

Afghanistan: A Nation of Minorities

Kathleen Ayers
School of the Future

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Overview

Although Afghanistan is landlocked, its location has been integral to the trade routes that have existed between Asia and Europe. Parts of Afghanistan used to lie along the Silk Road, which allowed for the sharing of culture and ideas. Throughout the area's early history, the territory changed hands numerous times. Of the greatest significance were the invasions of Afghanistan (although the area was not yet known by this name) by Alexander the Great in 330 BCE and the Mongol invasion of Genghis Khan in 1220 CE.

Afghanistan has had a contentious, recent past filled with further outside interference and invasion. King Nadir Shah of Persia was responsible for fighting and expelling nations who had occupied Afghanistan. He created an empire in 1736 that included Iran, Afghanistan, and parts of India. This empire later crumbled after the assassination of King Nadir Shah. Afghanistan didn't become a self-proclaimed nation until Ahmad Shah Durrani unified Pashtun tribes and formed the country in 1747. Even in its early stages of independence, Afghanistan was a pawn between the British and Russian Empire's interests in the area. As the Russian Empire began to encroach upon Afghan territory, the British Empire intervened in a desire to protect its colony in India. This set off the first of three Anglo-Afghan Wars. The third of the Anglo-Afghan Wars marked the end of British interference in Afghanistan and initiated the peace treaty that brought about the nation's independence in 1919.

Following the end of British interference, Afghanistan suffered a series of transitions between leaders, often marked by assassinations or coups. However, also during this time Afghanistan began to revolutionize its education and social norms. These reforms were often met with resistance by Afghan traditionalists. Another aspect of Afghan society that was being reformed during this time was its military, which received weapons and funding from the Soviet Union.

In December of 1979, Afghanistan was invaded by the Soviet Union. The Soviets quickly moved in and successfully gained power over Kabul. Soon afterward, the Soviets assassinated Amin the current leader of Afghanistan and put Babrak Karmal in his place, who was a leader of the Parcham party. Prior to the Soviet invasion, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan had two major parties: the Parcham faction which supported the Soviets and the Khalq faction in favor of radical reforms for their nation. Overall, most of Afghanistan was unhappy with the Soviet occupation and the Soviet-backed Parcham leader and government.

The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan began as the Cold War was waning. Therefore, although tension between the United States and the Soviet Union was lessening, the competition between the two nations was persisting. Elsewhere in the world, Iran was in the midst of revolution which was a main supply of U.S. oil. The lack of security in U.S. oil reserves in Iran led the U.S. to search for other areas in the Middle East and surrounding nations that could produce the resource. Thus, America looked to Afghanistan.

During the Afghan-Soviet War, the United States along with other allies aided the mujahideen with funding, weapons, and training. The mujahideen consisted of various ethnic factions in Afghanistan who opposed Soviet occupation. When fighting against the Soviet Union a diversity of ethnic groups united to fight a common enemy. However, after the end of the Afghan-Soviet War these factions soon vied for the ultimate control over Afghanistan leading to more years of civil war.

Out of Afghanistan's civil war rose the Taliban, a Pashtun organization that wanted the control of Afghanistan to return to their hands. According to Zabriskie in *Hazaras: Afghanistan's Outsiders*, "...when the Taliban rose to power in 1996, [they] promis[ed] security to a populace tired of the bitter conflict among ethnic warlords..." (2008). However, the Taliban soon enacted strict sharia law and executed many Hazaras in Mazar-i-Sharif and Hazarajat.

"In early 2001, in the coldest days of a brutal Hazarajat winter, the horror came to the district of Yakawlang. On January 8, the Taliban rounded up young Hazara men in Nayak, the district center. 'People were thinking they would be taken to court,' recalls Sayed Jawhar Amal, a teacher in the nearby village of Kata Khona. 'But at 8 a.m. they were killed. All of them.' The men were lined up and shot in public view" (Zabriskie, 2008).

Therefore a group known as the Northern Alliance in the northern reaches of Afghanistan made up of mostly Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras joined forces in opposition to the Pashtun-based Taliban leadership.

