

## The Iran Hostage Crisis and its Impact on Iranian Americans

### **Overview:**

This first day of this unit provides a history of Iranian-American relations and introduces students to the Iran Hostage Crisis. The curriculum aims to give students a nuanced understanding of the conflict, as well as the events that led up to the crisis. The second day of the unit explores the ramifications that the conflict had on Iranian Americans, as well as on American perceptions of Iran and entities that they associated with Iran. This unit combines both American and global history, demonstrating that American history takes place within a larger context. The unit is intended for high school students.

### **Essential Questions:**

Day 1: What factors influence political and diplomatic relationships between countries?

Day 2: How do current events influence perception of immigrant communities; and the way those communities think about belonging in the United States?

### **Subjects:**

American History

World History

### **Standards:**

- North Carolina Standards for American History:
  - AH1.H.1.2 (Use historical comprehension to analyze visual, literary and musical sources)
  - AH1.H.1.3 (Use historical comprehension to consider multiple perspectives of various peoples in the past).
  - AH2.H.3.4 (Analyze voluntary and involuntary immigration trends since Reconstruction in terms of causes, regions of origin and destination, cultural contributions, and public and governmental response)
  
- North Carolina Standards for World History:
  - WH.H.1.2 (Use historical comprehension to analyze visual, literary and musical sources)
  - WH.H.7.1 (Evaluate key turning points of the modern era in terms of their lasting impact)

### **Materials:**

- Homework: Pre-unit Introduction to Iran Worksheet
- The Iran Hostage Crisis Student Video Viewing Guide
- The Iran Hostage Crisis Student Video Comprehensive Questions
- 5 visual primary sources & associated guiding questions worksheet
- Note: This curriculum assumes that students have access to a computer and the internet at home, and that the teacher has the ability to broadcast YouTube videos in the classroom.

**Duration:**

Two days, each day includes 50 minutes of in-class work and about 10 minutes of homework. Note: Curriculum can be adapted so that homework is done in class, and the unit is spread out over 3 days.

**Additional Reading:**

For teachers who wish to delve deeper into this topic, below are some reading recommendations. Note that no outside preparation is necessary to teach this lesson, these readings are entirely optional.

- "The Hostage Crisis in Iran," The Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum [https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/research/hostage\\_crisis\\_in\\_iran](https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/research/hostage_crisis_in_iran)
- "The Iranian Hostage Crisis and its Effect on American Politics," by Elaine Kamarck, *Brookings Institute* <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/11/04/the-iranian-hostage-crisis-and-its-effect-on-american-politics/>
- *The Limits of Whiteness: Iranian Americans and the Everyday Politics of Race* by Neda Maghbouleh

**Procedure:**

## Pre-Unit HW

1. This homework assignment is intended to introduce students to Iran and familiarize them with basic facts about the area. Students will explore a National Geographic webpage and answer a few simple factual questions.
  - a. <https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/geography/countries/article/iran>

## Day 1: Iran Hostage Crisis

2. Do Now (3 mins): As students enter the classroom, give them the Student Viewing Guide handout for the Iran-U.S relations video. Tell students to read over the handout and preview the questions that accompany the video.
3. Video (17 mins): Tell students that today's lesson will focus on relations between the United States and Iran, the country that was featured in the previous night's homework. Mention that while students might have heard about Iran in the news, this unit will focus on providing nuanced context around U.S.-Iranian relations focusing on a specific period; the hostage crisis.

Class will begin with a video overview of relations between the two countries. Tell students to take notes on the comprehensive questions handout as they watch video. They do not have to answer in full sentences, but they have to write enough that they can retain the information. Play video from the Duke-UNC Consortium for Middle East Studies from 0:00-6:25 for an overview of U.S and Iranian relations (the rest of the video will be shown at the end of the lesson):

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbC2BfruYDQ>

After the video, review the answers to last night's homework, the student viewing guide (including the key terms & timeline), and the comprehensive questions worksheet that accompanies the video.

