

The background features a series of concentric circles in light gray, some solid and some dashed, creating a ripple effect. A large, solid red speech bubble is centered on the page, pointing downwards. The text 'THEMES IN PERSEPOLIS' is written in white, uppercase letters inside the speech bubble.

# THEMES IN PERSEPOLIS

## THEME #1

# RELIGION, OPPRESSION, AND MODERNITY

- Persepolis begins in 1980 in post-revolution Iran. While Iran was becoming more and more Westernized under the shah, the revolutionaries who take over Iran begin to implement strict Islamic law that makes Iran a less modern place than it once was. For example, women are forbidden to work or drive and must wear traditional Islamic costumes that cover their bodies fully, including a veil. Popular music and western movies and books are also now forbidden.
- While many Iranians supported the revolution and the overthrow of the shah, they are now faced with an extremist Islamic regime that they do not agree with.

## THEME #2

# NATIONALISM, HEROISM, AND MARTYRDOM

- Nationalism can be very simply defined as patriotism for one's country. At times, nationalism takes on a negative meaning when people begin to feel that their country is more superior to others and that people from other countries are not worthy of respect or equal human rights.
- The people of Iran supported a revolution against the shah and as a result took over 50 Americans hostage for over a year. The new rulers of Iran have made laws that restrict the people of Iran to traditional religious codes of Islam. Americans and other westerners are viewed as evil adversaries.
- People like Marjane and her family must now either accept or fight against the new regime. Will they accept these strict new nationalist beliefs? Are they willing to die for what they believe is right?

### THEME #3

# VIOLENCE, FORGIVENESS, AND JUSTICE

- The historical body count by the end of *Persepolis* is enormous: from the start of the Revolution to the end of the Iraq-Iran War over a million people die—on the battlefield, in the streets, and in prison cells—killed by the Shah and by the Islamic Republic that replaces the Shah.
- Official, legally sanctioned punishment for infractions as small as an improperly worn veil or the possession of forbidden party fare could be shockingly severe, including torture and death, and the people who carry out these punishments are usually agents of the regime. As such, Marjane claims, “it was really our own who attacked us.”

#### THEME #4

# CHILDREN, WAR, AND GROWING UP

- *Persepolis* shows children to be easily influenced ideologically and behaviorally during war because children do not yet have the capacity to understand the complexity of the situations around them. For example, we see how many boys easily become radicalized and come to believe in the heavenly benefits of martyrdom because they are naturally trusting of authority.
- How does war impact the youth of a country? What types of events mark the “coming of age” or “growing up” of children in war-torn countries?

## THEME #5

# THE PERSONAL VS. THE POLITICAL

- *Persepolis* is a story about Marjane Satrapi, her family, her friends, and the people she knows—and also about the nation of Iran. These two stories are intertwined —one cannot be told without the other, and no individual in the story can exist outside of the context of the historical change happening in Iran.
- The question is: if a person cannot escape the political world they live in, how much should they participate in the political sphere, and do we actually have a choice in becoming part of the political world around us?

## THEME #6

# GENDER

- *Persepolis* opens at the moment in Iranian history when it becomes obligatory for women to wear the veil and schools become segregated by gender. Over the course of the graphic novel, Marjane begins to understand that women in the new society of Iran now have a lesser role than they have ever had before and are restricted to obeying the men around them.
- To what extent does the country or society you live in control the importance and role of gender? What happens to people who speak out against gender discrimination? How does a society's view of gender impact individual identity?