At the height of the Taliban's power, the United States was attacked on September 11, 2001. Two days prior to the assault on the U.S. Ahmad Shah Massoud, the leader of the Northern Alliance, was assassinated in a suicide bombing. Following the attacks on

America's Twin Towers and Pentagon the United States began the War on Terror by invading Afghanistan and aligning ourselves with the Northern Alliance as well as other outsider nations.

As the War on Terror wages on, the United States military was spread thin as another conflict was initiated by the United States in Iraq. With greater attention on the Iraq War, the Taliban was able to regroup and strengthen its forces and control of many parts of Afghanistan. Through these thousands of years of conflict one question remains in my mind, is the source of Afghanistan's problems rooted in outside interference or is it due to the ethnic minorities and divisions that make up its nation?

This question led me to delve into Afghanistan's people and how its geography impacted both Afghanistan's people and its series of conflicts throughout history. This is an interdisciplinary unit for ninth grade, World History classrooms. The overarching theme of this unit is to analyze how geography and how access to natural resources have influenced Afghanistan's cultural diversity and its modern history. From the beginning of the school year, I discuss identity and the interaction between the individual and the environment. The goal of this unit is to continue with the theme discussed above and have students investigate how the geography of Afghanistan has created cultural diversity. From there the learners will begin to question how both geography and cultural diversity have impacted recent wars and conflicts in Afghanistan.

Rationale

I feel the largest problem that I must overcome is America's sense of what is considered "history." My learners are far too familiar with American, European, and some African history. Asian and Latin American history never receive enough time in America's curriculum; therefore, learners see these continents' and nations' histories as inconsequential. Even the School District of Philadelphia's Planning and Scheduling Timeline de-emphasizes the importance of Asian, Latin American, and African history. The World History course that I currently teach is basically a European History curriculum with fragments of other cultures history mixed in when they involve the Western world. Moreover, the curriculum and the textbook often only gives the Western perspective, leaving educators to find resources of their own to show multiple understandings of a period in history. The limited selection of other nation's histories and the lack of sharing multiple perspectives on events in time provide our learners with a small percentage of what the whole story of history contains.

With this said, it is ironic that the reason why Afghanistan is receiving so much attention is mostly because America is currently at war within the nation. If American were not at war, Afghanistan would be among the list of other nations in Southern Asia that most Americans either do not know exist or do not know how to pronounce, like Kazakhstan or Turkmenistan. My interest in Afghanistan didn't necessarily begin

because of the current conflict, but what did draw my attention was the novel *The Kite Runner*.

Secondly, another battle that I must wage is the idea that history must be ancient. Most learners in World History never get past the Second World War. However, history is living. It's not just what is in the past, but also what is in the present. Engaging learners in relevant material that they can read in newspapers, watch videos on news websites, or see clips of on the television makes their learning feel important. This year after teaching about the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, learners saw recent developments about an Israeli attack on a ship bringing aid to the Gaza Strip. In following days, learners were excited to hear about it on the news and share their findings in class. In addition, the recent developments in the War in Afghanistan and the rule of the Taliban have been a major headline in the news. Allowing learners access to information about what is current and modern gives them the opportunity to make their learning continuous.

Another hurdle that I hope to overcome in teaching this unit is to make learners aware of our global history and the ways in which developments in one nation directly affect the lives, policies and economies of another nation. I also wish to have learners understand the war in Afghanistan not only from the perspective of America, but also from the perspective of a variety of Afghan people (not to mention the other nations who are involved in the war).

Lastly, I desire to get our learners to start reading news articles online and watching news clips either on the nightly news and online as well. Making learning relevant can occur when learners can see that what they are discussing in the classroom is also being discussed among the global community.

Objectives

From the beginning of the school year we have discussed the relationship between nature and nurture and its impact on how individuals form their identities. I would like to continue with the theme of identity and focus solely on how geography impacts group identity and group formation. The first objective for my learners is to understand how geographical features within Afghanistan impact the way that communities have formed; as a result, one can discern the development of different cultures and ethnic groups.