4. Political Cartoon Analysis & Jigsaw (20 mins): Explain: "We're going to spend the next twenty minutes analyzing some primary sources from the Iran hostage crisis. These visual sources include graffiti and political cartoons that were produced during the crisis. We'll be looking at sources that examine this event from both an American and an Iranian perspective. Our goal is to think about the message the artists behind these images were trying to convey, and what that says about their societies at the time."

Divide students into 6 groups and assign each group a cartoon. Give them 5 minutes to analyze their cartoon together with the guidance of the visual primary source worksheet.

Next, jigsaw students so that they reconfigure into groups with a representative of each group. Keep track of time, giving the 1s two minutes to present their source, their analysis of it, & answer questions, then give the 2s two minutes, and so on. The jigsaw portion should take twelve minutes. Circle the classroom as students present and encourage students to ask their classmates questions about their sources.

5. Group Conversation (5 mins): Ask students: "Based on the video clip that we started with, and your analysis of the visual primary sources, what are some of the main factors that were at play in shaping American perspectives of the hostage crisis? What were some of the main factors that shaped Iranian perspectives of the hostage crisis? How much exposure do you think Americans and Iranians had to one another's point of views?"

6. Iranian-American Relations Today (3 mins): Say: "We will conclude today's unit by finishing the video we began with, which talks about Iranian-American relations after the hostage crisis." Play video: 6:25-7:35. When video concludes note: "This video was filmed in 2017. Since then, former President Donald Trump withdrew the United States from the nuclear deal, and reinstated sanctions against Iran. President Biden has said that he would like to restore the deal, but so far it seems that Iran is unlikely to agree."

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbC2BfruYDQ>

Allow students to complete the last question on the Video Comprehensive Questions worksheet and turn it in.

7. Previewing Day Two: (2 mins): "Today we discussed the Iran hostage crisis, and American and Iranian perspectives on this event. Tomorrow we are going to talk about the impact that the Iran hostage crisis had on Iranian Americans in the United States. In the 1970s, Iranians made up the largest international student population in the U.S. There was also a substantial population of American citizen of Iranian descent, people who had immigrated to the U.S for Iran and become citizens and their children."

Your homework for tonight will introduce you to some Iranian Americans currently living today in North Carolina. The documents you will be reading are testimonies from Iranian Americans given as part of an exhibit that was hosted at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2018.

Then tomorrow in class we'll talk about the lives of Iranian Americans living in the U.S in the 1970s and 1980s, and how they were impacted by the hostage crisis."

### Day 2: Homework

8. This homework assignment is intended to introduce students to thinking about the Iranian American identity and the history of Iranian immigration to the United States by introducing them to two Iranian Americans. Students will read three pages of text and answer a few questions.

### Day 2: The Impact of the Iranian Revolution on Iranian Americans

9. Do Now and Discussion (5 mins): Project a picture of Persian carpets on to the board. Have students do a free-write the following prompt: "In the homework for last night, Mehdi and Sepideh both talked about the connection they feel towards their Iranian heritage through their Persian carpets. Free-write about an object that makes you feel connected to your cultural heritage, or your family's history." Have a few students share their responses, and then click through the rest of the carpets on the slideshow.

Slideshow with carpets: <https://theculturetrip.com/middle-east/iran/articles/8-tips-for-buying-the-perfect-persian-carpet>

10. Power Point (12 minutes): Show Power Point, which covers Iranian waves of immigration to the United States and the impact of the hostage crisis on Iranian American communities.

11. Oral Histories (20 minutes): Explain: "We are going to listen together as a class to two oral history interviews by Iranian Americans. We will pause throughout the interviews to discuss them together."

A) Mahmoud Moallemian- born in Tehran, Iran 1938: Excerpt One- 5:29)  
<https://library.umd.umich.edu/miaohp/index.php>

Pause at 1:57. Ask: "What factors contributed to Mahmoud immigrating to the United States? How did the 1979 Iranian Revolution impact his trajectory?" After a few answers, continue playing.

At end of video, ask: "In what ways has Mahmoud stayed connected to his Iranian heritage? How has he helped to create and participate in community-building in the United States?"

Have students reflect on the interview as a whole- “What did you think about the questions given to the interviewee? How might these questions have shaped their narrative? What else stood out to you about the interview?”

