

7. KOREAN CULTURAL VALUES

GRADE LEVEL: 5-9

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SUBJECT: Geography, Global Studies

TIME REQUIRED: 3-4 class periods

OBJECTIVES:

1. Identify the importance of cultural values based on behavioral patterns.
2. Compare similarities and differences between the ways in which Westerners and Koreans might act in particular situations, and identify their respective underlying values.
3. Develop hypotheses about the ways in which individual and cultural values are shaped and changed.

MATERIALS REQUIRED:

- Handout 1: An American in Korea
- Handout 2: Confucianism in Korea
- Handout 3: Korea Today

PROCEDURE:

1. Ask students if they have ever had the experience of visiting or living in another country. Invite students who are immigrants, and who are willing to talk about their immigrant experience, to share what they found unusual upon arriving in this country.
 - Possible discussion questions include the following: Why might someone visit or move to a place that is very different from where they currently live? What kinds of problems might they expect to encounter?
 - Explain to students that they will analyze similarities and differences between beliefs and traditions of Koreans and Americans. If students are unfamiliar with the location and geography of Korea, it will be useful to locate Korea on a world map, noting its location in East Asia and its proximity to China and Japan. Moreover, ask students what they know about Korea and its people.
2. Explain that values are beliefs and attitudes people consider important to them. Although we all have things we cherish personally, many values are shared by people who have much in common, such as being raised in the same country or culture. Have students brainstorm ideas about what they think Americans value in general.
 - Possible discussion questions include the following: Generally, what do you think is important to Americans? Do you think Americans have ways of acting that are different from people in other countries? What does this suggest about American values?
 - Select some of the items on the brainstorm list and discuss what evidence students might have to support that the selected items are valued. Possible discussion questions include the following: How does that aspect affect our society and the way we live our lives? How might our lives be different if this was not an important value to many people? (The United States is a diverse country, of course, and it might be appropriate to discuss the value differences of various regions and/or subcultures.)
3. Have students work in pairs and read the statement for each sketch in Handout 1: An American in Korea. For each sketch, identify the value or values implied in each statement.
4. Working in groups of four, compare the conclusions drawn by each pair separately. Each pair should explain their reasons for identifying the value(s) they have indicated. The group should try to reach a consensus

- about the values suggested in each sketch. Have students select one probable Korean value that seems most similar to an American value and one that seems very different. What might account for this difference?
5. As a whole class, compare the answers of each group. Brainstorm for hunches about what factors may have contributed to the development of the value system suggested in these sketches. Consider how and from where people's values are derived as well as why different people hold different values.
 6. Explain that Confucianism is one of the factors that greatly influenced the Korean value system. Read Handout 2: Confucianism in Korea.
 7. Like all people today, Koreans are influenced by the world around them. Today, Korea is an industrial, westernized nation. Have students review the information in Handout 3: Korea Today. Ask students how changes in Korean society might affect Koreans and their traditional values.
 8. Have students write a letter to a Korean teenager coming to the United States preparing him or her for the adjustments he or she would have to make.

EVALUATION:

Students will be evaluated on an ongoing basis. Grading will be determined by student cooperation, attitude, participation, and the mechanics and organization of the written assignments. The final written assignment (i.e., the letter) should accurately reflect value differences and similarities (e.g., might require three differences and one similarity).

Handout 1

AN AMERICAN IN KOREA

Natalya's father has been transferred to the Korean office of his company for one year. The family has moved to Korea with him, and Natalya has enrolled in an international school in Seoul. Through her family and friends, she has been able to meet many Koreans and has become friendly with a few who are her own age. Natalya likes meeting new people and learning about their customs and traditions. She has noticed that Koreans often do things very differently than people back home, and she is interested in understanding the underlying values that motivate people's behavior. Whenever she finds herself in new situations, she tries to develop hypotheses about what people value. With your partner, read each of the following incidents and indicate what value or values you think that incident represents. Be prepared to defend your conclusion.

1. Natalya has been invited to share a meal with the family of a Korean student with whom she has become friends. As she sits down for dinner, she is impressed by the number and variety of foods that have been put out on the table. There seems to be more than enough to eat. She is surprised, then, when her friend's mother turns to her and says, "We do not have much to eat, but please eat a lot." Throughout the dinner, her hosts encourage her to eat more and seem concerned when she objects saying that she is quite full.

Possible Korean value(s): _____

2. Her friend, who is very outspoken when they are together with a group their own age, seems unusually quiet in his home. His father occasionally directs him to do things around the house, and he does so with no objection and a small bow to his father.

Possible Korean value(s): _____

3. Even before the dinner in situation 1, Natalya's friend and the other Korean students she has met have indicated to her that they are unable to hang around much after school. She knows they have a great deal of homework but has trouble understanding why they never seem to have any time. Tonight her friend explains that he gets private tutoring after school. She is surprised; her friend is an excellent student and certainly does not need any help keeping up with the school work. The family explains to her that almost all Korean adolescents receive private tutoring so that they might excel in school and get into an excellent university.

Possible Korean value(s): _____

4. Natalya visits her friend's school and is surprised to find that it is not co-ed. However, the biggest surprise is that there are about fifty students in each class. Despite what appear to be very crowded conditions, almost all the students are quiet and well behaved. All the students are very polite, especially to the teachers. She notices, as well, that the younger teachers seem to defer to the older teachers when having discussions and making decisions.

