

## 6. FOLKTALES OF KOREA

**GRADE LEVEL:** 5-8

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**SUBJECT:** Literature, Social Studies

**TIME REQUIRED:** 5 class periods

### **OBJECTIVES:**

1. Understand folktales as a reflection of the culture that produces the tales.
2. Explore, examine, and study various aspects of Korean culture through its folklore.
3. Discuss how the folktales of Korea reflect the values and history of Korean society.
4. Work independently in a cooperative group setting, discussing, researching, learning, and creating individual projects regarding folktales.
5. Create own folktales.

### **MATERIALS REQUIRED:**

- Copies of the book *Woodcutter and Tiger Brother*, by Nami Rhee (Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym, 1999)
- Copies of Korean folktale collections, such as *Long Long Time Ago*, illustrated by Dong-sung Kim (Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym, 1997); *Korean Folk and Fairy Tales*, by Suzanne Crowder Han (Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym, 1997); and *Korean Children's Favorite Folktales*, edited by Petyer Hyun (Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym, 1995)
- Copies of *Chi-Hoon: A Korean Girl*, by Patricia McMahon (Honesdale, PA: 1993), and *Sim Chung and the River Dragon*, by Ellen Schecter (New York: Bank Street, 1993)
- Sample sheet of *hanji* (Korean handmade paper)
- Copy of *Korean Cultural Heritage: Fine Arts*, Vol. 1, edited by Julie Pickering (Seoul: Korea Foundation, 1994)
- Assorted items for study trunk (e.g., chopsticks, Korean stamps, Korean music, Korean masks)
- Map(s) of Korea
- Tea items for celebration
- Self-evaluation forms

### **BACKGROUND:**

Korea is a country with a rich past and a proud heritage. Although the West has long known the art and literature of China and Japan, it has only recently discovered Korea's cultural productions. Many Americans know very little about the culture of Korea. A study of Korean folktales will give students an opportunity to discover the history and culture of the Korean people.

The term *folklore* is a broad term that is used to describe the traditional manners, customs, beliefs, ballads, tales, and proverbs of a people. Folk literature or traditional literature is only one part of the folklore of a people, but within the genre of folk literature there are several subgenres such as tales, myths, legends, and proverbs.

Author Jane Yolen in *Touch Magic: Fantasy, Faerie, and Folklore in the Literature of Childhood* (August House Publishers, Inc. 2000) identifies four functions of folktales: (1) creating a landscape of allusion; (2) enabling us to understand our own and other cultures from the inside out; (3) providing an adaptable tool of therapy; and (4) stating in symbolic or metaphoric terms the abstract truths of our common human existence (p.19).

Some Korean folktales were first told hundreds or even thousands of years ago. These tales have been changed by subsequent generations of storytellers to fit the contemporary culture. Although folktales may seem modern because people can still identify with the emotions of the characters, they are literary relics of a persevering culture. There are many benefits from studying these folktales. In addition to providing a safe way to explore unknown places, the study of folktales provides an opportunity to understand another culture. We examine the values of that culture as compared to our own values. Folktales also provide information about historical places, language, customs, heroes, and founders of the country.

## **PROCEDURE:**

### Class period 1—Introduction

1. Before the lesson actually begins, create an artifact study trunk filled with items from Korea. Include a doll, map, tape of Korean folk music, parasol, chopsticks, rice bowl, tea box, teacup, kite, world map, and handmade paper.
2. Begin by informing the students that during the next week they will be cultural anthropologists. Explain that cultural anthropologists study the material and intellectual culture of a people. Distribute notebooks to students. (Notebooks will provide space for research notes, stories, artwork, questions, and reflections).
3. Distribute a KWL (Know/Want to Know/Learned) graphic organizer chart (see sample on page 37) and have students brainstorm what they know about Korea.
4. Tell the students they are going to learn more about Korea and its people, and they are going to create a book about Korea.
5. Next, locate Korea on the map and a globe. Discuss the geographical properties of a peninsula.
6. Play some of the Korean folk music, and have students listen and try to guess the types of musical instruments used.
7. Follow-up: Set up a Korean Center to display the items from the trunk. Add some new items each day — such as Korean money, stamps, postcards.

