANALYSIS

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WHY IS EVERY PAGE IN A NOVEL PURPOSEFUL AND IMPORTANT?

From the very beginning, paintings by Daniel Miyares will appear preceding a new chapter. While the page is not labeled, it is clear that these beautiful works of art serve a purpose for how the story is told. Depending on student level and ability, you may want to have students address one or more of these images and make interpretations based on their understanding. As a follow-up after reading the book, have students revisit their interpretations and have them assess whether or not their thoughts have changed. Consider the following questions:

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITTEN RESPONSE

Before Reading:

- ★ Why do you think Daniel Nayeri chose to include these paintings in this novel?
- ★ What significance do these paintings have based on their location in the book?
How might it help you understand the events of the chapter?

After Reading:

- ★ How do these images relate to the characters' journey on the Silk Road?
- ★ In what ways do you see evidence of the images within the text itself?
- ★ Which image best represents the overall theme of the story?
- ★ Which image resonated with you the most and why? Provide direct textual evidence to support your thinking.

ARTWORK ANALYSIS NOTE CATCHER: ANTICIPATION/AFTER READING ACTIVITY

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Directions: Analyze the paintings present at the beginning of each chapter. Use the space provided to interpret their meaning in your own words before you read the chapter. After reading, respond with any confirmations or adjustments to your initial thoughts.

*See the Chapter Discussion Questions for some ideas teachers can use for the analysis portion of this note catcher.

CHAPTER DISCUSSION AND COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

CHAPTER 1: THE FIRST TIME I WAS STONED TO DEATH

1. Analyze the image on page 2. What do you notice and wonder about what is happening in the painting? How is color used to convey a possible mood for the upcoming chapter?
2. How might this image foreshadow the events that may take place in the first chapter?
3. How does the narrator begin this story? In what ways is his use of suspense successful in drawing the reader into the story?
4. In what ways are the events from the image analyzed at the start of the chapter present? (pg. 3 summarizes the painting using vivid language)
5. How does the author use figurative language to emphasize importance? (Examples of metaphor and personification can be found throughout the chapter on pgs. 3-4)
6. What do we learn about the narrator from the events in the first five pages?
7. What inferences can you draw about how the narrator came to be in his current situation based on your knowledge of the Silk Road?
8. What are your first impressions of Samir?
9. In what ways do you notice the conventions of folklore being presented in the first chapter of the novel so far? (see pg. 14)
10. The narrator describes Samir as “an unserious man, a liar, and a thief”. How do these assertions about him compare to your first impressions? Explain.

CHAPTER 2: MONKEY, DONKEY, MASTER, MULE

1. Analyze the image on page 18. What do you notice about this image based on what you learned in Chapter 1?
2. What do you think the title indicates about the events of Chapter 2? (You may have students reflect on the title again after they read the chapter to confirm or adjust their thinking).
3. The narrator's name is revealed to be Omar. What is the significance of his name? How does it compare to the name "Monkey" that Samir gives him?
4. What do you think the monkey symbolizes?
5. Based on what you know of Omar thus far, what animal would you say he should be named after?
6. How do you feel about the bargain that was made to get Omar away from the monks?
7. What makes The Seller of Dreams who he is according to Omar?
8. What is your interpretation of "the merchant's crown"? Why do you think Samir desires it?
9. Based on the way that Omar speaks of Samir, how does he seem to feel about his new master? In what ways does the mid-point on page 22 possibly foreshadow the fate of Samir?
10. In what ways are mood and tone present in Chapter 2?
11. How is figurative language used to emphasize Omar's feelings toward Samir?

CHAPTER 3: THE EXPENSIVE NATURE OF LOVE

1. What is the significance of the color choice in the painting that precedes the chapter (pg.26)? Describe what you see and who you think is present in this image.
2. How might this painting foreshadow the events of the third chapter and its title?
3. Think about the title of the chapter. Why might love be “expensive”?
4. Reflect on your knowledge of the Silk Road. Why do you think Omar describes this leg of the journey as “dangerous”?
5. Have students complete character analysis charts to get them thinking about what they have learned so far.
6. How does the author use details to establish the setting in this part of the story?
7. What do you learn about the caravan and the life they lead? How does Omar feel about them?
8. How does Omar feel about the way Samir “treats” the stories he tells?
9. What new knowledge does Omar glean from speaking to the merchants and other members of the caravan?
10. What predictions do you have about how this journey will unfold?
11. In what ways is religion a part of the culture of the caravans?
12. What are the “Nothings and Somethings” of life?
13. Describe Mara? How is she now a part of the story beginning in Chapter 3?
14. What are the most powerful things on earth? Which does Omar believe is the most important?
15. Reflect on the painting at the start of the chapter. How do color connotations play an important role in the events of this chapter and the events on page 42?
16. Interpret the meaning of “Accidentalism”. How do Smithy and Mara feel about this term? How do you know?
17. Why do you think Omar says that death is better than losing love? What is it about love and death that would make him believe what he does?

