

## Material Memory of Migration in South Asia

### Lesson Objective/Overview

South Asia presents an important case study for students developing an understanding of the history of migration and the cultural transmission of memory in the context of one of the largest historic refugee crises, the 1947 Partition. This lesson is designed to introduce students to the aftermath of South Asian independence, in which the British withdrew from their imperial colony and orchestrated the formation of two countries (the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan) leaving in its wake unprecedented displacement and bloodshed.

Through examining testimonies tethered to material memory from online catalogs students will develop critical research and analysis skills. Curations from The Partition Museum, The 1947 Partition Archive, and The Museum of Material Memory will provide students with a point of entry into evaluating the role oral histories play in understanding the significance of individual experiences as they relate to the collective memory and to cultural relevance of personal artifacts and relics. Following independence from imperial British forces, the new political boundaries and sudden transition to democracy led to mass violence and for at least 14 million people to migrate from their ancestral lands.<sup>1</sup> Those displaced brought with them heirlooms or ordinary objects that held memories of the past to their new countries. Through visual analysis in gallery walks, listening to testimonies, reading articles on Partition, and engaging with narrative texts, students develop their ability to have cogent discussions on the impact of displacement as a result of colonialism. Students will also be able to create a storyboard and/or write a personal narrative in which material memory and identity can be intertwined and expressed.

Although designed for an English course for students at the 9-12 grade level, it can be adapted to be integrated to suit a high school history or art history course.

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<sup>1</sup> Guneeta Singh Bhalla  
HUMANITIES, Summer 2022, Volume 43, Number 3

## **Standards**

### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy - Literature**

RL.11-12.3 Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

RL.11-12.6 Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy - Informational Text**

RI.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RI.11-12.2 - Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

RI.11-12.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.

### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12 - Writing**

W.11-12.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

W.11-12.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.

W.11-12.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

## CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12 - Speaking and Listening

SL.11-12.5 Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest

### Materials and Resources

- [The Story of the 1947 Partition as Told by the People Who Were There](#)
- [How British colonialism broke up a subcontinent - in 3 minutes. Produced by Zahra Haider](#)
- [The things they carried: Aanchal Malhotra revisits partition through everyday objects](#)
- [In conversation with Aanchal Malhotra](#)
- [Google Arts & Culture: The Partition Museum's archive](#)
- [The Museum of Material Memory](#)
- [1947PartitionArchive](#)
- [1947PartitionArchive YouTube page](#)
- [How the Memory of India's Traumatic Partition Is Being Preserved Across Borders \(Time Magazine\)](#)
- [Storyboard Template](#)
- [The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India by Urvashi Butalia](#)
- *Divided by Partition: United by RESILIENCE: 21 Inspirational Stories from 1947* by Mallika Ahluwalia
- [The Moth Radio Hour: Sorry Sari](#) by Nina McConigley

### Lesson Objectives

- Students will analyze the historical context of the Partition and its effect on South Asia by reading and annotating texts including an article from the founder of the 1947 Partition Archive
- Students will summarize their understanding of videos related to the the history of Partition and inspiration for the book *Remnants of a Separation* with co-founder of the Museum of Material Memory with author Aanchal Malhotra

- Students will note observations of family and cultural heirlooms through pictures and narratives of those displaced through the Partition by engaging in a gallery walk
- Students will describe experiences of South Asians in newly independent India and Pakistan by reading narrative accounts and through independent research of online museum collections
- Students will analyze and compare different accounts of the Partition by engaging in a turn-key activity with their peers
- Students will create visual storyboards of migratory experiences by doing a close reading of autobiographical accounts of the Partition
- Students will write a narrative piece in which a cultural object holds significance through the story's unfolding
- Extension: Students will pick one object from the Museum of Material Memory to research; students will then write a creative short story on the piece that reflects an aspect of experiences resulting from Partition

## **Lesson Procedures/Learning Activities**

### Class 1 and 2 - Introduction

1. As a bell ringer activity, students will be asked to write in a KWL chart and answer the first two columns, "What do I know about India and Pakistan?" and "What do I want to learn about India and Pakistan?" Ask students to share their responses with the class.
2. Distribute Attachment B "Reading and Viewing Guide" and have a student read the directions. In the interest of time, the reading by Guneeta Singh Bhalla may be abridged in order to complete the reading and viewings in one period. Alternatively, this activity may be split over multiple periods.
3. Distribute copies of The Story of the 1947 Partition as Told by the People Who Were There by Guneeta Singh Bhalla and read as a class. This will give students an overview of Partition history as well as demonstrate why Bhalla was inspired to collect/document oral histories to preserve, humanize, and also challenge "official histories." Guide students to annotate the text and review annotating text strategies if needed.
4. Instruct students to compose their answers to questions one and two in the Reading/Viewing Guide, to begin the Think-Pair-Share Activity. Students will then



spend a few minutes dialoguing with a peer. Finally, students will engage in a class discussion and share their findings.