Possible Korean value(s): _____

5. Natalya is planning a shopping trip to a local market to buy a gift for her mother’s upcoming birthday. Because her Korean is not very good, and she is unsure when to try to bargain for something she would like to purchase, she wants one of her Korean friends to help. Her best friend has been unusually anxious recently. She is worried about exams and Natalya feels that getting away from school work will do her friend good. She agrees to go to the market, but an American friend later tells Natalya that she must be more sensitive to her friends’ emotional well-being. Asking a Korean friend for help at a time when she is upset and anxious is actually a very rude thing to do. Natalya wonders why her friend did not simply tell her that she did not want to help her at that moment.

Possible Korean value(s): _____

6. While in Korea, Natalya learns about Korean history. She learns that although Koreans have fought bravely against foreign invaders throughout their history, they have never invaded other lands. In fact, for much of their history they have turned inward and focused on their own development. In the late nineteenth century, when the European powers attempted to expand Western-style politics and commerce into Asia, Korea tried to avoid becoming industrialized and militarized, thereby earning the nickname Hermit Kingdom.

Possible Korean value(s): _____

Handout 2

CONFUCIANISM IN KOREA

Korea today is a very different country than it was just a generation ago. However, although Korean values and culture have changed in the modern world, they are still very much influenced by centuries of old traditions and beliefs. Young Koreans may express no interest in Confucianism, for example, but they are still very much influenced by the Confucian approach to work, study, family, and life in general. To begin to understand Koreans, we must know something about Confucianism.

Confucius was a teacher and philosopher who lived in China in the sixth century BCE. Confucius believed that the government should be run by those citizens who were highly educated. Everyone in society, however, had a role to play, and if that role were carried out correctly, a society would be harmonious and peaceful. Confucius' teachings were introduced to Korea during the Three Kingdoms period (37 BC–668 CE), but they became part of an official state ideology during the Choson Kingdom (1392-1910). During that period, Confucianism was seen as a means to restore and maintain social order. Confucianism's strict set of rules for proper social conduct became instilled in everyday Korean life.

Confucianism stresses the harmony of social relationships. The five most important relationships were specified, and the proper attitudes governing those relationships were delineated:

- Between father and son.....filial piety (obedience and respect toward the father)
- Between ruler and subject.....loyalty
- Between husband and wife.....separate roles and responsibilities
- Between elder and younger.....respect toward elders
- Between friends.....trust

A person's position in relation to others was, and still is, of great importance. Although friends can treat one another as equals, all other relationships are vertical. This vertical social system implies one person has greater authority, and consequently greater social status than another person. Each person must know his or her position and treat others accordingly. Older people, for example, are to be respected and obeyed. Furthermore, each position has certain rights and responsibilities that need to be fulfilled. A father is the head of his household and is to be respected and obeyed; however, he also has the responsibility to look after his family. Similarly, a ruler should be obeyed, but he must also look after his people. In addition, Confucianism stresses the importance of education, which is seen as the most important path to success as well as a valuable pursuit for its own sake. Teachers are held in high esteem, and most young people strive to perform well in school.

Some people today argue that Confucianism gets in the way of modernization. Confucianism, they say, leads to submission to authority and blind loyalty, and it serves to limit change and innovation. Others argue that Confucianism, with its emphasis on education and harmonious social relationships, has helped to make Korea the modern, dynamic nation it is today.

work sheet on next page..

Describe how these values might affect relationships in families, at school, and in society overall. Include any references in the reading that leads you to develop your hypothesis.

FAMILY:

SCHOOL:

SOCIETY:

WORKS CONSULTED:

Hur, S. V., and B. S. Hur. *Culture Shock: Korea*. Portland, OR: Graphic Arts Center, 1998.
Korea Overseas Information Service. *A Handbook of Korea*. Seoul: Korea Overseas Information Service, 1993.

Handout 3 KOREA TODAY

Although Confucianism continues to influence the values and behavior of Koreans today, Korea is a rapidly changing society. For each of the tables below, describe in your own words what that table tells you about life in Korea today. How might these changes in Korea affect the values and behaviors of Koreans today and in the future?

**Table 1
URBANIZATION**

Percentage of population living in a city with a population of 50,000 or more

1961.....	36%
1980.....	66%
1991.....	80%
2000.....	85%

**Table 2
POPULATION GROWTH**

1961.....	25,800,000
1970.....	32,200,000
1980.....	38,100,000
1990.....	42,900,000
1999.....	46,900,000

In 1999, approximately one out of every four Koreans lived in Seoul.

**Table 3
FAMILY SIZE**

Average family size

1967.....	5.5
1996.....	3.3

Percentage of one-person households

1967.....	2.3%
1995.....	12.9%

**Table 4
PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN
IN LABOR FORCE**

1965.....	28.6%
1980.....	42.8%
1995.....	48.3%

**Table 5
CHANGING INDUSTRIAL STRUCTURE**

*Percentage of population involved in agriculture and fisheries (primary);
manufacturing (secondary); service (tertiary)*

	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Secondary</i>	<i>Tertiary</i>	<i>Total</i>
1960.....	80. %	5%	15%	100%
1975.....	46%	19%	35%	100%
1990.....	18%	27%	55%	100%
1995.....	12.5%	23.6%	64%	100%

SUMMING UP:

In your own words, describe how Korea has changed in the second half of the twentieth century, and explain how you think these changes might influence Korean behavior and values.