ITEM 3.11  ▪ Marjane Satrapi, Excerpt from Persepolis, 2004

Often our past experiences are colored with multiple sensations, ranging from the touch of a loved one to the smell of baking bread. Capturing these moments sometimes calls for more than words. Marjane Satrapi has long been an innovator in expressing identity and memory in the form of the graphic novel. The excerpt below is taken from Persepolis, Satrapi's 2004 novel that has recently been made into a feature film.
AND ALSO BECAUSE THE YEAR BEFORE, IN 1978, WE WERE IN A FRENCH NON-RELIGIOUS SCHOOL.

WHERE BOYS AND GIRLS WERE TOGETHER.

AND THEN SUDDENLY IN 1980...
ALL BILINGUAL SCHOOLS MUST BE CLOSED DOWN.

THEY ARE SYMBOLS OF CAPITALISM.

OF DECADENCE.

BRAVO!
WHAT WISDOM!

THIS IS CALLED A "CULTURAL REVOLUTION."

WE FOUND OURSELVES VEILED AND SEPARATED FROM OUR FRIENDS.

AND THAT WAS THAT...
EVERYWHERE IN THE STREETS THERE WERE DEMONSTRATIONS FOR AND AGAINST THE VEIL.

AT ONE OF THE DEMONSTRATIONS, A GERMAN JOURNALIST TOOK A PHOTO OF MY MOTHER.

I WAS REALLY PROUD OF HER. HER PHOTO WAS PUBLISHED IN ALL THE EUROPEAN NEWSPAPERS.

AND EVEN IN ONE MAGAZINE IN IRAN, MY MOTHER WAS REALLY SCARED.

SHE COVERED HER HAIR.

AND WORE DARK GLASSES FOR A LONG TIME.
I really didn't know what to think about the veil. Deep down I was very religious but as a family we were very modern and avant-garde.

I was born with religion.

At the age of six I was already sure I was the last prophet. This was a few years before the revolution.

Before me there had been a few others.

I wanted to be a prophet...

Because my father had a Cadillac.

And, above all, because my grandmother's knees always ached.

Come here, Mary! Help me to stand up.

Don't worry. Soon you won't have any more pain. You'll see.
LIKE ALL MY PREDECESSORS I HAD MY HOLY BOOK.

THE FIRST THREE RULES CAME FROM ZARATHUSTRA. HE WAS THE FIRST PROPHET IN MY COUNTRY BEFORE THE ARAB INVASION.

YOU MUST BASE EVERYTHING ON THESE THREE RULES: BEHAVE WELL, SPEAK WELL, ACT WELL.

I ALSO WANTED US TO CELEBRATE THE TRADITIONAL ZARATHUSTRIAN HOLIDAYS, LIKE THE FIRE CEREMONY, BEFORE THE PERSIAN NEW YEAR, NOROUZ, ON MARCH 21st, THE FIRST DAY OF SPRING.

ONLY MY GRANDMOTHER KNEW ABOUT MY BOOK.

RULE NUMBER SIX: EVERYBODY SHOULD HAVE A CAKE.

RULE NUMBER SEVEN: ALL MAIDS SHOULD EAT AT THE TABLE WITH THE OTHERS.

RULE NUMBER EIGHT: NO OLD PERSON SHOULD HAVE TO SUFFER.

IN THAT CASE, I'LL BE YOUR FIRST DISCIPLE.

REALLY?

BUT TELL ME HOW YOU'LL ARRANGE FOR OLD PEOPLE NOT TO SUFFER?

IT WILL SIMPLY BE FORBIDDEN.
EVERY NIGHT I HAD A BIG DISCUSSION WITH GOD.

God, give me some more time. I am not quite ready yet.

YES YOU ARE, CELESTIAL LIGHT, YOU ARE MY CHOICE, MY LOST AND MY BEST CHOICE.

EXCEPT FOR MY GRANDMOTHER, I WAS OBVIOUSLY THE ONLY ONE WHO BELIEVED IN MYSELF.

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE WHEN YOU GROW UP?

I'LL BE A PROPHET.

HAHA! HAHA! HAHA!

SHE'S CRAZY.

MY PARENTS WERE CALLED IN BY THE TEACHER.

YOUR CHILD IS DISTURBED. SHE WANTS TO BECOME A PROPHET.

WHAT ABOUT IT?

DOESN'T THIS WORRY YOU?

NO! NOT AT ALL!
CONSIDER

1. How does the veil function as a symbol? Is it fair to say the veil limits conceptions of identity? Why or why not?

2. The events in "The Veil" are both religious and political. How are institutions like religion and politics portrayed in the memoir? How do they relate to identity?

CHALLENGE

3. Using your own writing and drawing skills or comic creation software, develop your own graphic representation of an episode in your life. Select an episode that represents aspects of your identity.Storyboard the comic to organize the events. Compose the comic and share it with classmates or post it on the Web.