5. Next, show students the clip *How British colonialism broke up a subcontinent*. Repeat the same process for Think-Pair-Share with the next set of questions.
6. Lastly, show the final clip *In conversation with Aanchal Malhotra* and repeat the process for Think-Pair-Share for the final set of questions.
7. Have students return to the KWL chart and fill in the final column about what new information they learned about India and Pakistan.

### Assessment

8. To formally assess students, answers on the Reading and Viewing Guide worksheet can be used to check if students properly analyzed and made inferences to the proposed questions. Additionally, the final column responses of the KWL chart could be used to see if the students' learning goal of summarizing their understanding of the historical context and the factors that led to the Partition of India and Pakistan.

### Modifications

9. The time given during the think-pair-share can be adjusted for students to have sufficient time for constructing and sharing their responses. A teacher model of a question can also be implemented.

### Class 3 - Gallery Walk

1. Prior to the start of class, use Attachment C "Gallery Walk Graphic Organizer", to print "exhibit" documents/pictures and paste onto Easel chart paper. This can allow students to write anonymous observations, questions, and to build on other student remarks in written form around each piece. The graphic organizer can be used to record their impressions when they return to their seats, or during the gallery walk. Note, students should travel in the same direction with a three minute limit, to avoid clustering.
  - a. If possible, incorporate an audio clip at a computer with headphones. This would add another dimension to the gallery. This can also be done as a whole class activity at the end (The *Time Magazine* article includes two Soundcloud links with oral testimonies).
2. Explain to students that they will be doing a tour of a photo gallery of items from The Partition Museum (located in Amritsar) and a piece (you may choose to

incorporate more) from the digital archive of the Museum of Material Memory. They will be expected to examine objects that carry significance to the person or family that was uprooted and displaced.

- a. If possible, project the website pages and read the “About” section of the Museum of Material Memory.
3. Inform students that they will be divided into pairs (or small groups). Send each pair to a different exhibit to begin and remind them that they have three minutes per exhibit. Tell students to examine each image, read the description, and either remark on the chart paper or in their graphic organizer. After three minutes, the pairs rotate. Repeat until students visit each exhibit.
4. Once students return to their seats, facilitate student volunteers to share their questions/remarks on exhibits to generate discussion about migration, violence of displacement, preservation of memory, the significance of what some objects were comprised of (The Partition Museum categorizes some collections by metal, paper, textile, fiber art, for example).
5. Ask students to identify images/stories that had the most impact for them personally.

#### Assessment

6. The Gallery Walk Graphic Organizer student answers can serve as a way to formally assess if students understood how to properly observe and inference artifacts of the exhibits.

#### Modifications

7. The teacher can model a gallery exhibit with the whole class prior to conducting it in pairs.

#### Class 4 and 5 Analyzing Partition Memoir with Storyboarding

1. Prior to class, select a story either from the Museum of Material Memory or *Divided by Partition: United by RESILIENCE: 21 Inspirational Stories from 1947* by Mallika Ahluwalia as the class text.
2. As a bell ringer activity, have students describe their earliest memory of the concept of “place” in a journal entry. Tell students to describe as many sensory details about what they remember and to explain why the place holds importance for them. Ask each student to share.

3. Provide the Storyboard template to each student and read directions to the class: Illustrate the story that has been read by drawing its main ideas within each of the blocks below. Below each drawing, include a short caption or relevant quotation from the story.
4. Provide the text to the class and read your chosen story of migration as a result of Partition. After the reading, model how to track the main events of the plot of the narrative and create illustrations with captions/applicable quotations from the text. As a class, students can complete the graphic organizer.
5. For the next class, have copies available of stories from the Museum of Material Memory or Mallika Ahluwalia's book for students to work in pairs or independently. At the beginning of class, give students time to browse the stories and to make their selection. Students will read their chosen stories and complete another storyboard.
6. Students can present their work to the class. Debrief and ask students to compare storyboards with a partner or a small group. What similarities and differences do they find? This discussion can help students clarify ideas in the narratives and can also help them identify and analyze recurring patterns that surface in stories of displacement.

#### Assessment

7. Use student storyboards and presentations to check for thoroughness and accuracy and as a means to evaluate reading comprehension.