B) Farideh Freedom Hosseini- born in Shiraz, Iran 1944- 6:24)

<https://library.umd.umich.edu/miaohp/index.php>

Pause at 2:01. Ask: “What factors contributed to Farideh immigrating to the United States? How did the 1979 Iranian Revolution impact her trajectory?” After a few answers, continue playing.

Pause at 4:36: “What is Farideh’s perspective on differences and similarities between life in Iran and life in the United States? What is her relationship with her family like post-immigration?”

At end of video, ask: “In what ways does Farideh stay connected to her Iranian heritage? How has she helped to create and participate in community-building in the United States?”

Have students reflect on the interview as a whole- “What did you think about the questions given to the interviewee? How might these questions have shaped their narrative? What else stood out to you about the interview? How was it similar than the first interview? How was it different?”

12. Group Discussion (5 mins): “Let’s take a moment to broaden our discussion from the specificity of how the Iran hostage crisis impacted the Iranian American community, and think together more generally. How do current events influence perception of immigrant communities? How do current events impact the ways that immigrant communities think about themselves and their place in the United States?”

13. Exit Ticket (7 mins): Complete a quick (ungraded) pop-quiz, to be handed in, to measure the efficacy of the unit and student’s learning outcomes. Write the following questions on the board:

1. What is the capital of Iran?
2. Who was the Shah? What relationship did the the United States have with the Shah?
3. Describe one of the visual primary sources that we examined in class, and explain what it tells us about the Iranian and/or American perspectives of the hostage crisis.
4. Describe one aspect of Iranian culture that you learned about during this unit (this could include a handicraft or other cultural art form, or a holiday).
5. Describe two ways that the Iranian hostage crisis impacted Iranian Americans.

Name:

Date:

The Iran Hostage Crisis

Pre-Unit HW: Introduction to Iran

Explore this page, and answer the questions below:

<https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/geography/countries/article/iran>

1) How do you pronounce Iran?

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2) Name two countries that border Iran.

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3) What name did Iran used to be called? This term is still sometimes used to describe the area.

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4) What is the capital of Iran?

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5) What language do Iranians speak?

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6) What religion do most Iranians practice?

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Photo Description: Iranian students climb up American embassy gates in Tehran to overtake the embassy. Taken Nov 4, 1979.

# The Iran Hostage Crisis

*(Adapted from The Middle East Explained, A project of the Duke-UNC Consortium for Middle East Studies)*

## Key Terms

**Islamic Republic of Iran:** A medium-sized country on the Persian Gulf in south-west Asia. Iran has an ancient culture dating back thousands of years. A majority-Muslim country, Iran is currently governed by a theocratic republic.

**Iranian Constitutional Revolution:** A revolution in which Iranians demanded democracy and sought to replace the monarchy's abuse of power with law, representative government, and social justice. The first Iranian Constitution and the first national parliament of Iran were established in 1906.

**Mohammad Mosaddegh:** Mossadegh served as democratically elected Prime Minister of Iran from 1951 until 1953, when his government was overthrown in a coup d'état organized by the United States and Britain. As prime minister, Mossadegh fought internal corruption, challenged foreign interference, enacted social reforms, and nationalized the Iranian oil industry.

**Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi:** The shah (king) of Iran from 1941 until his overthrow by the Iranian Revolution on February 11, 1979. He led a rapid industrial and military expansion in Iran and implemented economic and social reforms. At the same time, the monarchy denied human rights, tortured political prisoners, and refused to allow democratic elections. SAVAK, the dreaded secret police, suppressed all forms of opposition. Throughout his rule, the shah received consistent American support.

**Iranian Revolution of 1979:** Due to mounting discontent with the shah's human rights abuses, millions of Iranians took to the streets to protest. A massive general strike shut down the country for two months. In February 1979, the peaceful revolution replaced the monarchy with an Islamic Republic that placed all power in the hands of a single religious leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

**Ruhollah Khomeini:** A religious scholar known as an "Ayatollah," Khomeini was the symbolic leader of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Following the revolution, Khomeini became Supreme Leader, the highest-ranking political and religious authority of Iran.

