

12. COMING OF AGE DURING THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION: RICHARD E. KIM'S *LOST NAMES: SCENES FROM A KOREAN BOYHOOD*

GRADE LEVEL: 9-12

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SUBJECT: World Literature

TIME REQUIRED: 5-8 class periods

OBJECTIVES:

1. Understand how the Japanese occupation of Korea affected the young narrator and his family and, by extension, all Koreans.
2. Identify with a young boy who comes of age during a particularly difficult time in his country's history.
3. Learn the importance of family ties and religious faith in building courage and fortitude.

MATERIALS REQUIRED:

- Copies of Richard Kim, *Lost Names: Scenes from a Korean Boyhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998)
- Maps of the Korean peninsula that also show Manchuria, Siberia, China, and Japan

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Lost Names eloquently and sensitively describes a young boy's growing maturity. It is a book with which young people can readily identify. In addition, this book details the life of one Korean boy growing up during the Japanese colonial period. Kim describes the hardships and humiliations that Koreans suffered. Knowledge of Korean history and geography will greatly enhance the students' understanding and appreciation of this book. Following is a list of significant events and dates leading up to World War II in East Asia.

- Sino-Japanese War, 1894-95: Conflict with China in which Japan won and gained Taiwan and part of Manchuria.
- Russo-Japanese War, 1904-05: After its victory over Russia, Japan assumed a position of protection and control in Korea.
- 1910: Japan colonized Korea and exploited Korea economically. The Koreans were forced to export a large portion of their rice crop to Japan, thus causing a food shortage in Korea. The Japanese also took over Korea's natural resources.
- Second Sino-Japanese War, 1937-45: Japan invaded Manchuria and set up a puppet government. Japan then conquered China's coastal areas, major cities, and railroad lines.
- World War II: Japan joined with Germany and Italy, forming the Axis Powers. On December 7, 1941, Japan bombed the American naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, hoping to get the United States out of the Pacific and also to negotiate a favorable peace treaty. Instead, the United States declared war against Japan. In 1945, with Japan's surrender, Korea gained its liberation from Japan.

PROCEDURE:

1. Begin by asking students what they know about Korea, Japan, and the events leading up to World War II.
2. Distribute maps of the Korean peninsula and have students locate Korea, Japan, China, Manchuria, and Russia.

3. Discuss Japanese imperialism and events leading up to the Japanese occupation of Korea.
4. Distribute books. *Lost Names* is divided into seven sections and may be completed in eight class sessions, including an introductory lesson. Of course, teachers are free to take more or less time as they see fit. Explain to students that this book is a fictionalized memoir in which the author writes of his and his family's experiences from 1933 to 1945 during the Japanese occupation of Korea. The seven sections provide glimpses into the boy's life and development from age one to age thirteen.
5. Begin reading "Crossing," the first chapter, in class. At appropriate points, stop to discuss literary elements such as setting, narrator, point of view, theme, and symbolism. Have students examine maps to locate Korea, Manchuria, Siberia, and Japan.
6. Students will finish the first section for homework. They will keep a journal for recording their responses to specific discussion questions.
7. Students will continue reading the book at home and writing in their journals. Class time will be devoted to discussion of the book.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Students should be aware of the historical context of each section and of the events occurring at the time.

"Crossing"

1. When the book opens, the narrator is only a year old. Considering his young age, how is he able to remember what happens?
2. Why is the narrator's father taken off the train for questioning by the Japanese police? What is the relationship between Korea and Japan at this time?
3. What role does religion play in the lives of this young family?
4. How does the narrator make these scenes immediate for the reader?
5. What fears enter the young wife's mind as she, her husband, and her child cross the ice-covered river to Manchuria?

Journal Question: What does it mean to the narrator and his mother to have crossed the frozen river separating northern Korea and Manchuria? What does the crossing represent to them? What do the crossing and thin ice symbolize?

"Homecoming"

1. Why has the family returned to Korea?
2. What year is it now? What is happening in the world at this time?
3. What are the Japanese Imperial Forces doing in China at this time?
4. What happens to the boy narrator as a result of his singing "Danny Boy"? What happens to the Korean teacher who defends him?
5. After reading this chapter, what have you learned about the relationships between Korea and Japan, between Japan and China, and between Japan and Russia?

Journal Question: What has the boy's homecoming been like? If you were returning to your home after an absence of several years, how would such a homecoming make you feel?

"Once Upon a Time, on a Sunday"

1. What is life like in a colonized country?
2. Why do the Japanese prohibit the Christian children from attending church?
3. How are the Japanese trying to eradicate Korean culture?
4. What year is it? What is going on in the world?

Journal Question: What roles do God and religion play in your life?

“Lost Names”

1. Why is the boy narrator sensitive about having white rice in his lunch box? Why is white rice scarce in Korea at this time?
2. Why is the boy’s father wearing traditional Korean clothing and a black armband on this particular day? What does a black armband usually signify?
3. How are the Japanese trying to erase all traces of Korean culture and history?
4. Why is it important that the boy accompany his father to the police station to register the family’s new name?
5. Why are people visiting their ancestors’ graves on this day?

Journal Question: How would you feel if you were forced to change your name?

“An Empire for Rubber Balls”

1. What year is it now? What is happening in the war in the Pacific?
2. Discuss the irony in the fact that the leaflets, which the American bomber planes dropped to assure the Korean people that they will not be bombed, are printed in Korean.
3. Describe the incident with the rubber balls. Why is the boy brutally beaten by the Japanese athletics teacher?
4. Who is helping the boy narrator remember the events in this section?
5. Why would the boy narrator cry “for everyone, Koreans and Japanese alike”?

Journal Question: Describe an injustice that you have suffered. How did it make you feel?

“Is Someone Dying?”

1. What evidence is there in this chapter that the Japanese war effort is in trouble? Do the Japanese teachers and soldiers know what is really going on? Why do you think they are being kept in the dark as to the true progress of the war?
2. What is the boy narrator feeling as he leaves the airfield with his mother?

Journal Question: Who or what has influenced the kind of person you are?

“In the Making of History-Together”

1. Why does the boy narrator decide to help the Japanese priest and his wife? What does this tell you about the boy’s character? Who has influenced the boy?
2. What reputation does the boy’s father have among the Korean people in his town and among the Japanese? Why do people hold the boy’s father in such high esteem?
3. How does the boy’s father take charge of the detention camp after Japan’s surrender?
4. How has the boy been influenced by his father?
5. Describe the boy’s plan for taking over the police station. How does his plan differ from that of the adults?
6. Describe the way in which the boy narrator has grown and matured over the course of this book.

Journal Question: Discuss in detail your overall opinion of the book. Give specific reasons supporting your opinion.

EVALUATION:

Grades should be based on the students’ participation in class discussions, reader response journals, and comprehension of the novel.

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MAP OF EAST ASIA