### Class period 2—Korean Family Life

1. Discuss Korean family life and the importance of family.  
Visit <http://www.csun.edu/~hcedu004/culture.html> and go to the section entitled *Selected Aspects of Korean Culture* for background information on Confucian teachings and familial relationships.
2. Read Patricia McMahon, *Chi-Hoon: A Korean Girl* (Honesdale, PA: 1993). This picture book follows the daily activities of a contemporary girl in South Korea. The book discusses the language, family structure, school day, holidays, and food. It is wonderfully edited and contains beautiful color photographs. After you read the book, discuss its different aspects, and have children jot down notes in their research notebooks.
3. Next, read Ellen Schechter, *Sim Chung and the River Dragon* (New York: Bank Street, 1993). This picture book focuses on the theme of filial piety. After you read the book, discuss the importance of family and the teachings of Confucius. Have children list the five teachings of Confucius in their research notebooks and look for specific examples in the story.
4. With the help of the librarian, divide the students into groups and have them research the Korean house, hangul, art, traditional clothing, Korean flag, and handmade paper. Make sure that student researchers record their findings in their notebooks.
5. Follow-up: Lead a discussion after the stories are read and the small groups have finished their research. Ask how Korean families are the same as American families and how they are different. On a flip chart record student responses.

## KWL Chart

KNOW

WANT TO KNOW

LEARNED

*If you have time, begin construction of a traditional Korean house.*

## **KOREAN HOUSE**

Materials: two large cardboard boxes (refrigerator or stove), muslin fabric (or pellon) for the screens, black paint, brushes, staple gun, and box cutter.

Directions: With the box cutter or exact-o blade, cut out the interior of each face of the box. Remove the panels of cardboard and put the fabric over the exposed opening. Stretch the fabric. Tape with masking tape. Next, staple the fabric to the cardboard. Have children paint the fabric with letters of the Korean alphabet.

### Class period 3—Korean Folktales and Folk Art

1. Introduce Nami Rhee, *Woodcutter and Tiger Brother* (Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym, 1999).

Synopsis: When a fierce tiger threatens him, a woodcutter convinces the animal that he is really his older brother. The woodcutter invites him to see his mother, who has been longing for her son. The tiger is too ashamed to see her in his present state because he might frighten her. The tiger goes away, but every first and fifteenth day of every month, he leaves a gift for his mother. The woodcutter is impressed by the tiger's dutifulness to his mother. Later the mother dies, and while visiting her grave, the woodcutter encounters five tiger cubs with black ribbons tied on their tails. The cubs tell the woodcutter that their father has died.

2. Remind the children about the Confucian teachings discussed during the previous day. Discuss any unfamiliar words. Next, read the book or tell the story. Stop the story before the end and have students write their predictions in their research notebooks.
3. After you read the book, distribute copies of the book and have students look at their copies.
  - THE COVER: First, direct students' attention to the cover of the book. Note that the illustration is a wrap-around. Have students guess what the illustration represents. Note the Korean writing on the cover. Tell them this writing is called hangul (great script), a system of writing that was developed in 1446 by King Sejong and his scholars. (See additional information on hangul.)

Also note the *tojang* (seals) on the cover of the book. *Tojang* are engraved pieces of wood, stone, or ivory. They were first used during the Koryo Dynasty around 913 CE.

Koreans have always treasured books and decorated their covers. Traditional covers consisted of wax-coated mulberry paper (*hanji*). These book covers were called water chestnut printing blocks, or *pup'yongch'o*, and were first used in 1354 on Ch'oe Hae's anthology, *Cholkoch'onbaek*.

Books were considered one of the Seven Treasures of Nirvana. These consist of money, wine cups, knot-shaped talismans, books, paintings, mirrors, and the musical instrument of the heavenly god. (Im Young-joo, "Book Covers: Practical Works of Art," in *Korean Cultural Heritage: Fine Arts*, Vol. 1, ed. Julie Pickering [Seoul: Korea Foundation, 1994], pp. 180-83).