## Timeline

**550 BC:** The Persian Empire is established by Cyrus the Great. Various imperial dynasties rule Iran for centuries.

**1906:** Iranian Constitutional Revolution

**1941-1979:** Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi rules Iran.

**1951:** Mossadegh becomes prime minister of Iran.

**1953:** Mossadegh nationalizes the Iranian oil industry.

**1953:** Coup d'état against Mossadegh, organized by United States and British governments.

**1970s:** The shah allies with other oil-producing countries to triple the price of oil.

**January 1979:** The shah is driven from power by a massive, peaceful, revolution and flees into exile.

**February 1979:** Ayatollah Khomeini returns from exile and establishes the Islamic Republic of Iran.

**November 1979:** More than 50 United States Embassy employees are taken hostage by a small group of Iranian militants.

**1981:** After 444 days, the hostages are released, just as Ronald Regan is sworn into office.

Name:

Date:

### The Iran Hostage Crisis: Video Comprehensive Questions

1. In 1906, Iranians wished to transition to democracy and looked to the United States for support. Name one of the Americans who is considered to be a hero of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution. Why is this person considered to be a hero?

2. Professor Kurzman says that the coup d'état of 1953 was “one of the most important moments in Iranian political history.” Why was the coup d'état significant?

3. How would you describe the rule of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi?

4. What were the outcomes of the Iranian Revolution of 1979?

5. What factors led to the seizure of American hostages? How is this event related to the 1979 Revolution?

6. How do the attitudes of the United States about Iran's nuclear program compare/contrast with those of Iran?



“Hostage,” by Herbblock

Graphite, porous point pen, ink, and opaque white over blue pencil underdrawing

Published in the *Washington Post*, November 15, 1979

Source: Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress



"And now the latest from Terroran" by Herblock

Ink brush, crayon, and opaque white over blue pencil underdrawing

Published December 27, 1979, distributed by Field Newspaper Syndicate

Source: Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress

Source #3



By Jim Borgman

Ink on paper

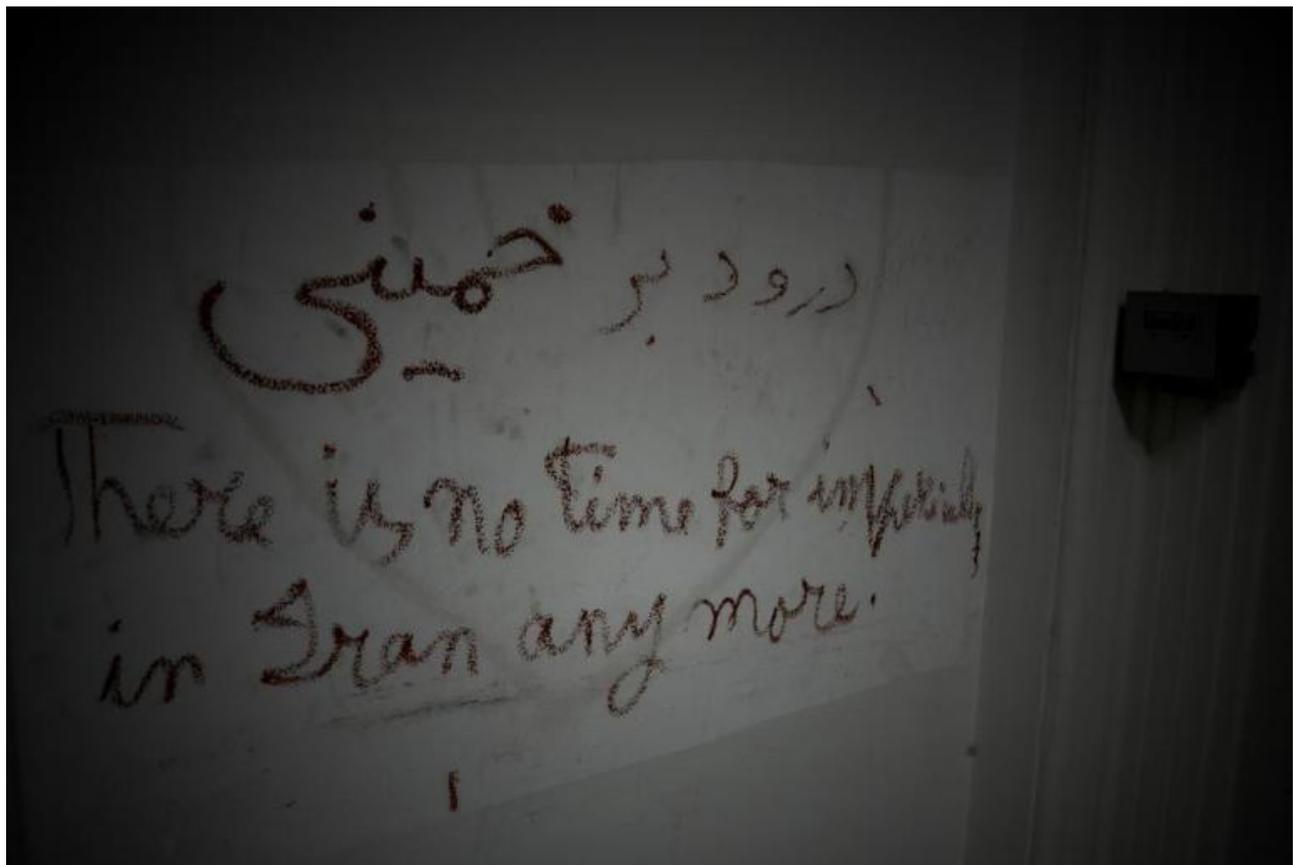
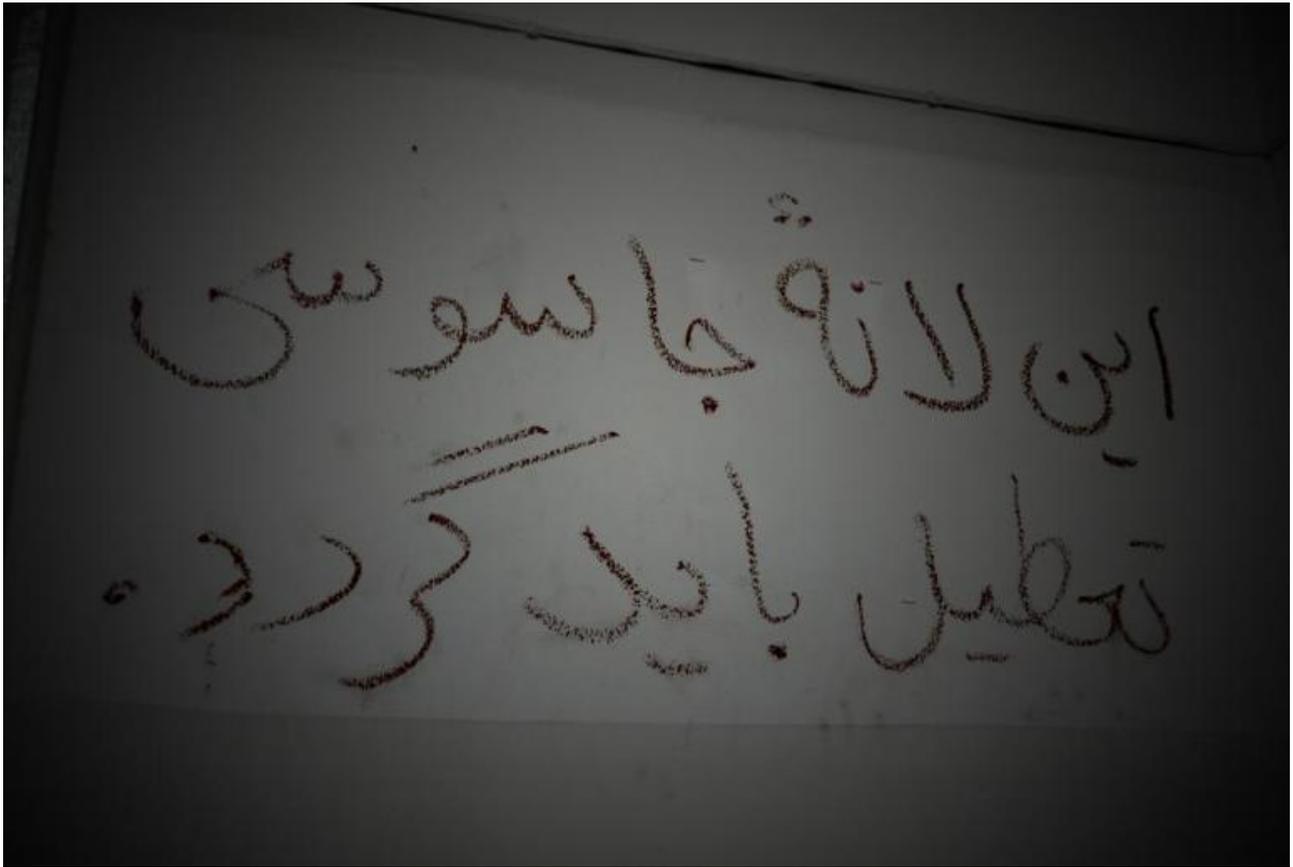
Published 1980 in the Cincinnati Enquirer

Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress

Source: John Moran Auctioneers & Appraisers



Associated Press Photo  
American Embassy in Tehran, Iran in 1980



Graffiti written during the hostage crisis on the walls of the American Embassy's second floor.

Top: Translated from Farsi- "This den of spies should be closed."

Bottom: Line 1, translated from Farsi- "Hail Khomeini." Line 2, in English- "There is no time for imperialism anymore."

Source: "In Pictures, Iran Marks 1979 Hostage Crisis" by Soraya Lennie *Aljazeera*



This is a newsletter for students, faculty and staff at a Sharif University, a local college in Tehran, Iran. This was published sometime in the early 1980s.

Front Cover: Depicts a fist layered on top of a photo of Iranian demonstrators, crushing the embassy compound made to look like the letters "USA." The letters are on top of an eagle, which is on top of President Carter's head. Translation of the Farsi writing: "Special Issue of the Sharif University of Technology: on the occasion of the pinnacle of the Iranian people's anti-imperialist campaign."

Back Cover: Photo of Iranian demonstrators.

Source: The Middle East Poster Collection at the University of Chicago





# Carolina Connections

## IRANIAN IMMIGRATION TO NORTH CAROLINA

The largest concentrated population of Iranian Americans is in California, although North Carolina has also been an attractive destination due to economic and educational opportunities. Iranian immigrants and their descendants have contributed to the economic and cultural development of North Carolina.

Established in 1987, the Iranian Cultural Society of North Carolina (ICSNC) plays an important role in preserving and promoting Persian language, literature, history, music, dance, art, food, and cultural celebrations for the benefit of Iranians as well as the greater community in the state. The group holds concerts, celebrates important holidays, such as the Persian New Year (Nowruz), and participates in international festivals to inform people about Iran and Iranian culture. The society has collaborated closely with the Carolina Center for the Study of the Middle East and Muslim Civilizations since 2009.

Sepideh and Mehdi are members of the Iranian Cultural Society of North Carolina and affiliated with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Their migration stories share the significance of their cultural traditions in this section.



# Carolina Connections

## Reminders of Home

### Sepideh

Board Member | Iranian Cultural Society of North Carolina

When Sepideh returns to North Carolina from her visits to Iran, she always tries to bring back traditional handicrafts, “As much as I can fit in my suitcase,” she says. Some of these handmade pieces, meant for everyday use, were out of fashion in Iran for her parents’ generation, but they’re making a comeback among the younger crowd.

It has always been part of Iranian culture to not only beautify the home with decorative items, but to support the artisans who make them. “When you purchase an item that’s been made by [an artisan], you support that craft,” she says. “Many Iranians are very sensitive about supporting the handicrafts and contributing to maintaining the tradition.”