Next, I would like learners to question how Afghanistan's geography has affected its role in history. I want learners to question why Afghanistan is significant in the global community. What are its relationships to its neighbors?

Once learners are familiar with Afghanistan's basic geography and its role with its neighbors, I would like to focus more closely on how the people of this nation have learned to work within the boundaries of their nation. In other words, how have the

people of Afghanistan learned to cope with their geographic boundaries, climate, and topography and use it to their benefit? To do this we will examine how life is sustained in Afghanistan by investigating how the economy of Afghanistan has changed throughout history.

The next objectives that I have set to develop require the knowledge about Afghanistan's geography and people. In order to truly understand the modern history of a country one must first comprehend its boundaries by both land and by ethnic groups. Therefore, once there is a foundation for the basic understanding of Afghanistan's land and people, I start this next group of objectives by having learners organize modern events in the nation's history. Then, I focus solely on the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan and its impact on society. In understanding how the Taliban has changed Afghan society, I pay close attention to how the Taliban has taken advantage of ethnic divisions and how the Taliban has marginalized women in its society. Finally, in order to raise cultural awareness about Afghanistan and the war that the United States is currently waging, the culminating project is for learners to take the perspective of different nations and different ethnic groups to create a peace agreement to end the war in Afghanistan. The goal of this culminating assignment is to see how much the learners truly understand about Afghanistan's role in the world and the various divisions that exist among its ethnic groups.

Strategies

This unit utilizes a recent, high-interest novel, *The Kite Runner*, to assist in learning about Afghanistan's history and social climate. While learners are reading the novel, I will be using the historical context of the book as a roadmap for the lessons in World History. Learners will engage in daily group work exercises or discussions to come to an understanding of the different perspectives of the war in Afghanistan.

During the day to day lessons I will utilize different primary and secondary resources to facilitate the analysis of Afghanistan's geography and ethnic groups. In order to cover a variety of perspectives and fit in a large amount of information into a short amount of time, I will use station activities. A station activity involves learners analyzing documents and information organized by the educator so that learners can quickly gather information and move to the next topic. After a stations activity is done the goal is to synthesize the information and make inferences or predictions. In addition, I will also be using graphic organizers so that learners can clearly compare and contrast differences between Afghanistan's ethnic groups. The culminating assignment will require group work along with research. Learners will be required to be aware of the current conflict occurring in Afghanistan and be able to take the perspective of a different nation or different ethnic group in order to create a peace agreement that suits all parties involved in the conflict.

Classroom Activities

Day 1: Division of Communities and the Geography of Afghanistan

Learning Objectives

The objective of this lesson is for learners to understand more clearly how an individual interacts with his or her environment. Learners will see how the physical characteristics in geography naturally form borders and cultures. Although we will not discuss the impact of how artificial borders have often been created with modern governments, I will refer back to other boundaries we discussed in Africa during our unit on imperialism. The goal of the activity is for the learners to carve out territory to claim as their own from the map. In the end the learners will realize how ethnic groups normally form communities together and how natural boundaries often designate where territorial claims will lie.

Learning Plan

At the beginning of class, learners will be shown a map of Philadelphia. They will be asked to explain why the neighborhoods in Philadelphia are divided the way that they are. Moreover, I would like for learners to see that these boundaries have become something that they identify with. For instance, learners are proud of their neighborhood and often fight or argue to represent it.

During the remainder of the class period, I will provide groups of learners with a map that has a few geographic features (rivers, mountains, desserts). The learners will be assigned to different ethnic groups that are related to a specific livelihood (herders, traders, etc.).

Day 2: Afghanistan's Geography

After having learners understand how natural boundaries relate to the formation of communities, today they will be analyzing different types of maps of Afghanistan to understand more about the nation's topographic, political, ethnic, and religious divisions. This activity will be set up as stations. There will be different maps posted in four corners of the room. Learners will have questions to answer from exploring each map. After dividing the learners into groups, they will have two to four minutes per station to answer the questions for each map. Upon completion of the stations assignment we will discuss the answers to the questions. Then, from the maps learners will be required to make inferences about Afghani history and culture. (For instance, considering that Afghanistan is landlocked, what inferences can you make about Afghanistan's

relationship with its neighbors? Or, how do you think the terrain and climate have made Afghanistan difficult to invade or colonize?)