CHAPTER 4: OUR WELL-BEING HINDERED BY A WELL BEING HINDERED

1. Analyze the painting on page 46. What predictions can you make about the chapter based on what you see and the title of the chapter?
2. Consider the idea of color connotations and symbolism. What meanings can you glean from just the color choices alone? Explain.
3. Define the word hindered. How might this word's meaning affect the events of the chapter and what you predicted?
4. How does Omar feel about Mara at this stage of the novel? How do you think Mara feels about him? Explain.
5. What are your impressions of Rasseem? What are some events that have taken place that have led you to draw your conclusions?
6. What does Omar want Samir to admit about himself? Why do you think it bothers him so much? Explain.
7. Analyze the events that take place on page 58. What do Omar and Samir discover that makes the Silk Road dangerous?
8. How do you think Samir is doing as "The Seller of Dreams"? Explain.

CHAPTER 5: A LIST OF KILLERS AND REASONS FOR KILLING

1. In Chapter 3, Omar describes love as "the color red". Analyze the painting on page 64. How do you think Omar would describe this version of red? What are some other ways red can be symbolized?
2. How many assassins are after Samir? What are some of their special "skills"?
3. Based on the reactions of the caravan, what inferences can you draw about Cid in comparison to the assassins after Samir?
4. How does the road to Kucha compare to other roads they have taken so far?
5. How does Mara clarify the questions Omar has about Cid?
6. Compare and contrast Omar and Mara's feelings toward Cid. At this point in the story, who do you think is correct in their thinking? Explain with a rationale that can be supported by your own inferences and textual evidence.
7. Interpret the following quote from the end of the chapter:
"To everyone we love we give a knife. The knife is shaped to pass through the bones of our chests like a key in a lock." Refer to page 74
What does this confession by Omar potentially foreshadow? What evidence can you use to support your thinking?

CHAPTER 6: ENTER THE VIKING BERSERKER

1. Analyze the painting on page 76. What predictions do you have about Chapter 6 based on the chapter's title and the painting? Consider the color choice and potential symbolism.
2. How does the descriptive language used in the text propel the plot of the story? Refer to page 78.
3. How does the setting impact the characters and events that have taken place?
4. In what ways is the theme of family present in the text so far?
5. Why do you think Omar is having trouble telling the truth to the merchants? What information do you think they have that Omar does not? Explain.
6. What is it about Samir that frustrates Omar the most in this chapter? What does Omar want everyone else to know about Samir?
7. How is figurative language used to describe The Norseman?
8. What literary techniques does Nayeri use to highlight important plot events?
9. How would you describe the banter between Omar and Samir towards the end of the chapter? Explain.

CHAPTER 7: A LITTLE SLEEP, A LITTLE FOLDING OF THE HANDS TO REST

1. What mood does the painting on page 94 convey to the reader? Analyze the painting and determine what you think it means for the chapter as it relates to the title of the chapter.
2. How does Omar describe how orphans learn things? Why do you think he describes himself as “useless”?
3. Summarize the events that take place between pages 96-102. What “mystical event” ends up happening? Explain.
4. What makes Samir destitute according to Omar? How is Omar feeling about being the servant to a destitute master? Explain.
5. How does the author use dashes throughout the chapter to emphasize key details? Explain.
6. After reading the chapter, how closely does the title of the chapter align with what occurs? Explain.

CHAPTER 8: DEATH BY DREAMING

1. How does the painting foreshadow the title of the chapter? What predictions can you make based on how Chapter 7 ends.
2. What do you think the colors of this painting symbolize? Explain.
3. How does Nayeri use dashes to emphasize his points at the beginning of the chapter?
4. How reliable do you find Omar's testimony so far?
5. Omar alleges that he is "fine" at the bottom of page 109. Do you believe him? Why or why not?
6. How have the real threats of the assassins impacted the caravan?
7. Describe the love/hate relationship Samir and Rasseem seem to have, according to Omar.
8. Omar believes that Samir is childish to believe every family is a happy one. How does Omar's own personal experiences impact the way he feels about family? Do you agree or disagree with the way Samir views who family can be? Explain.
9. Why do you believe Smithy and Mara choose to remain when so many others have chosen to stay away from Samir? Explain.
10. How do Samir and Omar's opinions on religion and God differ (pg. 115)? Explain.
11. What are some of the difficulties the caravan experiences moving through the desert?
12. How does Omar begin to plan buying his freedom from the lies?
13. What is the meaning of the title "Death by Dreaming" by the end of the chapter?

