

The life of the Báb - a teacher's guide

The Bab

Mirza Ali Muhammad was born in Persia in 1819.

He was a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, and as a child he was recognised for his good nature and wisdom beyond his years.

Bab is the title that Mirza Ali Muhammad adopted.

It is the Arabic word for 'gate' the meaning of this word is well known in the Islamic world.

Students should note the name of Báb and recognize Báb as a title copy into workbooks.



The 'Hebron Bab' in Jerusalem

Great cities like Jerusalem and Cairo are surrounded by walls and have a series of gates, each known as a 'Bab', through which people would enter. Within the city they would find comfort and safety and a place to trade their goods and produce.

Slide 2

Straightforward information of the where the word Báb comes from. Students to be set a task to think of what kind of things one could get in a city that would bring comfort and safety. Also to make suggestions on how they would trade for such things.

Why would someone take on such a title?

During the year 1844, at the age of twenty-five the Báb made an extraordinary announcement:

Firstly, he said clearly that he had brought a new religion.

Secondly, he declared that the purpose of his religion was to prepare humanity for the imminent appearance of another messenger from God who would usher in the age of peace and justice promised in all the worlds' religions.

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If he was to prepare humanity for another 'messenger' who would bring in an age of peace and justice, could this be seen as a 'gate' to another type of comfort and safety?

What kind of things do you think would help bring safety and justice?

The Bab said of this promised messenger:

"From the beginning that hath no beginning all men have bowed in adoration before Him Whom God shall make manifest and will continue to do so until the end that hath no end"



The Bab's home was in the city of Shiraz, Iran. It was in this room in his home that the Bab first spoke of his message.

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Can you discuss and try to explain what the Báb's statement means.

Find out what adoration and manifest mean before you start.

Slide1

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The Bab's announcement came at a time when there were widespread expectations of religious change.

His declaration that religious faith should be based upon love, compassion, and choice and not upon background, force and coercion, appealed to many different classes of people in Persia - from the very poor to the very rich and the highly educated.

This new religion became known as the Babi Faith, the followers were known as Babis. The new religion spread rapidly throughout Persia.



Slide 5

Do you think religion should be forced on people even by their family?

Often people simply belong to the same religion as their parents.

Should having or not having a religion be a free choice?

What choice would you make and why?

The Bab's insistence on improving the status of women, his promotion of education and the pursuit of the sciences was very revolutionary both inside and outside Persia.

The Bab's ideas described a very different society from the one that existed.

The religious leaders and the political establishment within Persia were alarmed at this promise of change.



A group of religious leaders, meeting with Persian royalty during the 19th century.



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Today we seldom think twice about the things that the Báb said about women, science and education. Why do you think these ideas caused problems, and today still cause problems.

Why are political establishments worried by change?

The leaders of Persian society, both political and religious, encouraged the ordinary people to attack and persecute the supporters of the Báb's new religion.

Thousands of Babis were put to death in a horrific series of executions and massacres.



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Can you think of any other situations where people would be attacked and killed for trying to bring about a better society?

Civil rights, Apartheid, Trade unions, etc, etc etc.

Edward Granville Browne a professor from Cambridge University recorded some of the events that took place and noted the extraordinary courage in the face of persecution shown by these men and women. Many other Europeans witnessed the events happening in Persia.



Slide 8

Straight forward information.

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The nobility of the Bab's life and his message, and the heroism of his followers became a topic of conversation and discussion throughout Europe.

The Bab was eventually arrested by the authorities and put on trial in the city of Tabriz, he was given the opportunity to give up his beliefs and return to Islam and save his life but he refused and the court sentenced him to death. One of his followers volunteered to die with him.

Slide 9

Straight forward information.

The question should be asked is anything worth dying for?

The Martyrdom of the Bab

On the 9th of July 1850 the Bab was led to his place of execution in the 'Barracks Square' in Tabriz, a city in northern Persia. Some 10,000 people, including representatives of European governments, crowded the rooftops of the buildings and houses that overlooked the square to witness the event.

Slide 10

Straight forward information.

What does martyrdom really mean?

A martyr is...A person who is put to death for refusing to renounce their faith or belief.



The photograph shows where the Bab was executed.
The X marks the spot from where he was suspended by ropes along with one of his followers.

Slide 11

Straight forward information.

The Bab and his young follower were suspended by ropes from a hook on the wall.
A regiment of soldiers were arranged in three rows, each row of 250 soldiers opened fire in turn. So dense was the smoke raised by the gunpowder that the entire square was obscured from the eyes of the people.

When the smoke had cleared the Bab was nowhere to be seen and his companion was standing unharmed in the square.


