

## LEARNING ABOUT KOREA THROUGH A 1,000 WON NOTE

**GRADES:** 4-12

**AUTHOR:** Jack McLeod

**SUBJECTS:** Social Studies, Geography, Economics

**TIME REQUIRED:** 1 class period

### **OBJECTIVES:**

1. Learn about the Korean monetary system
2. Learn about Korean culture as revealed in its currency
3. Learn about the use of the English language in Korea

### **MATERIALS REQUIRED:**

- Prepared handout of the 1,000 won bank note

### **BACKGROUND:**

The won is the medium of exchange for the Republic of Korea. The exchange rate for won (in 1997) was approximately 880 won to \$1 (U.S.). It is now approximately 1,300 won to \$1 (U.S.). The won comes in denominations of 10, 50, 100 and 500 won in coins and 1,000, 5,000 and 10,000 won in paper currency.

Confucianism is a philosophy of life that emphasizes social and natural order, social obligation, harmony and respect for family and age. This philosophy is integral to Korean culture. The very center of Confucianism is the "Five Relationships" of king to subject, father to son, elder to younger brother, husband to wife and friend to friend. As a system of ideas, Confucianism is especially important in family, interpersonal relations and politics.

The Korean alphabet, or *hangul*, is written using letters that reflect the shape of the speech organs used in making a particular sound. Under King Sejong, a group of scholars invented *hangul* in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

### **PROCEDURE:**

1. Hand out photo copies of the Korean 1,000 won bank note. Explain that the won is a medium of exchange in Korea like the dollar is in the U.S. In itself it has no value. Instruct students to examine the bank note, both front and back, and discuss what they see on the note.
2. Ask students to identify what levels of technology and culture can be inferred from the note. Possible answers include number system, geometrical designs, calendar, written language, two languages, government, printing, paper making, wood working, masonry, pottery, etc.
3. Ask students what clues to the Korean environment and climate can be found on the note. Possible answers include: mountains, trees, flowers, deer, wet climate, etc.

### **DESCRIPTION OF IMAGES ON THE BANK NOTE**

#### **FRONT SIDE:**

1. Notice that the front of the bank note is written in Korean.
2. Written on the top center is "Bank of Korea," and underneath that is "1000 won"

3. To the right is Yi Hwang (pen name *Toegye*) who was one of Korea's leading Neo-Confucian scholars and is credited with a system of thought widely known as the "*Toegye School of Thought*."
4. *T'uhoo*, which is similar to a dart game, is in the lower left. To concentrate the mind, Yi Hwang would toss bamboo arrows into a vase.
5. Between the vase and Yi Hwang are stylized images from nature that are important in Korean culture. One can discern mountains, flowers, deer and clouds.
6. In the bottom center is the circular design yin yang, which symbolizes harmony in the universe. The yin yang symbol is also a prominent feature on the Korean flag.
7. The Korean writing in the circle above Yi Hwang's right shoulder is the seal of the head of the Bank of Korea.

**BACK SIDE:**

1. Notice that the back of the bank note is written in English.
2. *Tosan Sowon* Confucian Academy, established in 1574 by Yi Hwang, became a leading Confucian school in Korea and was the center of the *Toegye School of Thought*.
3. Building Construction and Architecture: The buildings of the academy are traditional Korean in construction and architecture. The roof is one of the most important aspects and distinctive features of traditional Korean architecture. The roof has a gentle upswing and large eaves. Where the upswing is aesthetic, the large eaves are functional as an accommodation to the monsoon climate. The eaves protect the rice paper windows from the rain and provide shade during the hot, dry season. The clay tile roof protects the buildings from the rain and fire. The roof construction and lush vegetation provide clues to the wet Korean climate.

**ENRICHMENT:**

- Have students convert won into dollars and dollars into won. The exchange rate can be located on many internet sites, the *The Washington Post* or *New York Times*.
- Figure out the cost in won of items familiar to students: newspaper, gum, soft drinks, fast food, movies, computers, automobiles and batteries.
- Examine the nature and function of money.
- Examine how and why English became such an important language in Korea.
- Investigate the natural environment and climate of Korea.

## 1,000 WON BANK NOTE



FRONT



BACK

