

## MIN HWA AND BEYOND: FOLK PAINTINGS OF KOREA

**GRADES:** 9-12

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**SUBJECT:** Art, Social Studies

**TIME REQUIRED:** 3-4 class periods

### **OBJECTIVES:**

1. Identify specific motifs of Korean folk painting
2. Analyze Korean folk art according to art principles
3. Determine some common characteristics of Korean folk painting
4. Explore how motifs and art principles suggest values and customs
5. Create a folk painting

### **MATERIALS REQUIRED:**

- Copies of handouts 1, 2, 3 and 4
- Copies of photo studies 1, 2 and 3
- Bamboo brushes of various sizes
- Ink stones or India ink in various colors: blue, red, yellow, green, orange, purple
- Small plastic cups
- Paper (inexpensive newsprint for practice drawings and to cover work area)
- Quality white, rice, handmade or *hanji* paper (Korean paper) for finished works

### **BACKGROUND:**

By studying the folk art of another culture, one will be able to expand his or her worldview and discover the pride people take in creating art for friends, family and special occasions. Simple designs often express a wish for good luck, wealth and happiness or provide protection against evil spirits. Korea's folk art offers a wide perspective of the culture, philosophy, history and daily lives of its people and country. Everyone from the scholar, government officer and high class family member, to the monk in the mountains, to the unskilled commoner in remote villages could try his or her hand at folk painting. These paintings incorporated people's everyday lives and were offered at festivals and ceremonies such as weddings, New Year's Day and the first day of spring.

The earliest examples of folk paintings are found on the stones and murals of royal tombs in Koguryo. Other works incorporated motifs from shamanism, Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism. As time passed, many of these symbols were used together in interesting decorative compositions on everyday items. The tourist who visits Korea today gains an appreciation for the Korean peoples' sense of humor, dedication to hard work and study, and love of nature by studying the myriad works of art that are seen in royal palace screens, Buddhist temples, commercial buildings, homes and schools.

Before beginning, stop to think how art is often used to convey a message, to provide support in times of need and to advertise words of wisdom that could help one through tough times. Art trends often develop as a result of philosophical attempts to provide answers to questions or to offer a strategy on how to live a happy life.

### **COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF KOREAN FOLK ART:**

Korean folk art is stylized and can be very abstract as it expresses the following:

- Man's dreams
  - Imagination
  - Humor
  - Satire
  - Sense of fantasy
2. Korean folk artists make no attempts at realism.
    - It fills in open space
    - It positively expresses animals
    - It is both childlike and complex
  3. Korean folk art expresses the following:
    - Man's heart is more important than his name
    - Unequivocal yearning for happiness
    - Honesty and simplicity
  4. Nature is an important theme in Korean folk art.
  5. Korean art uses include the following:
    - Bold compositions
    - Dynamic brushwork
    - Intense colors

#### **PROCEDURE:**

1. Distribute handouts and review background. Ask the class what various symbols in art demonstrate about the values and customs of a country.
2. Divide students into cooperative learning groups to find motifs and art principles in one of three photo studies.
3. Regroup for class discussion of Korean folk paintings.
4. Determine basic characteristics of Korean folk art.
5. Discuss how these characteristics reflect Korean values and customs.
6. Have students list motifs they will use in their paintings.
7. Encourage students to develop a folk painting according to the art principles and motifs they have studied. Have them first sketch out basic project.
8. Practice with bamboo brush and ink prior to actual project.

#### **EVALUATION:**

- Grades should be based on the students' participation and comprehension of the lesson as exhibited through the art work and discussion.

#### **RESOURCES:**

Ho-Am. *Masterpieces of the Ho-Am Art Museum*. Samsung Foundation of Culture: Seoul, 1996.

Hollym. *Korean Heritage*. Hollym Corporation, Publishers: Seoul, 1996.

*A Window on Korea*. CD-Rom, Korean Overseas Information Service: ROK.

