

High School+ | The Prophet

The Prophet: A Graphic Novel Adaptation

Published by: Graphic Mundi

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Ages: 15+

Review

A brief summary: Almustafa, named prophet by the Seeress Almitra, has lived in Orphalese, a small coastal town with surrounding hills, for 12 years, but that time is now at an end. A ship has arrived to take him home (or, to the place of his birth; what is home after all?) but before he steps forward to the next chapter, the people seek to hear his wisdom on life. Across 26 poems, Almustafa speaks on topics ranging from love and children to pain and death and everything in between, all from the aim of sharing how one might live life well.

Originally published exactly 100 years ago, even with the title never once going out of print, it would be easy for someone to question the relevance of these meditations in a world so different. But that questioning would be misguided. As a librarian in the United States in 2023, I haven't been able to get the poem on children out of my mind since reading this comic adaptation. We are facing a surge of calls for "protecting the children" from any ideas that a small, but vocal, minority of regressive parents are opposed to. Parent's rights they yell, but never children's rights. Almustafa would shake his head in frustration at such actions, I think, for he says, "You may give them your love but not your thoughts, for they have their own thoughts." In other words, the responsibility of the parent is to love their children – not to dictate what they may think. Now tell me that these poetic meditations aren't relevant today!

This adaptation of *The Prophet* accomplishes what surprisingly few comics adaptations manage: elevation of the original. More than simply presenting the work to a new audience, with a few neat illustrations thrown in, the team of A. David Lewis and Justin Rentería have broadened the story and provided visual metaphors that help the poetry sing to the reader. Rentería draws a world free of modern technology, set in an Ottoman-esque world, that even for those of us who have never been to such a place feels *real* and accessible. There is a power in this, the ability to draw the reader into a world where the people, even in the background, could be your neighbors. In the afterword, we learn from Lewis how personal this adaptation is for him. That passion comes through, even in repeated readings, which I hope you find yourself doing. I know I am.

Elements of Story

Plot: Almustafa, the prophet, has lived in Orphalese for 12 years waiting on a ship to come and take him back home. Now that that time has come, before he departs, the people seek his counsel one last time.

Major Characters: Almustafa; Almitra; The People of Orphalese

Major Settings: Orphalese and the surrounding countryside

Themes: Each section of *The Prophet* (save the opening and closing) focuses on some specific, universal aspect of living, but throughout, each one touches on the themes of The Good Life, love, and faith.

Lesson Plan Idea Using Common Core Standards (CCS)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2 – Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text

Directions: *The Prophet*, a work of free-verse poetry, is divided into more than twenty individual sections (26 poems), touching on numerous aspects of human living as the People of Orphalese seek to gain more wisdom from Almustafa before he departs. While there are universal themes throughout each of these topics, such as what it means to live a good life, each can be considered deeply on their own. For this assignment, students should choose one of the topics to explore deeply. As an example of how to organize this, consider the section On Children.

1. As a class, silently read the poem, “On Children,” (pages 20 and 21).
2. Once all students have finished silently reading the poem, read the poem aloud to the class while students follow along.
3. Discuss as a class the metaphor(s) present in the poem, paying special attention to the visual metaphor(s) created for this graphic adaptation. Do the visuals help make clear the message? What IS the message?
4. Discuss the specific passage, “You may give them your love but not your thoughts, for they have their own thoughts. You may house their bodies but not their souls, for their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit -- not even in your dreams.” It seems that Almustafa is saying here that while parents should freely give their children love, it is not for them to decide what children think. Do they agree or disagree with this idea?
5. Wrap up by providing paper and pencils for the students to draw with. Ask them to provide a visual representation of the above passage, to be turned in before leaving class. (Ideally providing them with up to 20 minutes to complete this.)