Day 3: Ethnic Divisions

A variety of geographical features often leads to a variety of ethnic groups. The objective for today's class is to make connections between the past two lessons about geography with the ethnic groups in Afghanistan. Moreover, learners will be asked to analyze differences in the ethnic groups to further develop an understanding of the impact that these divisions could have on Afghan society. The class will begin with a discussion about, "What makes you feel like you are part of a group?" I want learners to first think about what they use to form their own groups – interests, personalities, popularity, etc. Then, after a discussion on their own ingroups, I will have learners think more broadly about what ties or bands a group of people together in a nation. For the body of the lesson learners will be using an interactive map from the PBS Newshour website to find a information about some of the major ethnic groups in Afghanistan. Learners will be required to complete a graphic organizer about the Pashtuns, Hazaras, Uzbeks, and Tajiks. The information they will have to research an input into the graphic organizer from the website will be as follows: location in Afghanistan (use cardinal directions), place of origin, population, religion, and language. After completing the first four, learners will choose from the remaining ethnic groups which they would like to research. Also, relate ethnic differences with religious ties. (Don't know how to do this yet). I would like to make this topic relevant by discussing the idea of group identity and group formation and relating it back to the different neighborhoods in Philadelphia.

Using the map from PBS Newshour I would somehow like to have learners create a graphic organizer that explain the following: where each ethnic group is located, where they originated from, population, religion, language, and the role that each groups plays in society.

Day 4: Economy then and now

Natural Resources, Ability for Trade, Oil (Carter Doctrine)

What happens in your neighborhood when you don't have education? You don't have a job because you got arrested for truancy? Think about what a lack of economy means leads to -

The objective I would like to explain is how has geography impacted the way that the people of Afghanistan live their lives? It is first important to realize that Afghanistan is

landlocked and therefore does not have strong ties to water trade; however, Afghanistan is located in a major junction between Asia and Europe as a land trade route. Secondly, due to Afghanistan's lack of water, most of what is produced requires irrigation. Learners will use Microsoft Student to look up "Agriculture" under Afghanistan's economy. This will inform learners that Afghanistan's economy depends almost solely on agriculture, 70% of the nation's wealth comes from farming and herding. Moreover, learners will also find that during the 1990s Afghanistan became the largest producer of opium which is later used to make heroine. Due to government unrest and changes in leadership the opium trade has remained a facet of Afghanistan's economy. With high levels of unemployment farmers become dependent on the money that can be made from the drug trade. After reading and discussing this information, the class will watch clips from MSNBC's *Afghanistan Opium Trade*. After viewing clips we will first discuss the perspective of this video; then, we will analyze how Afghanistan's bad economy has spurred the opium trade and the effect the production of opium is having on Afghan families.

Day 5: Now that learners have a basic understanding of the geography and people of Afghanistan, I would like to begin learning about its history. Today's activity will involve learners organizing events by chronological order. To date we have not discussed what happened historically in Afghanistan other than the information that learners have picked up from reading *The Kite Runner*. Therefore, I will provide the learners with a list of events in Afghanistan's history starting from the Soviet Invasion and ending with the present day on small pieces of paper. Learners will use Microsoft Student to attempt to put the events in order. I will walk around the room and inform learners of how many events they have correct, but I will not inform them of which event is in the correct place. To make this activity more engaging I will make it a competition and pair off learners. The first group to get the chronological order of the events correct will win a prize!!! I will choose events from PBS Newshour's website under the link "A Historical Timeline of Afghanistan."

Day 6: Rise of the Taliban

Day 7: How has the Taliban's rule change Afghan society?

