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*This activity focuses particularly on **Articles 8, 12-17, and 28- 29** of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. I developed it for use in an introductory course in the social foundations of education, called “Education in a Pluralistic Society”. I think it could also be adapted to and used within a wide variety of courses that consider children’s development of cultural and personal identity.*

One of the ideas implicit in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, articulated in various ways in the articles listed above, is that every child has a right to develop his or her *identity*. The child has a right to a “name and nationality”, two of the many aspects that make up what is commonly called “identity”, and other rights articulated by the Convention -- e.g. to freedom of assembly, education, religion, thought and belief, and access to media, as well as freedom from “unlawful attacks on his or her honour and reputation” -- are also closely associated with “identity”. This lesson considers these aspects of the Convention in the context of the life-story of a reluctant Iranian child emigree, portrayed in the movie Persepolis.

Persepolis first appeared as an autobiographical graphic novel, by Marjane Satrapi. For those unfamiliar with the book, with the sequel (Persepolis 2) and/or the recent movie based on them, the series tells the story of a girlhood in revolutionary Iran. The character Marjane leads a privileged childhood which is radically disrupted by revolutionary politics. Persepolis is a contemporary bildungsroman which illuminates the travails of a child struggling to grow up and maintain her integrity while living in societies outrightly repressive (Iran) and permissive but unsupportive (Austria). Marjane struggles with freedom and the lack thereof, with religion, especially when it is co-opted by the regime for its own purposes, with national/ethnic identity, and of course with all the other travails of childhood and adolescence.

In this lesson, after viewing the movie, students consider ways in which Marjane’s rights were and were not upheld by various adult characters – the state, most obviously, but also Marjane’s parents, other family, peers, the educational system, and others. At times, one ideal, e.g. that every child should remain with his/her parents, was given up for the sake of another, e.g. freedom and safety. The point I hope to express is that in a less-than-ideal world, those responsible for children may be forced to make difficult choices, sometimes sacrificing one ideal for another. At the same time, as the movie shows, children possess astonishing resilience, as well as insight, creativity, and other qualities that those responsible for children ought to keep in mind.

My students are often skeptical of the idea that people from other cultures have a right to develop and/or maintain a non-mainstream identity. At times, I think multiculturalists work with too rigid a notion of identity and culture, as if children had no right or ability to diverge from the cultures of their parents, and yet there is certainly fairness in the insistence that people in positions of authority (e.g. schoolteachers) ought to respect

diversity, disagreement and the multiplicity of experiences. Persepolis, read/viewed in the context of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, provides a venue for discussing some of the complex situations facing children in a globalizing, cosmopolitan world.