#### Modifications

8. To modify, students with stronger reading comprehension skills can be paired with struggling students to assist them in analyzing the stories. Additional time can also be allocated to practice presentation skills.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Attachment B: Reading and Viewing Guide

The Story of the 1947 Partition as Told by the People Who Were There by Guneeta Singh Bhalla

*How British colonialism broke up a subcontinent (3 minutes)*

*In conversation with Aanchal Malhotra (4 minutes)*

Opener: Read directions below to complete the Think-Pair-Share activity

#### Think-Pair-Share Procedure

1. Think - reflect on questions and write a response
2. Pair - pair up and discuss your responses
3. Share - after reconvening, pairs report back to discuss with class

*The Story of the 1947 Partition as Told by the People Who Were There* by Guneeta Singh Bhalla

1. What is oral history?
2. How does oral history differ from official history?

*How British colonialism broke up a subcontinent*

3. What are some strategies that imperial Britain employed to maintain control over South Asia?
4. In what ways are India and Pakistan still impacted by the Partition today?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*In conversation with Aanchal Malhotra*

5. Malhotra states, "The object is borderless, it doesn't, the object doesn't have any citizenship. It has the capacity to absorb memory." What do you think she means by this?

6. Can objects be transportive? Explain.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Attachment C: Gallery Walk Graphic Organizer

Directions: Examine the photos around the room. Choose 5 exhibits from the gallery space and answer the questions in each column.

Exhibit Item	Observations: What do you notice? What can you infer?	How does the exhibit make you feel?

In 7 or fewer words, what are some similarities that you notice about the objects?

# IMAGE #1



Rosary

Forced to migrate from East [Pakistan](#) to [India](#), Sunil Chandra Ghosh shared a very close bond with his mother. She used this rosary to pray when she was alive. He kept it safely as a remembrance of his mother, whom he credits as being his strength as long as she lived. Generously donated by Sunil Chandra Ghosh.

The Arts and Cultural Heritage Trust



Partition Museum,  
Town Hall, Amritsar

# IMAGE #2



Thali, Katori, and Lassi Glass

The thali and katori made of kansa [metal](#), and lassi glass made of brass, were owned by Kamal Bammi's family before Partition. They were brought across from their house in [Lahore](#) by a Muslim friend of the family, when he traveled from [Pakistan](#) to visit them in [Delhi](#) in 1949. Generously donated by Kamal Bammi.

The Arts and Cultural Heritage Trust



Partition Museum,  
Town Hall, Amritsar



# IMAGE #3



People migrating through train.

Some of the most iconic photographs of the Partition show refugees traveling on train carriages. So large were the numbers of refugees that they had to find space to sit on roofs, in doorways and on the engines of both goods and passenger trains. Courtesy: "Refugee Travel between India and Pakistan", The Railway Gazette, 24 October 1947.

The Arts and Cultural Heritage Trust



Partition Museum,  
Town Hall, Amritsar

# IMAGE #4



Indians celebrating Independence at Vijay Chowk, Delhi. Courtesy: Nehru Memorial Museum Library  
1947

The Arts and Cultural Heritage Trust



Partition Museum,  
Town Hall, Amritsar

# IMAGE #5



Dhakai Sari  
1951

This Dhakai Sari, gifted to Bakul Chandra at her Wedding in 1951, was carried by her when she migrated in 1955 from Comilla, (then) East Pakistan to India. Donated to the Partition Museum by Bakul Chanda.



# IMAGE #6



Map of Undivided India

The Arts and Cultural Heritage Trust



Partition Museum,  
Town Hall, Amritsar

# IMAGE #7



Keepsakes from East Bengal  
SEPTEMBER 17, 2018

TEXT BY TANJIMA KAR SEKH & SUSMITA KAR  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY TANJIMA KAR SEKH  
Asansol, West Bengal, India

MUSEUM *of*  
MATERIAL  
MEMORY

The very first time I first saw this exquisite piece of jewellery was in 2016, on my wedding day. I'd always heard of my maternal grandfather's ancestry since childhood, and being born in a divided state has made me conscious about our political history – a history that this bracelet had survived. My grandfather, Bhabendu Bikas Majumder was born in the family of landlords from Panchgaon in Noakhali district (now in Bangladesh). He was however brought up by his maternal grandfather Gopal Biswas at Dashani, Khulna. He was one of ten siblings : three brothers and seven sisters.

My grandfather recalls his mother, Snehalata Majumder – to whom this bracelet originally belonged – to always be well dressed and adorned. Some of the family members even remember her being weighed against gold during her marriage. It's no wonder that even after the loss of a huge amount of possessions during the Partition, she had enough to gift everyone from the next generation.

It was the 10th of October 1946, the day of Kojagori Lakshmi Pujai, which is always performed in Bengali Hindu households during the evening on Purnima (full moon day) in the month of Aswin (mostly October). A Muslim woman who worked in the zamindari household informed the Majumders about the probable attack by the Muslims during the evening prayer the same day. But despite this warning, the puja was organized, as the Majumders probably could not fathom the amount of disaster awaiting them. In the evening – just as they'd been warned – gangs of Muslim men entered the household, plundering everything, killing the kanchas who guarded the doors, and taking the gold idol of goddess Lakshmi. When they finally reached the landlord, my great great grandfather, Lakshmi Majumder, the mob could not decide whether to kill him or not. He was a civil lawyer who had also helped a lot of Muslims. So they spared his life but chopped off his thumbs from both hands to weaken the spirit of the rich zamindars. It was the threatening to the Hindus of the district to flee to India.