Day 8: Role of women

The objective of today's class is to see how women have been marginalized in Afghan society under the leadership of the Taliban. I will show learners images that relate to

different topics about women's rights. The images will be in a PowerPoint presentation. As we go through the images learners will take notes. After the presentation, I will have clarifying questions written on chart paper around the room. Learners will be divided into groups and asked to discuss the questions and write answers on the chart paper. If learners like what another group writes they can add a plus sign next to their response, likewise if they disagree with what another group writes they can add a minus sign next to their response. After all groups have moved through the questions, we will have a full class discussion.

Day 9: US Conflict

We will start this class by watching a clip from *Charlie Wilson's War*. Then, we will discuss the United States foreign policy with Afghanistan after the Soviets withdrew from the country. Next, I will show a clip of the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001. I want learners to see that had the United States not left Afghanistan in political and economic ruin after the Soviet withdrawal; then, perhaps Afghanistan may not have become the refuge for Al Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden. Today's class will focus mostly on classroom discussion. How did US policy hurt Afghanistan? What are the United States intentions in Afghanistan? Should the United States continue to fight or again pull out? Is the United States fighting in Afghanistan to truly help the citizens of that nation or to protect our own nation from another terrorist attack?

Day 10: Resolution

On the final day of the unit each class will have a specific role that they will have to act out. Each role will be represented by two learners so that they can work together to research information about who they are and what stake they have in Afghanistan. The culminating assignment will be given at the beginning of this week (day 5) and will be discussed each day until the actual resolution is proposed. Each pair of learners will be responsible for writing a "Resolution Paper." The paper must include some background information about their nation or ethnic group and it must also include a list of demands and sacrifices they are willing to cede in order for peace to be maintained in Afghanistan. On day ten we will hold a mock conference in which all members will be brought to the table and the goal will be to draft a resolution to end the current war in Afghanistan. The resolution must also include information about Afghanistan's government, the Taliban, Afghanistan's economy, and Afghanistan's foreign relations.

Annotated Bibliography/Resources

Annotated Bibliography for Teachers

Filkins, Dexter. The Forever War. New York: Vintage Books, 2008.

Zabriskie, Phil. "Hazaras: Afghanistan's Outsiders." *National Geographic*. Feb. 2008. Web. 18 June 2010. <<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2008/02/afghanistan-hazara/phil-zabriskie-text/4>>.

Zabriskie's article provides detailed information about the advances in Hazara society in education and security. Zabriskie goes back in history to discuss how the Hazara's are descendents of the Mongol invasion of Genghis Khan, which brings both pride and indignity for the Hazara people. Although they have been living in Afghanistan for centuries, they are still seen as outsiders to many of Afghanistan's other ethnic groups especially the Pashtun led Taliban. The author follows one story in particular of a young Hazara boy who desires to marry outside his ethnic group and become a professor at Kabul University. In the end, the young man was not hired at Kabul's University which is filled with mostly Pashtun professors and administrators, nor does he marry the girl he loves because her parents refuse his hand in marriage. The article shows that while there is hope for many of the Hazara's youth, cultural biases against their ethnic group persist.

Annotated Reading List for Students

"Afghanistan." *CIA - The World Factbook*. 27 May 2010. Web. 4 June 2010. <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>>.

Hosseini, Khaled. The Kite Runner. New York: Penguin Group, 2007.

The Kite Runner is a novel about a boy who grew up in Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion. The main character's family leaves Afghanistan due to the war and emigrates to California. Later the character returns to Afghanistan to redeem himself for a betrayal of a former friend. When he returns he finds his home changed under the rule of the Taliban.

Shroder, John Ford. "Afghanistan." Microsoft® Student 2008 [DVD]. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2007.

I often use Microsoft Student as a textbook for my learners. It provides written information along with images about historic events or the people of a given location. Microsoft Student, also, gives access to data already created in tables about geography, population, war statistics, or more.

Waldman, Amy. "A NATION CHALLENGED - THE LAW - A NATION CHALLENGED –

THE LAW - No TV, No Chess, No Kites - Taliban's Code, From A to Z - NYTimes.com." *The New York Times - Breaking News, World News & Multimedia*. 22 Nov. 2001. Web. 07 June 2010.