## HANDOUT 1: WISHING SOMEONE A LONG LIFE

### Photo Study 1: *Sibjangsaeng Do* (Ten Longevity Symbols)

According to ancient popular beliefs, mountains are sacred. The cosmic force can be seen in the rocks, water, grasses and trees as well as in the clouds above. To wander in the mountains is an act of meditation and adoration. The figures of people or animals that can be seen are very small: the natural order will continue regardless of human intervention. The Taoists believe that it is important to follow the Tao, the path of rightful living, in order to live in harmony with the natural order of the world. Focusing intently on the surrounding natural world, one can gain a closer understanding of reality. To follow the Tao, it is necessary to embrace the fact that all life is in a constant state of change, and that one would know instinctively the best path to follow.

Now look at all the symbols: the sun, moon, mountains, trees and water. These are common symbols in the world and are a few of the most popular symbols used to wish someone a long life in Korean folk art. How might these symbols express "longevity?"

Korea's folk art has 10 common longevity symbols:

sun	deer
clouds	crane
rocks	tortoise
bamboo	mountain fungus
water	pine

Now picture living in a small Korean village surrounded by beautiful mountains. The New Year holiday is approaching and a traveling painter, known as a "passing guest," visits your household. He offers to paint your cards of good wishes for you so that you will be able to distribute them to your friends on the holiday. You inform him that you want to wish them a long life, and you choose the symbols that you want on your cards.

### Task:

1. List the longevity symbols that you see in the picture.
2. Discuss how the symbols might express the idea of longevity.
3. Write a summary of your conclusions for class discussion.

## HANDOUT 2:

### WISHING TO DISPEL EVIL SPIRITS AND INVOKE HAPPINESS

#### **Photo Study 2: *Hopyo Do* (Sitting Tiger)**

Many Korean folktales have stories of small and peaceful animals making fun of big and powerful animals. The Chinese symbol for leopard is "*Ho*," which resembles the tiger and "*Pyo*," which means magpie and is a sign of good news. Therefore, the tiger and magpie became symbols of good news, and in this case implied that one is never alone in the face of adversity.

Picture living in a small village where most of the people do not read. A common form of entertainment would be to share stories at night. These stories would sometimes try to encourage children not to be afraid of what seems big and mighty. The stories would take monstrous threats and trivialize them—not because the threats were not real but because they would always be there, and life always offers a simple solution to overcome them or to live harmoniously in their presence without getting hurt. These allegories transformed the monstrous shapes into something that looked ridiculous and would remind the children that the best way to get through life is sometimes to just laugh at how you make big problems out of little ones.

Now look at the tiger in photo study 2. Does he look frightening? Why or why not? Look at the magpie. What impression does it give you?

The tiger does not look too frightening: he is in a resting position and is not about to attack. His body seems more like a cat's than a savage beast's. As for the magpies, they know they have each other to help out in a crisis, and they are safe on a high perch. They can just fly away if the threat becomes great. They really do not have too much to worry about.

Picture living in a small village and that your best friend is about to be married. She is very nervous because she does not know her future husband very well. She is imagining the worst case scenario. You take out a brush and ink and think about a similar folktale you heard years ago. You quickly sketch out the large beast that caused so much anxiety and balance it with the little animal who laughed it off. You send this to your friend so that she can relax and laugh at herself for worrying over nothing.

#### **Task:**

1. List large animals that seem fearful and small animals that can easily appear to be threatened.
2. Discuss how the size or proximity of a threat can increase anxiety.
3. Write a summary of your conclusions and discuss with the class how humor is a powerful tool to dispel anxiety.

## HANDOUT 3:

### WISHING SOMEONE SUCCESS AND GOOD FORTUNE

#### Photo Study 3: *Munja Do* (Scholar's Study)

Confucius is a Chinese sage that has a tremendous influence on the Koreans' view of the world. He presented an ethical, moral system to govern the world based on a series of human relationships:

1. Righteousness between sovereign and minister
2. Proper rapport between father and son
3. Separation of function between husband and wife
4. Deference for elder siblings
5. Faith and trust between friends

At the heart of Confucian thought, one can find moral principles that govern how individuals should behave. In Confucian thought, the notion of the state is that of an extended family; thus, it was thought that it should be governed like a family. Filial piety, a reverence for one's ancestors and great faithfulness to one's friends are considered a very important social norm. In order to promote these ideas, numerous rites and ceremonies became part of everyday life. The symbol of the person who best exemplified these teachings was the scholar who passed rigorous exams in the Confucian classics, in poetry and essays and in the skill of calligraphy.