CHAPTER 9: ENTER THE MONGOL GUNNER

1. How does the painting on page 118 differ from the painting from the last chapter?
2. How does the mood of this painting set the tone for Chapter 9?
3. What initial thoughts does Omar have about Samir's disappearance at the start of the chapter?
4. Describe the conversation that occurs between Mara and Omar on page 120. How has their relationship changed since the start of the novel? If you could ask each of them one question, what would you ask and why?
5. How does the desert setting influence the way Omar describes the characters?
6. What techniques are used by the author to propel the plot of the story on pages 121-126? Explain.
7. By the end of the chapter, how do you think Mara would describe Omar? Explain.

CHAPTER 10: THE BUYER OF DREAMS

1. Consider the title of the novel and the title of this chapter. What predictions do you have about what might happen?
2. Analyze the painting on page 139. Describe the scene you think it paints. Then, after you read, refer back to your original predictions and make a confirmation or adjustment.
3. What adjectives would you use to describe Gracus?
4. Who is the Angel Gabriel? Why do you think Omar mentions him when discussing Gracus Ghuldor?
5. What makes Omar a "clever boy" in the eyes of Samir towards the end of the chapter? Do you agree or disagree with his assessment of who Omar is?

CHAPTER 11: ABLUTIONS AND POLLUTIONS

1. Based on the meaning of the words present in Chapter 11's title, how does the painting on page 144 compare or contrast?
2. What do you think is happening in the painting?
3. After reading page 147, refer to the painting. What has changed in your understanding of the painting?
4. How would you describe how Samir and Omar's relationship has changed since the beginning of the book? What kind of relationship do they have?
5. How would you describe Samir's observational skills when it comes to people? What important facts does he notice about the ablutionist?
6. When Omar mentions that most of the caravan deserted Samir, how does Samir respond to this? What themes are present on page 149?
7. How does The Seller of Dreams get the ablutionist to play shantranj (chess)?
8. What causes the "choked scream" Omar tells of? Why do you think this is important?
9. What is the outcome of this test with one of Samir's assassins? How was this able to occur?
10. What important information does Omar learn about Cid in this chapter?
11. How does this information impact how you feel about the characters in the novel and the theme of family?
12. How does Omar feel about love by the end of this chapter?
13. Looking back were there any clues that lead to this revelation? Explain.
14. Based on this new information, what kind of person do you feel Mara is? Have you always thought so? Why or why not? (pg. 157) Explain.

15. On page 159, Omar poses six questions:
- a. Why do we have to be so cruel to each other?
 - b. Why is our pain made softer when we inflict it on others?
 - c. Why is this world so much less than what it ought to be or what we can imagine?
 - d. Why did God give us these imaginations if all they do is point us at a country we can never reach and will never see?
 - e. Why is everything such a disappointment?
 - f. Why is love the best and worst disease?

Try and answer these questions based on your own understanding as they relate to the text and/or your own life. What answer do you believe Omar is seeking overall? What does he desire?

16. Analyze the following quote from page 159. Then, interpret it in your own words. How do you think the characters (Omar, Samir, Mara, Rasseem) would respond?

- a. *“Life is only disappointing if there is nothing after it. Otherwise, life is our time in a craftsman’s hands—the way a piece of wood is carved into a spoon by a carpenter or reeds are woven by a basket weaver.”*

17. In what ways does the ending of Chapter 11 bring a sense of déjà vu? Refer to the bottom of page 168.

18. What are some of the indignities Omar mentions at the end of the chapter. How do they relate to the world we live in today?

CHAPTER 12: A QUICK ASIDE

1. Have students discuss what an “aside” is. How might this be significant to the way the rest of the novel unfolds? Why do you think the author chose to interrupt the regular flow of the novel in this way? Why now? Explain.
2. Analyze the painting on page 172. What might this foreshadow?
3. What are Omar’s confessions? How do you think this will impact the outcome of Samir’s fate?
4. Why do you think Omar as the narrator chooses to tell the reader this information? How might the story have been different with these confessions omitted?
5. The very last sentence says very little. However, the simple words make implications for larger events. Predict how this last line may affect what is to come in Chapter 15.