- THE END PAGES: End pages are literally the pages at the end of the book. They are attached to the cover of the book and hold the signatures of the book to the cover. The end pages of this book look like *hanji*, like Korean handmade paper. The oldest extant Korean handmade paper dates to the Silla Kingdom and was manufactured by the government. There were many different kinds of paper and many different uses—everything from paper for documents to paper for raincoats and daily utensils. Today, the traditional method of making paper from mulberry trees continues. People continue to use *hanji* because (1) it is durable, (2) it is soft to the touch, (3) it permits ventilation, (4) it retains heat, and (5) it is shiny and translucent. (Young Dam, "Hanji: The Development and Production of Traditional Korean Paper," in *Korean Cultural Heritage: Fine Arts*, Vol. 1, ed. Julie Pickering [Seoul: Korea Foundation, 1994], pp. 180-83).

- **ILLUSTRATIONS:** Now open the book and direct attention to the illustrations. Have children retell the story by looking at the illustrations. What can they find out by looking at the illustrations that they couldn't tell when you read the story? Have them jot down their observations in their research notebooks. (Maybe you want to point out the clothing, houses, bird, etc.)

Show the children examples of other styles of illustration — e.g., realistic, folk, impressionistic. Discuss why the illustrator chose to work in this medium.

4. Follow-up suggestions: After you have thoroughly discussed the book, have the students dramatize the story using their own language. Or have two students play one role (one student plays what was told in the story; the other tells what the character was thinking). Or have the class create a theme banner (or bumper sticker) — a proverb or statement that mirrors the theme of the story. Or have the children write a description of Korea based upon the details and illustrations from the story. Or have children construct a Character Chart (see sample on page 40) for the human brother and the tiger. Discuss which character changed.

Or have students sketch the characters or the prominent theme of the story and share it with their group. Or have students create new interactions between the characters. What would the mother say to the tiger? What would she say to her human son after she met the tiger?

#### *Background Information on Painting:*

Ahn Hwi-joon's article "Korean Painting: Influences and Traditions" states "interest in traditional culture has been increasing dramatically in Korea in recent years, but this does not necessarily mean that people understand its significance. This is especially true in the fine arts. Two contrasting tendencies prevail in Korea's art community: one follows tradition blindly without developing it in a modern perspective, and the other rejects tradition indiscriminately without even attempting to understand it" (*Korean Cultural Heritage: Fine Arts*, Vol 1, ed. Julie Pickering [Seoul: Korea Foundation, 1994], p. 38).

Although genre paintings existed throughout unified Korean history, the Unified Silla Kingdom, the Koryo Kingdom, and the early Choson period, they generally depicted the upper class. However, in the eighteenth century, commoners became a focus of Korean painters. Genre paintings became more realistic and provided a portrait of daily life in Korea. They are an important cultural record particularly during the cultural renaissance started by the Sirhak Movement. Examine the pictures of the Choson landscape and genre paintings (pp. 54-61) and the Treasury of Korean painting (in *Korean Cultural Heritage: Fine Arts*, Vol. 1, ed. Julie Pickering [Seoul: Korea Foundation, 1994], pp. 92-101); pay particular attention to Bodhidharma by Kim Myong-guk.

#### Class period 4—Stories from Korea

1. Provide students with copies of collections of Korean folktales. Some suggestions:  
*Long Long Time Ago: Korean Folk Tales*. illustrated by Dong-sung Kim. Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym, 1997. A collection of 20 short folktales.  
 Han, Suzanne Crowder. *Korean Folk and Fairy Tales*. Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym, 1997. Lively, readable collection of tales.  
 Hyun, Peter, ed. *Korean Children's Favorite Folk Tales*. Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym, 1995. Includes seven folktales, including *Kongji and Patji*, a Cinderella tale.
2. Grimm, William and Jacob. *The Wolf and the Seven Kids*: Beacon Second Reader, Antelope Publishing, 1914. After reviewing the story, ask students to tell the parts they remember.
3. Explain the cooperative learning strategy of think-pair-share. Assign each student one partner. Tell the stu-

## Character Chart

Name of Character/Personality

Changes in the Story

dents that you will be reading a story, but when you put up one finger, it is think time (time to think of the answer to the question). When you put up two fingers, it is time to use a quiet voice and share with your partner.

