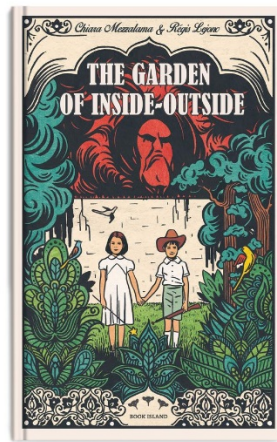


(Activities highlighted in red)



The Garden of Inside-Outside

Written by Chiara Mezzalama and illustrated by Régis Lejonc

Translated by Sarah Ardizzone

Published by Book Island

Synopsis

This is an autobiographical account of a little girl, her brother and mother, leaving Italy to join their father as he takes up his position as Italian ambassador to Iran in the summer of 1981. Iran was, at this time, in the throes of the revolution, war and a hostage crisis all of which remain, largely in the periphery, as the children play in their Edenic, but walled garden. While these two children remain firmly on the 'Inside', the 'war monster' rages on the 'Outside'. But this is the story of what happens when the 'Outside' breaches the garden wall, in the form of a little boy, Massoud. As Chiara and Massoud embark on a secret friendship that relies on the wordless language of play, Chiara begins to ask the big questions about who gets to choose who's on the Inside and the Outside, and if the two can or should be kept apart. A beautiful book which bridges picture book and graphic novel genres, it is perfect for KS2 and KS3, as it facilitates discussions on:

Themes - war, childhood, divisions, walls, lockdown, art, hope and friendship (it concludes, most pressingly, with the concept that hope and friendship endure long after the war has ended)

Author and Illustrator

Chiara Mezzalama is an author and translator, born in Italy and now living in Paris. She has written a book for adults entitled *The Persian Garden*, and both this and her children's book, Teaching notes of 'The Garden of Inside-Outside' by Dr. Ann Alston
More info about the book on www.bookisland.co.uk.

The Garden of Inside-Outside, tell the story of when she spent a summer in Tehran as a child, because of her father's position as an Italian Ambassador.

Régis Lejonc is a French illustrator, cartoonist, screen writer and author. He has illustrated over 60 books and was the first French illustrator to win the prestigious Prix Sorcières, the French Independent Booksellers' Award twice in one year. Find out more about how he works in this wonderful interview by Library Mice where he talks about illustrating *The Garden of Inside-Outside* <http://librarymice.com/the-story-behind-the-art-regis-lejonc-and-the-garden-of-inside-outside/>

Here he talks about his choices of the multiple frame that the graphic novel style provides giving a sense of time passing, his use of felt pen, and the use of colours, particularly red and green that are so symbolic within the book.

History

There is a very useful, bite sized explanation about Iran's traumatic history included as a preface of sorts at the beginning of the book.

If you would like to learn a little more context, or point children in the direction of learning more, then this webpage gives a synopsis of events.

https://academickids.com/encyclopedia/index.php/Iranian_Revolution

Geography

Of course, beginning with an Atlas to make look at both where Iran and Italy (the family leave Italy for Iran) is always useful. Find the Iranian flag and think about the colours that are used most within the book and how they relate to it – pupils might also note that the Italian flag has the same colours. Pupils may have experience of moving from one country to another. This gives an opportunity to discuss how it might feel to move to a new country, and to look up how living in Italy might be very different from living in Iran. You might consider differences (or similarities) in language, religion, art and architecture, time, weather.

Art (Intertextuality)

The University of Chicago had an exhibition of Iranian Art of the Revolution and War and also provides additional context, including how boys, in particular were sent to fight and/or to remove mines. This might give further insight into what Massoud might be experiencing on the outside, and the further risks, of his entering the garden. This may make readers more sympathetic to Chiara's unnamed brother's reaction as he wants to tell the adults about Massoud's breach of their wall.

It is useful to search for images of Iranian Art/ posters and propaganda at this time because the illustrations in the book clearly reference this iconic artwork. The colours red and black feature heavily in such works, as does the face of Ayatollah Khomeini, placed at the top, Teaching notes of 'The Garden of Inside-Outside' by Dr. Ann Alston
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god-like, with an omniscient eye. I've included some links here, but images are subject to copyright.

<https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/collex/exhibits/graphics-revolution-and-war-iranian-poster-arts/women-and-children/>

<https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/media/images/meposters-0004-188.original.jpg> (Black/Red)

The slogan here translates as 'Workers of the World – Unite!' and a typical slogan of the left wing often communist parties) in Iran in this era.