CHAPTER 13: ENTER THE ROGUE LEGION OF THE ROMAN ARMY

1. Analyze the painting on page 176. How does color once again, play into what the painting is attempting to convey? What predictions do you have about the chapter and its title based on what you see?
2. Have students discuss the reputations of popular Roman Legions in the Roman army. Why is it “farfetched” for Samir and Omar to believe they would be able to outrun them?
3. How does sadness play a role in the “Nothings and Somethings” of the world?
4. What is love and its meaning on page 179 for Omar? How does this love differ from the other types of love he has described in the novel so far?
5. How do Omar’s confessions about love, death, sadness, and life present in this chapter? Do you agree with his choices? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 14: THE END OF MY TESTIMONY

1. What do you notice and wonder about the image? What appears to be happening in this image? (Pg. 182)
2. Reflect on the first image from chapter 1. How does this image relate to the first? What does it possibly say about the ending of the book?
3. What do you think Omar Means when he says that this is “*The end of My Testimony*”?
4. On the bottom of pg. 184 Omar says: “*I sit and think about Samir. All the time I knew him, I thought he was a hustler of cheap tricks. But he never lied when he said he was only a seller of dreams. Somehow, it never occurred to me to ask where he truly got all those dreams to see. I guess I didn’t really know my friend.*”

Think about the relationships you have your friends or family. Do you think that you know everything there is to know about them? What do you think Omar means that Samir “never lied”? What do you think changed Omar’s mind?

5. What do you believe the merchants crown is? What do you think Samir was seeking in the beginning of the novel? What do you think the merchants crown means now?

CHAPTER 15: THE COST OF SIX BOLTS OF SILK

1. What is happening in the painting on pg. 186? How does color choice impact your inferences on what is happening?
2. How has Omar become a “dream seller” in this chapter? What tone is set in this chapter? Explain.
3. Do you think that Samir and Omar should have been able to figure out who Cid was? What is ironic about who Cid was and how Samir says he “probably should have known”?

CHAPTER 16: THE EXPANSIVE NATURE OF LOVE

1. Analyze the final image of the novel. What do you think this means for Samir and Omar? How might it relate to the title of this final chapter? Explain.
2. How does this chapter circle back to the beginning of the novel? What is it about the way Samir tells a story that “finds its way to become true”?
3. How does Omar describe the setting of where they are walking in this chapter? How does it reflect on your knowledge of the Silk Road?
4. How does the note that Mara writes to Omar impact him? What are your opinions about this note? What might it mean for the events that will transpire for the characters after the final chapter ends?
5. Throughout the novel, Omar tells us that this story will tell of the death of Samir. How does the final line of the story tell of a rebirth? What is your interpretation of what that means for their relationship moving forward?

FURTHER READING

- Chess
- Ancient Roman Army (Popular Legions)

LESSON IDEAS:

- Five Senses for Vivid Language
- Author’s Craft: Point of view and character voice
- Character Analysis
- The Use of Figurative Language in Literature
- Context Clues for Vocabulary Instruction
- The Cultural Significance of a Name: Have students research the names in the text and then, research their own.
- Understanding Plot Elements
- Analyzing Themes in Literature
 - Loneliness
 - Love
 - Abandonment
 - Betrayal
 - Fear
 - Overcoming hardships
 - Family

Chapter	Image Analysis Before Reading	After Reading Reflection
Chapter 1: The First Time I Was Stoned to Death		
Chapter 2: Monkey, Donkey, Master, Mule		
Chapter 3: The Expensive Nature of Love		
Chapter 4: Our Well-Being Hindered by a Wellbeing Hindered		
Chapter 5: A List of Killers and Reasons for Killing		
Chapter 6: Enter the Viking Berserker		
Chapter 7: A Little Sleep, a Little Folding of the Hands to Rest		
Chapter 8: Death by Dreaming		
Chapter 9: Enter the Mongol Gunner		
Chapter 10: The Buyer of Dreams		
Chapter 11: Ablutions and Pollutions		

Chapter	Image Analysis Before Reading	After Reading Reflection
Chapter 12: A Quick Aside		
Chapter 13: Enter the Rogue Legion of the Roman Army		
Chapter 14: The End of My Testimony		
Chapter 15: The Cost of Six Bolts of Silk		
Chapter 16: The Expansive Nature of Love		

THE MANY ASSASSINATIONS OF SAMIR, THE SELLER OF DREAMS: ANTICIPATION GUIDE

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Directions: On a scale of 1-5, 1 being strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree, respond to the following statements:



Statement	Before Reading	After Reading	Explanation
Death is better than losing love.			
Once you are a liar, no one will believe anything about you, even if you show them a broken heart.			
It is okay to embellish the truth as long as it provides an entertaining story.			
A cup of tea can solve any problem.			
Only the truth can set your conscience free.			
A broken heart is the most believable thing in the world.			
Love is the most important thing on earth.			
You have to be pleasant to get people to trust you			