4. Choi, Yangsook. *The Sun Girl and Moon Boy: A Korean Folktale*. Knopf Books for Young Readers, 1997. After reading the story, stop periodically to ask questions.

Examples of questions: Why do they think the clothing is different from other versions of the tale? What type of food is being transported? How does Korean food compare to food in the United States? What type of housing is depicted in the story? Why is it different? Why is the tiger punished? Is it a happy ending? Why or why not?

*Enrichment:*

Have children make an accordion book. Give the children a sheet of paper. Then tell the children to fold the paper like a fan and make a book on the different folds of the fan. Or simply have them make an action map on their folded fan.

*Evaluation:*

Have students share their stories and pictures.

*Background Information on the Korean Alphabet:*

Koreans speak and write the same language. The Korean alphabet script, called hangul, was invented in the fifteenth century by a group of scholars under the direction of King Sejong the Great, the fourth monarch of the Choson Kingdom. King Sejong wanted all of his people to be able to express themselves through writing. Hangul, originally called *hunminjongum*, means “proper sounds to instruct the people.” Volume 113 of the *Sejong Annals* contains the following description by King Sejong: “The sounds of our language differ from those of China and are not easily conveyed in Chinese writing. In consequence, though one among our ignorant subjects may wish to express his mind, in many cases he after all is unable to do so. Thinking of these, my people, with compassion, we have newly devised a script of twenty-eight letters, only that it may become possible for anyone to readily learn and use it to advantage in his everyday life.”

The hangul alphabet consists of ten vowel and fourteen consonant letters. The three basic vowel symbols represent Heaven, Earth, and Man. The five basic consonant symbols are drawings of each speech organ, and the rest of the consonants are formed by adding additional strokes to the basic symbols.

Hangul was created in the ninth month of the lunar calendar in the twenty-eighth year of King Sejong’s rule (1446). The 550th anniversary of the Promulgation of Hangul was celebrated on October 9, 1996, with a special stamp.

Class period 5—Celebration and Tea Ceremony

Culminate the activities of the past couple of days with a tea ceremony. Gather the students and explain that today is the day they have been waiting to celebrate. Assign a committee to prepare for your Korean tea ceremony (include a table setting group, cookie server group, floor pillow group, music group).

Teach the children how to say “thank you “ — *kamsa hamnida* (kahm-SAH hahm-nee-DAH). Encourage the students to use the Korean words they have learned.

Gather the students and give them airline tickets to Korea aboard their very own airplane. Once again, locate Korea on the globe, and chart a course. Have students sit on their “plane” (in their seats). Perhaps some students can serve, for example, as flight attendants, ticket takers, and pilots. When students arrive in Korea and get to the restaurant, ask them to take off their shoes and sit on the floor. Serve cool tea and cookies.

*How to Make Barley Tea:*

2 tablespoons roast barley

3 3/4 cups water

Put the roast barley and water into a saucepan and bring to a boil. Lower the heat and simmer the tea until it is as strong as you like. Strain. Sweeten with honey or sugar to taste. (Note: This tea is served hot in winter and cold in summer. Roast barley is available in Korean or Asian markets and contains no caffeine.) Recipe from: Hilaire Walden, *Korean Cooking* (Edison, NJ: Chartwell Books, 1995), p. 120.



## SELF-EVALUATION

Have students evaluate their own work in their research notebook.

|                           |       |      |                    |
|---------------------------|-------|------|--------------------|
| My notes are.....         | Great | Good | Need to be better  |
| My handwriting is.....    | Great | Good | Needs to be better |
| My folktale is.....       | Great | Good | Needs to be better |
| My illustrations are..... | Great | Good | Need to be better  |

Before we made our Research Book on Korea, I used to think the following:

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But now I know the following:

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