

## TRADITIONAL KOREAN ARCHITECTURE

**GRADES:** 6-8

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**SUBJECT:** Social Studies

**TIME REQUIRED:** 1-2 class periods

### **OBJECTIVES:**

1. Study traditional Korean housing and building designs
2. Compare and contrast traditional Korean and Western housing designs

### **MATERIALS REQUIRED:**

- Pictures of Korean buildings as well as other traditional architectural forms students have studied
- Pictures of Western housing and buildings that can be mounted and used in a gallery.

### **BACKGROUND:**

Korea was an agricultural society, and its people established an intimate relationship with the land and nurtured it. The strength of traditional Korean architecture can be found in its simplicity, spontaneity and great respect for nature. As believers in a life of harmony with nature, Koreans readily accepted naturalistic philosophies and applied their own interpretation of them to architectural plans and placement of buildings.

The natural environment has always been regarded as an element of utmost importance in Korean architecture. Rather than resisting the magnificence of the natural environment or competing with it, traditional architectural design sought to attain an ideal harmony between their structures and their natural surroundings. Efforts were made to avoid having man-made construction disrupt the natural contour of the terrain, thereby disrupting the highly revered harmony of nature.

Traditional Korean architecture has seldom ventured toward ostentatiousness in scale or ornamentation. Rooms were of relatively small size and simply decorated. This reflected the Confucian ideology of emphasizing a simple and frugal lifestyle. The traditional Korean buildings and the layout of the house, palace and temple were in harmony with the natural terrain. The feeling of openness is important.

A dwelling in Korea is a house with a garden or natural landscape surrounding it. The garden is not a formal one. A prominent feature of Korean architecture is the roof, which curves up at the eaves for aesthetic and functional reasons. The eaves cover both indoor space and outdoor space, providing covered space for outdoor activities.

The architecture of houses, temples and palaces follow the same architectural style. Most designs are non-symmetrical, following the natural setting. The use of irregular stone and wood is combined with an aesthetically pleasing touch, being as natural as possible.

This ecological concept and environmental awareness goes back to a few thousand years of traditional Taoist thinking of living in harmony with nature.

The floors of traditional homes, palaces and temples are elevated for warmth and dry-

ness. Flooring is made of baked clay plastered with oiled paper and wood. Rooms with these elements are heated by a system called *ondol*, in which under-the-floor flues carry warm air from a central source, usually the kitchen stove. The warm floor of an *ondol* room creates an ideal living space since Koreans make extensive use of the floor from sitting to sleeping. The bedding items are stored in beautiful chests during the day.

Doors and windows often stay open for cross ventilation in summer. Rice paper is used for windows and doors for aesthetic and functional reasons. It keeps warmth inside and quickly dries during the monsoon season. The kitchen extends out into the walled courtyard where large ceramic jars of spices are stored.

#### **PROCEDURES:**

1. Distribute or post pictures (in the gallery) of various public buildings, homes and monuments. Have students identify and list similarities and differences of each. Pictures can be of other societies students have studied as well as their own.
2. Ask students to discuss the characteristics of Korean architecture (conformity with nature, elevated, open door/windows, unique roof structure).
3. Ask students why they think structures were built the way they were. Response should include the connection to the teachings of Taoism where harmony with nature is emphasized.
4. Have students draw a picture of a Korean palace, temple or home on a 5x7 index card. On the lined side, have students write to a friend describing the five important elements of Korean architecture.

#### **EVALUATION:**

- Written response to be assessed should include tiled roof, elevated structure, open doors/windows, surrounded by nature and constructed with earthen materials.

#### **ENRICHMENT:**

- Invite a member of the Korean community to speak to the class on the topic of Korean homes, buildings past and present. The talk might include Korean culture in general.