Iranian Posters of the Revolution by Kazem Chalipa:

<https://kazemchalipa.wordpress.com/2012/12/02/the-iranian-revolution-in-chalipas-art-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86/teh-scaner-chalip-5/> (Ayatollah at the top)

Look up some images of gates in Iran – Persian gates and tiles/mosaics and think about how many of these patterns you can see in the illustrations. Look at the end pages – the patterns of leaves, and the title page surrounded by a red gate like image.

Children's Literature

It is worth having a conversation about how many gardens pop up in children's literature. How many other stories, films or TV programmes do the children know that might be set in a garden or have a garden that is significant? The following is just a brief list of gardens that come to mind – I'm sure you and your children can think of more! Older readers may also reference the significance of the story of The Garden of Eden here.

Oscar Wilde's very short fairytale '**The Selfish Giant**' includes a giant who builds a wall around his garden to keep the children out, but he finds that it is always winter in his garden until he lets the children back in, and with them comes Spring and happiness.

The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett. Again the children play in the restorative garden, nurture unlikely friendships, and finally breach the walls as Colin runs into his father's arms.

Tom's Midnight Garden by Philippa Pearce. Tom is sent to his aunt and uncle's so that he doesn't catch measles from his brother. Tom is bored and lonely until he hears the clock strike thirteen and finds he can escape into the garden as it was about 60 years beforehand, where he meets Hattie in Victorian England.

Where the Wild things Are by Maurice Sendak. This is not strictly a garden but the escape to a secret place, without adults still stands.

In the Night Garden This is quite different, but still shows a garden where the 'creatures' play, and yet it is overseen by some omniscient narrator, telling them when to go to bed.

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We as adults are aware that gardens are metaphors for childhood. In a garden we tame nature, help it to grow where and how we want it to, and there's certainly something similar to how we tend to children as we bring them up! The Romantics thought children were pure and should be brought up in the countryside, and there's certainly an overlap of that still with us – we see it in property shows like 'Escape to the Country' as people leave the city often to bring up children in the countryside.

Discuss with the children why they think books are often set in gardens?

How might they design their perfect garden?

How might a day in the garden be different from say, an adventure in the forest?

As you go through the story you might note the many intertextual links within the book, both to the gardens and 'innocence' of childhood, and in contrast to Iranian artwork and political posters of the 1980s – to 'Inside' and to 'Outside'.

Step by Step through the Book

The Cover

What do you think this book is about?

What did you see first?

Would you like to be in this garden? Why/why not?

Why do you think about the children's clothes? (white pure, well dressed, oddly colonial image – cowboy hat)

Tell me about what they are holding. (The girl has a wand and the boy a toy gun.)

Tell me how the figure in red and black makes you feel?

Discuss the artwork, the wall, the title. The children look quite colonial here. Will you fear that the red figure might encroach the walls? The title is in white, why do you think that might be?

The Title Page

Here there is a useful historical synopsis given by the author. This gives a good opportunity to discuss the historical context and the nature of autobiography. Also noteworthy is the black title in a white square box surrounded by what seems like red ornate ironwork of a Persian design. This gives the impression of enclosure, hinting as to the nature of the story. The colours also foreground the colours to come in the book.

p. 1 – Look at the old-fashioned toys. The toys give me the impression that the children like to read and learn (books and globe). They also show us the time period – they don't have any plastic toys or electronic devices.

Think how much we can tell from looking at one image very carefully.

Activity: Write a list of what you would take with you if you were Chiara or her brother? How would you decide?

The writing and frame are in black (note because this will change over the page). Normally we read, in English, from left to right. The aeroplane is heading right – as we begin our adventure but also back over our heads – perhaps heading East?

p. 2-3 – Note the green – inside. Why is this green? The children play in the garden, but what about the parents? They are in the background. This is the only time we see their father. The parents are well dressed and feel perhaps distanced from the children who play. How different do you think this time is for the adults from the children?

Activity: Look up one of the items in the garden. Pomegranate trees/ carp/ plane trees.... Perhaps draw one? Or design your own garden, try to use descriptions like they use here – with 'leaves as big as giant's hands' - or think of where the children will hide in this 'garden full of hiding spaces'.

p. 4-5 – Outside is now in red. In fact, all the colours have changed to black and red. What does red represent? Anger, blood, hatred. Talk through who the figure at the top is and why he might be at the top. You might note the black foliage in the bottom righthand corner of the first image as this re-occurs throughout the book.