The teachings of Confucius became the political ideas of the Choson Dynasty (1392-1910) of Korea. The Choson Dynasty promulgated Confucianism through education and civil service examinations. A genre of paintings called *Munja Do* (pictorial ideograph) was developed during the Choson Dynasty. *Munja Do* superimposed depictions of symbolic animals, plants or even scenes with human figures on the flat forms of the Chinese ideographs. *Munja Do* embodies a prime Confucian theme: the eight cardinal principles of Confucian morality. They are the most basic tenets of Confucianism: filial piety, brotherly love, loyalty, trust, propriety, duty, honor and humility.

The eight categories of moral principles ultimately remind people that they have a greater responsibility to the group rather than to themselves. Further, it is a reminder that everyone has a place and role in the hierarchy and that predetermination exists in the expectations of how one should behave in each situation.

Now look at the symbols in photo study 3: The Chinese character "chung" suggests that subjects always help their kings keep the heavenly way.

Now picture yourself at a neo-Confucian school in Korea. Your classmates have been studying rigorously to pass the civil service exam, and your closest friend has difficulty mastering his brushstrokes. You look up the Chinese character for perseverance and you quickly send him a copy. He is appreciative of your good wishes.

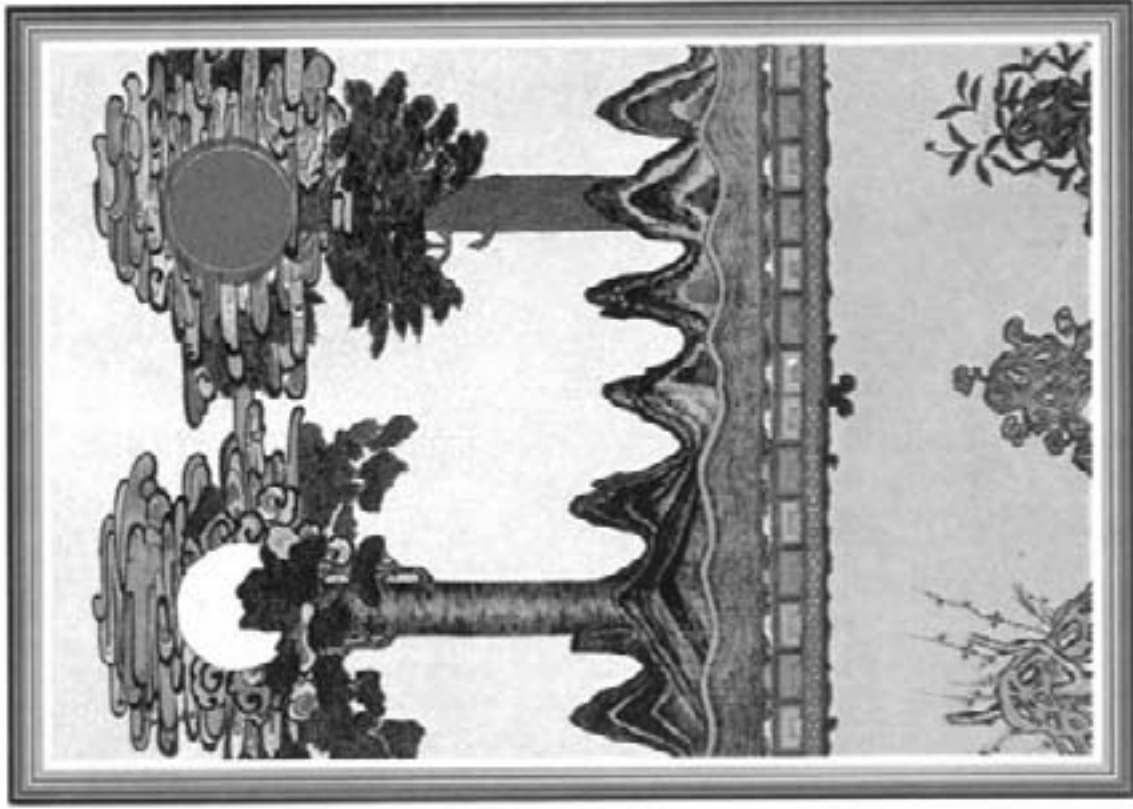
#### Task:

1. Make a list of what a scholar needed to attain academic success.
2. Discuss if "book knowledge" represents intelligence and wisdom.
3. Write a summary of your conclusions and tell the class how personal success in Korea may restrict one's personal freedom to act spontaneously.