The family's Muslim friends and acquaintances advised them to convert to Islam as stated by Lakshmi Majumder in a statement (which is recorded in *Communalism in Bengal: From Famine To Noakhali, 1943-47*, 2005). Agreeing that this decision would be the best, he, along with other Hindus of the region, made their way to the nearby mosque to get converted as they had no other option. But to their surprise, armed

## MUSEUM *of* MATERIAL MEMORY

Muslim rioters were waiting to attack them at the mosque as well. The entire family abandoned their house and property and escaped to Dashani, Khulna and stayed there as long as the unrest continued. Meanwhile Snehalata Majumder threw away all her jewellery in the lake behind their house. When the riots had subsided, the family returned and found a house which was left unoccupied and started living in it. Surprisingly, they retrieved a large amount of possessions and jewellery from their old neighbours. This bracelet in question is one such item, among many others.

Though the family continued to live in East Bengal during the Partition, they no longer had the same wealth or status. As a result, my grandfather's elder brother came to India in 1948 looking for safer future, and my grandfather joined him in Calcutta in 1949 after finishing his matriculation. They stayed in a slum named Dilwar uddin Basti (presently near Picnic Garden Calcutta). They survived on the little money they had and on the daily wage that his brother earned. They contacted their eldest sister Renu, who was married in Calcutta, and went on to stay with her. In 1951, Dilip Majumder, my grand uncle joined the Chittaranjan Locomotive Works as a fitter. After finishing graduation from Bongobashi College, my grandfather joined as a Mechanical apprentice at CLW. He worked there till fifty eight and retired as a deputy chief mechanical engineer. The Partition not only divided the country but numerous families for their entire lives.

And so, this pair of bracelets has survived for a century since the turbulent times in which it was made. It measures 6.5 cm in radius and is fitted with stones of emerald, ruby and white pearls on pure gold. They are handcrafted and lightweight, and there is even a photograph of my great-grandmother, the original owner, wearing both bracelets on each arm. The pair was given by her to her daughter-in-law and my grandmother, Anjali Majumder, as a gift of marriage. Subsequently, on my own wedding day, one half of the pair was given to me. I had never met my great-grandmother in person but when I wore the piece which once belonged to her I was overwhelmed. The story of survival of this nonliving material is quite synchronized with the lives of my family members who could rebuild their fortunes after the crisis that the great Partition had brought upon them, and that is what makes it extraordinary and valuable.

## MUSEUM *of* MATERIAL MEMORY



**HANDOUT**

# Storyboard Template

**Directions:** Illustrate the story that has been read by drawing its main ideas within each of the blocks below. Below each drawing, include a short caption or relevant quotation from the story.

A large empty rectangular box for drawing.

Three horizontal lines for writing a caption or quotation.

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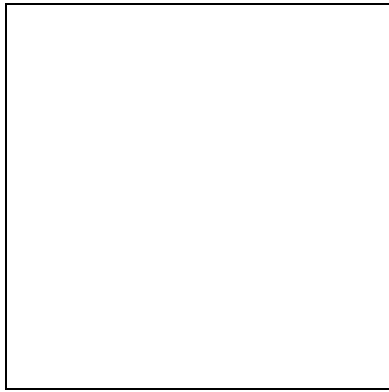
A large empty rectangular box for drawing.

Three horizontal lines for writing a caption or quotation.

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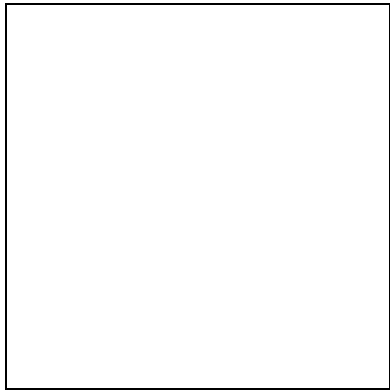




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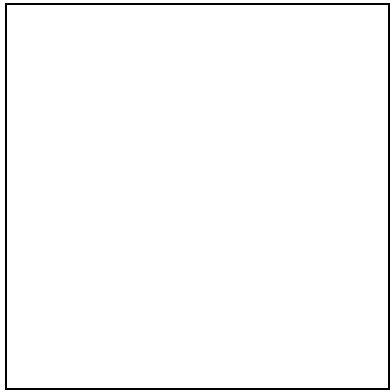
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