Activity: Use these images to write a description of landing at the airport and seeing Tehran as you drive through the city on the way to the house. It can be a newspaper article, a letter to a loved one back home, or a story.

p. 5-6 – Can anyone spot a lizard on a tree? Back on the Inside the lettering has changed to green. What do you think of the way Chiara describes the outside as a 'war monster'? Can anyone spot the war outside the wall?

p. 6-7 – Now here's a point where the lettering changes to red but we know we are on the inside. Tell me why you think this might be? The foliage that we noted on the 'Outside' page is now growing on the Inside and it is encroaching on the mother and her children. The mother is protecting the children, but where is the father do you think?

This gives the perfect opportunity to talk to children about how adults are scared sometimes too and that the mother doesn't know the answer. There's rich discussion to be had about how wars occur and that words can be ways of getting around wars – from disputes in the playground to wars between countries, words can be key in helping us to understand.

Activity: How do you think the mother is feeling here? Write a letter from the mother to her friend or sister back in Italy. She has left her friends and family to be with her husband in a

country at war. She is probably not allowed to leave the garden either. She does not go out to work, she also seems scared of the 'war monster'.

p. 7-8 – This is where Massoud comes into the garden. He is described as a 'little boy' – but he has to live on the other side. This reminds us that children get caught up in wars too. Note the red that lies outside the garden. This is the only time we find out the names and we only discover the names of these two characters, not the brother or mum and dad. Also, Massoud is red while Chiara is not. Why might that be? Will he always carry the war with him? Is he a threat? How can we 'speak' to each other when we don't speak the same language. Does this story tell us that children maybe know better than the adults? That they can be friends despite the adults who wage wars around them?

Activity: Pretend that you and someone in your class don't speak the same language, how can you tell each other how you feel? How do you decide if someone is your friend? What makes them friends?

p. 9-10 – Again note that Inside and Outside are now alongside each other. The red war has come into the garden as Chiara and her brother argue.

Activity: Conscience Alley- ask half of the class to list why Chiara is right, and the other half to give reasons her brother is right. Should they tell the grown-ups?

p. 10-11 – How are the colours different here? Why is there no title telling us we are Inside or Outside? Where might the children have been influenced by the war (enemies with beards and turbans in red and black). There is a discussion to be had about how we all like to play, and all children have the right to play under the UN convention of Children's Rights.

Activity: Look up Children's Rights - what rights do you think Massoud might be missing out on?

p. 12-13 – Look at the red background. How do you think Chiara feels? Why is she so confused about 'Inside-outside, inside-outside...'

p. 14-15 – Think about the question 'The wall had a good side and a bad side. But who says which side of the wall you're on? Who gets to choose?'

For older readers, there is a link here to The Berlin Wall, or to images of the seesaw installed in the wall of the Mexican/USA border. The link below shows a video of children on the seesaws at the border.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/seesaw-us-mexico-border-trump-wall-sunland-park-ciudad-juarez-a9027336.html>

p. 16-17 – Here we see Massoud back in the garden, wearing the T-shirt gifted to him by Chiara. Massoud has a cat he has carved for Chiara. He wanted to have a gift for Chiara. Note that when Chiara confides that they have an 'Inside-Outside secret' that the two are symmetrical. Having given each other a gift they are on an equal footing, and the artwork, emphasises this as the two are symmetrical in terms of colour. No longer is Massoud red and Chiara peach/purple.

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p. 18-19 – The writing is now black again – replicating the first image – ‘Returning’ as opposed to ‘Leaving’. Consider the conclusion. Chiara still has the cat – is there anything you have that you think you will keep forever?

Do you ever feel scared as you venture outside? Are walls and fences good or bad? Why?

Activity: Write the same story from Massoud’s perspective. You can do this as a story or diary, or as a graphic novel. If you are including pictures think carefully about the colours you use.

Activity: Imagine Chiara and Massoud meet up again when they are grown-ups. Think about where they meet, what they have done in their lives, and write their conversation – you could act it out with a learning partner.

Activity: This story is autobiographical. Write a story about a time or moment in your life when something was very different. You could (but don’t have to) write about the Coronavirus lockdown and draw pictures to go with it, like this book does.