## HANDOUT 4: CREATING A FOLK ART PAINTING

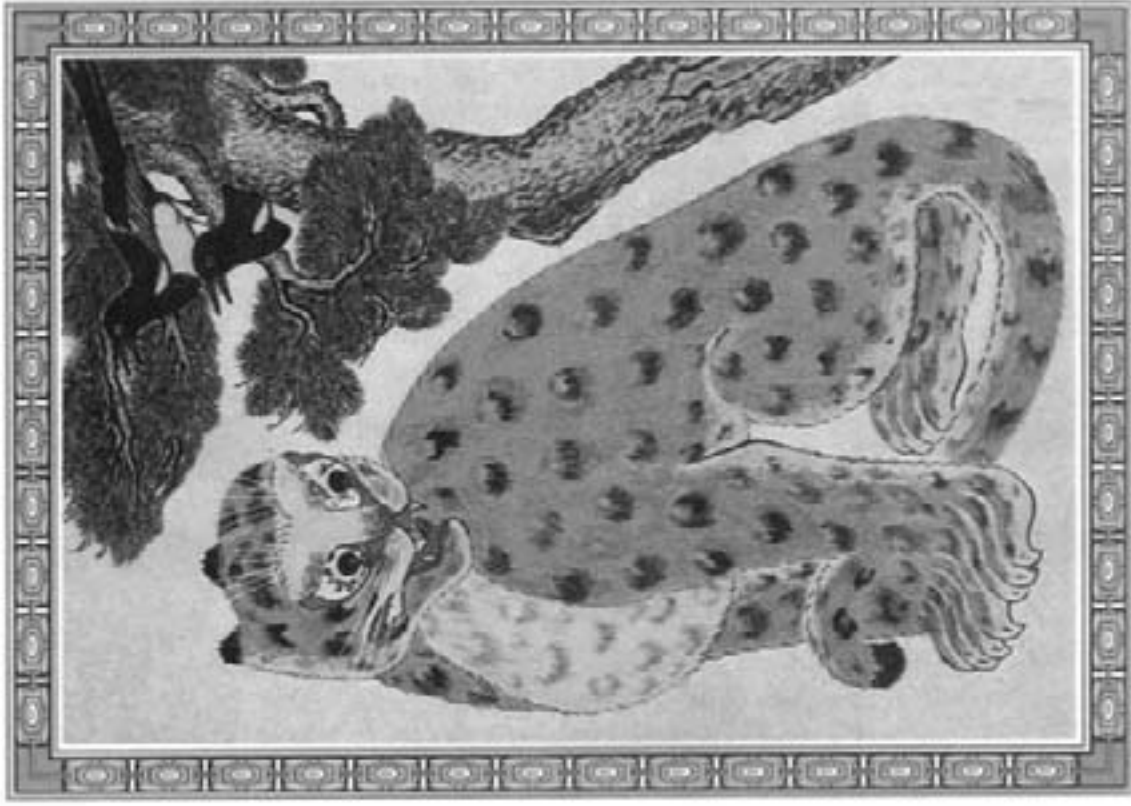
1. Make a list of the motifs that you will use.
2. Indicate the following:
  - How will your lines look?
  - Will you use overlapping shapes to create depth?
  - Will your figures be stylized?
  - How will you balance your picture?
  - Which colors or values will you use?
  - Will your basic shapes be 2D or 3D?
  - What will be your point of reference?
  - Will your objects be realistically proportioned?
  - What kind of mood do you want to express?
3. Try some pencil drawings of a variety of subjects. Focus on the longevity motifs such as the tiger or the scholar's closet symbols.
4. Create a drawing by paying attention to the principles of design found in Korean art.
5. Hold your brush in an upright position and practice strokes with bold ink. Be sure that the ink is at the tip of the brush. Use pure colors and avoid washes.
6. Try the finished sketch on rice or hanji paper.

PHOTO STUDY 1



Boosang-iwol-do (The sea, the sun and the moon)

PHOTO STUDY 2



Jakho-do (Magpie and tiger)

### PHOTO STUDY 3



Kangryun doll with the Chinese symbol 'chung' 忠