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What do think has happened?

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A report of the execution was sent by the British Government's envoy in Persia, who had witnessed the execution.

The report to Lord Palmerston the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs records the following:



Lord Palmerston

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Straight forward information.


"When the smoke and dust cleared away after the volley, Bab was not to be seen, and the populace proclaimed that he had ascended to the skies. The bullets had broken the ropes by which he was bound, but he was dragged from the recess where, after some search he was discovered and shot."

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Straight forward information.

However question should be asked why were European Governments in the so interested?

Another version of the story tells how when the guards had come to take him to the square for his execution the Bab had warned them that he had not completed his work and that no earthly power could silence him until he had finished all that he had to do or say. The guards ignored what he said and took him to the barracks square for execution.



Slide 15

The other version of the story.

Because the Báb had vanished after the first attempt at executing him, the guards were sent to search for him. Eventually they found him in his cell giving final instructions to one of his followers.

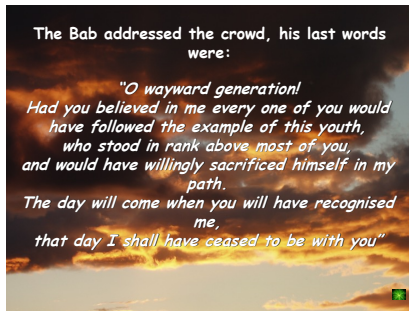
The Báb then told them that he had now completed his work and they had his permission to proceed with his execution.

The Báb was brought out and his young follower was again tied to him and both hung on the hook in the square. The original regiment of soldiers now refused to take any further part in the proceedings.

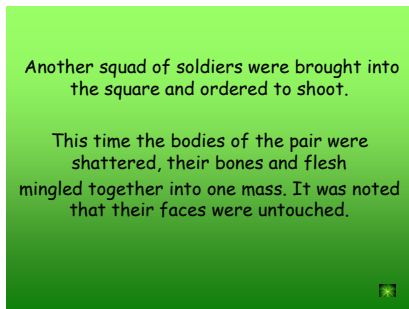
Slide 16

Students should be asked to write their own report on the events that happened, they could be watching from the wall, be one of the guards one of the soldiers or one of the Báb's followers.

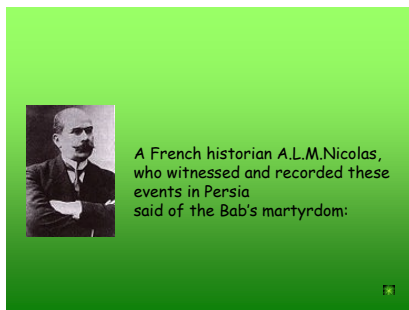
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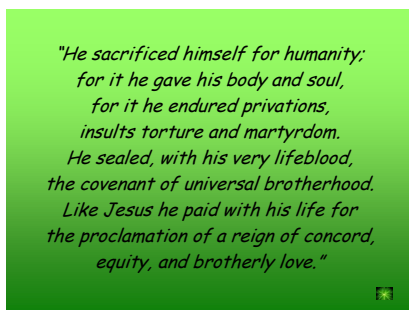
Slide 17
Straight forward information.



Slide 18
Why bring in new soldiers for the execution?

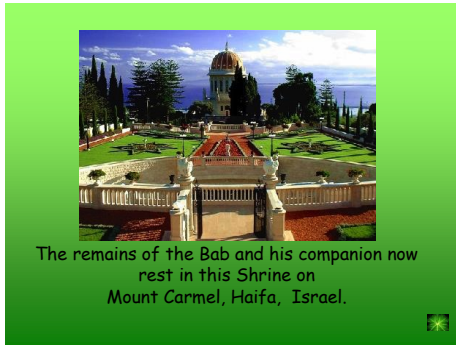


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Straight forward information.

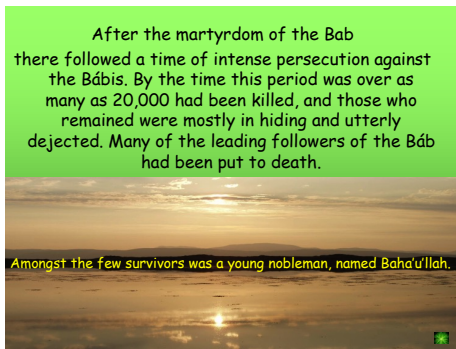


Slide 19
Straight forward information.
Discussion, are these ideas worth dying for?

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Slide 20
Straight forward information.



Slide 21
What does persecution mean?
Why do you think that the Báb's followers went into hiding ?
Discussion...What do you think could help them to recover from such shocking events?