In the United States as well, Persian decorative arts play an important role in helping immigrants maintain their cultural identity, helping to “preserve the memories of the place you came from, to be able to pass them down to the next generation,” Sepideh says.

Iranian immigrants often display reminders of their home country in their houses: paintings, calligraphy, and especially Persian carpets, which play an important role in everyday life. “You start seeing these motifs and these lines and patterns [in carpets] from a very early age, so they are engrained in our minds. They soothe your soul.”

After growing up in Tehran, Sepideh left Iran and her family 10 years ago. She moved to a small town in upstate New York as a Ph.D. student studying archaeology and anthropology at the State University of New York at Binghamton. In 2016, she came to North Carolina, where she taught courses on cultural heritage at North Carolina State University and is now pursuing a certificate in digital data curation from the School of Information and Library Science at UNC-Chapel Hill. She hopes to apply the skills she learns at Carolina to cultural heritage data she is collecting at a prehistoric Iranian excavation site.

Sepideh is a board member of the Iranian Cultural Society of North Carolina and helps coordinate festivals and other events. These activities help bring the thriving North Carolina Persian community together. “The Persian community is very diverse – different people with different viewpoints and perspectives and ideological ways of thinking,” she says. “But there is a nice cohesion in the community.”

When Sepideh moved to North Carolina, it was a community in which she almost instantly felt at home. “I feel like I have friends here that I’ve known for so many years, but I’ve only been in North Carolina for two years now,” she says. “The friends that I have around me, I feel like I’ve known them for my whole life. I feel like a part of an extended family in the Persian community.”



# Carolina Connections

## Reminders of Home

### Mehdi

President | Iranian Cultural Society of North Carolina

A small Persian carpet hangs in a frame on the wall of Mehdi's Chapel Hill home. It shows a young Kurdish woman, standing next to a samovar, a metal pot used for boiling water for tea. The carpet comes from Kurdistan, the western region of Iran where he was born. The image is a common one for Persian carpets in Iran and reminds him of where he grew up. It reminds him of something else, too: "The girl looks exactly like my second cousin," he says, laughing.

Persian carpets are just one of the many Iranian decorative arts. Pottery and weaving, sculptures and metalwork, painting and architecture and stone reliefs all date back thousands of years and continue to feature prominently in Iranian homes. "It is an integral part of Iranian culture," Mehdi says. "In any house you go to in Iran, with no exception, there is at least one small Persian carpet, if not a few framed calligraphy pieces or paintings on the wall."

Mehdi was raised in Kermanshah, located in the Zagros Mountains. He remembers meters of snow covering the mountains, sometimes as early as August. He used to walk through the city, much smaller back then, to visit his grandmother, his uncle, and his cousins. "I have fond memories of those days," he says.

But when the Islamic Revolution began in 1978, life changed. He was a rising senior at a university in Tehran when all the schools were shut down. He decided to come to the United States to finish the rest of his engineering degree at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. "That was 40 years ago," he says. "I thought I would finish that in two years, and I thought by then things would calm down and I could go back. Unfortunately, I still hear bad news every day." Only a few of Mehdi's family members were able to leave during the revolution. His brothers now live in the United States, but his mother, his sister, and most of his extended family are still in Iran.

After he graduated, he moved to California, where he worked at Stanford University for five years. In 1988, the project he was working on was transferred to Duke University – he's been there ever since.

In his time in North Carolina, Mehdi has become involved in the Triangle community and the local universities. In addition to being an engineer, he is also an advisor to the Graduate Student Association of Iranians at Duke, and he is a key supporter of the Persian Studies Program and the Carolina Center for the Study of the Middle East and Muslim Civilizations at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Both of his daughters attended Carolina. He currently serves as president of the Iranian Cultural Society of North Carolina, which celebrates Iranian traditions and identity and encourages cultural exchanges with other groups.

"As in other regions of the United States, minorities form a group – and Iranians of course were no exception – to get together on a regular basis, to have a voice, to let each other know of events to promote the Iranian culture," Mehdi says. "It is important for many reasons, of course: one is to introduce our culture to others who are not familiar with it but would like to be ... and also to tell others that we're the same. We're the same as other Americans."