<<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/22/world/a-nation-challenged-the-law-no-tv-no-chess-no-kites-taliban-s-code-from-a-to-z.html?pagewanted=1>>.

Waldman's New York Times article addresses many of the rules and restrictions enacted by the Taliban. Moreover, the article briefly describes some information about the lack of education of some of the Talib officials. The article was written in 2001 after the invasion of the United States.

Annotated List of Materials for Classroom Use

Afghanistan Opium Trade. Opium Addiction Ravages Afghan Families. MSNBC, 9 Aug. 2009. Web. 2010. <<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/32317823/>>.

This video discusses the current problems with the opium production and usage in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan Revealed: The Unknown Story of a Land. National Geographic, 2001. DVD.

The video produced by National Geographic after the beginning of the war with Afghanistan follows Ahmed Shah Massoud, one of the leaders of the Mujahedeen during the Soviet-Afghan conflict. The video documents how Massoud is currently working against the rule of the Taliban.

Khalilzad, Zalmay, and Daniel Bynam. "Afghanistan: The Consolidation of a Rogue State." *The Washington Quarterly* 23.1 (2000): 65-78. *The War on Terrorism: Afghanistan and the Taliban*. East Carolina University, 14 Dec. 2005. Web. 2010. <<http://www.ecu.edu/lib/govdoc/afghanistan.cfm>>.

This article discusses the briefly the history of modern Afghanistan and the rise of the Taliban. The authors argue that if the Taliban is not stopped it will continue to grow and take roots in other nations. Both Afghanistan's neighbors, Iran and

Pakistan, and the United States are credited for adding conflict or not quelling conflict.

Prososki, Lisa. "Afghanistan: People, Places, and Politics." *PBS Newshour*. MacNeil-Lehrer Productions, 2010. Web. 2010.

Afghanistan: People, Places, and Politics is a comprehensive website that helps to define the people of Afghanistan and explain the current conflicts occurring in Afghanistan. It provides a wonderful map of the different ethnic groups of Afghanistan with a brief description of each. The website also provides some teacher resources.

Appendix 1 – Pennsylvania State Standards for History

Pennsylvania State Standards - History

8.1.9A – Analyze chronological thinking

8.1.9C – Analyze the fundamentals of historical interpretation

- Reasons/causes for multiple points of view
- Central issue
- Cause and results

8.4.12C - Evaluate how continuity and change throughout history has impacted belief systems and religions commerce and industry, innovations, settlement patterns, social organization, transportation and roles of women since 1450.

- Asia

8.4.12D - Evaluate how conflict and cooperation among social groups and organizations impacted world history from 1450 to Present in Africa, Americas, Asia and Europe.

- Domestic Instability
- Ethnic and Racial Relations
- Labor Relations
- Immigration and Migration
- Military Conflicts

Appendix 2 – Day 3 Ethnic Divisions Graphic Organizer

Directions: Please use the following website to explore the map and fill out the graphic

organizer below for the various ethnic groups that live in Afghanistan. http://www.pbs.org/newshour/indepth_coverage/asia/afghanistan/map_flash.html					
	Location	Place of Origin	Population	Religion	Language
Hazara					
Pashtuns					
Tajik					
Uzbeks					
Choose one more ethnic group:					

Comprehension Questions:

1. Which ethnic group(s) has the largest population?
2. Which ethnic group was made up the majority of the population before the Soviet invasion?
3. Which religion appears to be in the majority in Afghanistan?
4. Which ethnic group(s) is a religious minority in Afghanistan?
5. Who is the location of the Hazaras both beneficial and problematic?
6. From completing this graphic organizer and looking at this map, if you were the leader of Afghanistan how would organize your government? (Think of the constraints – language, population, religion. How would you make it fair?)
7. How do you think the variety of ethnic groups has impacted Afghanistan’s history? (Hint: think divide and conquer or the strategy of using empowering a minority group who has been persecuted by the majority for years).