

MCAD
COMMONS

Shirin Neshat

Tooba _____

Secondary-level Study Guide

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Shirin Neshat's "Tooba" video installation is a two-channel video depicting a group's journey towards their ultimate home and sanctuary. Derived from the Qur'an, Tooba is a mythical character who embodies shelter and freedom to those who reach her.

1. In the Quoran, tooba or tuba is "A tree in Paradise whose width is a hundred years, and the clothes of the people of Paradise are taken from its bark." An-Nu`man bin Abi `Ayyash Az-Zuraqi added, "Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri narrated to me that the Prophet said, "There is a tree in Paradise, if a rider travels in its shade on a fast, sleek horse for one hundred years, he would not be able to cross it."
2. Have them read other accounts that mention trees in paradise such as the Gospel, Kabbalah and make a presentation on the symbolism of these trees. Have them bring images/representations of these trees, if any. Discuss the use of figurative language in the Koran to describe the tree and use of representations and symbolisms in the different religions.
3. Share with them the story of Tooba, the sacred tree depicted in Shirin Neshat's video installation. Ask the students if they know of any myths or real-life examples that resemble certain characteristics of the story of Tooba.

The artist Shirin Neshat often makes use of video installations as a medium for her art. Video installation is a contemporary art form that combines video or film technology with installation art, making use of all aspects of the surrounding environments such as galleries, museums or site-specific spaces to affect its audience.

Introduce the students to contemporary artists who also make use of video installation in their art, these artists may include Martha Atienza, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Nam June Paik, Kelly Richardson, Surekha, and Bill Viola, among many others.

1. Ask the students to research video installation artists and write a short reflection on at least one work or artist whose work they enjoy. Ask them to describe why they like their chosen work or artist and how they elevate the medium.
2. Invite the students to reflect on why the artists chose to work with this particular medium. Ask them questions such as:
3. What does the medium of video and installation work bring to the table that other mediums (such as photography, painting, or sculpture) do not?
4. Does the location of where the video is being shown matter? Why?
5. Ask the students to cite examples of how the context of a video and installation can change depending on the location where it is being shown.

Have the students watch Shirin Neshat's video installation of Tooba and take note (either mentally or on a piece of paper) of what they see. Ask several students to give a short summary of what they saw in the video.

Consider the following questions:

1. What is the purpose of having different videos being shown side-by-side?
2. In what ways do the videos differ?
3. What kind of color palette does the artist utilize? Why do you think they made this artistic choice?
4. How do the videos benefit from being shown in this particular space?
5. What other location or venue would it be appropriate to show this video installation?

Have the students recall the aspects of Islamic culture that they researched beforehand. Are any of these present in the video? In what way do they think someone from outside of that culture will be able to understand the video?

Divide the students into groups and have them record and edit a one-minute film on any electronic device they have access to. The video must contain elements of the basic narrative structure: a beginning, a middle, and an end. The video will be their interpretation of the themes dealt with in Tooba, and it will be a video installation.

After choosing a location and having a screening of their films, have them interview their audience about the experience viewing the video installation.

Have each group share their experience and the questions it has raised or answered for them regarding video installations and Tooba.