

20. ANCESTRAL RITES IN KOREA

GRADE LEVEL: 6-8

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SUBJECT: Social Studies

TIME REQUIRED: 1-2 class periods

OBJECTIVES:

1. Identify ancestral rites found in Korea.
2. Describe the rituals involved in each of the rites.
3. Compare and contrast the Korean ancestral rites with those in the United States.

MATERIALS REQUIRED:

Handouts:

- Ancestral Rites
- Photos of Sol-nal
- Sol-nal—New Year's Day
- "Harvest Moon Festival" by Ku Sang
- Chusok—Thanksgiving in Korea
- *Korea Times* article: "Chusok Holiday Festivities in Full Bloom" (September 7, 2000)
- *Korea Times* article: "Chinese Food to Flood Ancestral Rites" (February 2, 1999)
- *Korea Times* article: "Rising Costs Cloud Ancestral 8. Rites" (February 8, 1999)

BACKGROUND:

Koreans have a rich tradition of ancestral memorial rites. These rituals honor the spirits of ancestors and provide a link between the dead and the living, a continuity that persists in Korean culture. From ancient times, Koreans emphasized obedience to parents and respect for ancestors. The effect of Confucianism on Korean Life augmented these beliefs further. Traditional rituals associated with birth, the first birthday, coming of age, marriage, and death are vital parts of everyday life in modern Korean society.

Honoring one's ancestors and giving them continuity through offspring is the duty of filial children. Memorial services are held for ancestors up to four generations back: parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and great-great-grandparents. More distant ancestors are given memorial services once a year at their graves.

Sons are responsible for caring for aging parents and performing ancestral memorial rites. The family name and traditions are passed down through male heirs. Traditionally, when a couple could not produce a male heir, they adopted the son of a relative or the husband had a son with another woman to guarantee that the family name was continued. Today, the husband of a daughter can fulfill these duties.

PROCEDURE:

These activities concentrate on ancestral rites practiced during the two most significant Korean holidays: Chusok and Sol-nal. Both are lunar holidays. Ancient Koreans used the position of the moon to mark the change of seasons and dates important for agriculture. The practice continues in the observance of these special holidays.

1. Have the students complete Handout 1, comparing/contrasting events familiar to them with Korean ancestral rites. Discuss the contrast and similarities in the cultures of Korea and the United States. Establish a founda-

tion of knowledge based on students' experiences that can be called upon throughout the lesson.

2. Share background information with the students.
3. Distribute the pictures included in Handout 2. Ask the students to determine from the pictures what happens during the Korean holiday of Sol-nal, New Year's Day. Compile their responses, which are to be compared with the facts contained in Handout 3.
4. Provide the students with Handout 3, Sol-nal—New Year's Day. Discuss the reasons for this holiday, the ancestral practices conducted during Sol-nal, and the special preparations (including food).
5. Prepare *ttok-kuk* prior to the arrival of the students. Participate in this part of the ancestral service. See Indiana Web site listed in Resources to gather information on the setting of the ancestral table and for the preparation of *ttok-kuk*.
6. Have the students attempt bowing to the teacher or each other in the fashion followed by Koreans during this ceremony.
7. Discuss the meanings of each aspect of Sol-nal. How do Koreans feel about the elderly and each of their ancestors? Do we have any ceremonies or holidays that parallel Sol-nal?
8. Have the students read the poem, "Harvest Moon Festival," by Ku Sang in Handout 4. Ask the students: What is causing the son so much grief? What is the purpose of the Harvest Moon Festival? Why can the son not join in this festival?
9. Distribute copies of Handout 5, Chusok—Thanksgiving in Korea.
10. What is the purpose of this holiday? What practices are followed to commemorate the ancestors?
11. Prepare *songpyon* for students to try. Again, the Indiana Web site provides a recipe for *songpyon* as well as other activities conducted during this holiday.
12. Read in Handout 6 the *Korea Times* article, "Chusok Holiday Festivities in Full Bloom." List the activities typical of Chusok in the capital city of Seoul. What additional information is learned about Chusok from this article?

EVALUATION:

Have the students respond to this question: If you could combine ancestral practices of Korea and the United States, what special activities/ceremonies would you incorporate?

ENRICHMENT:

1. Search for information on the treatment of older people in Korea. How are older people regarded and what accommodations are made for them in Korean society? Compare and contrast with attitudes and practices in the United States.
2. Read the two additional *Korea Times* articles in Handout 7. Discuss the international influence on the local holidays of South Korea.

RESOURCES:

www.Koreatimes.co.kr

Handout 1
ANCESTRAL RITES

Compare and contrast customs in the United States that are similar to Korean ancestral rites.

<u>In Korea</u>	<u>In the United States</u>
Families honor ancestors for four generations back by visiting hometowns and grave sites.	
Families who have moved from their hometowns return for New Year's and Thanksgiving to honor their ancestors.	
Special foods are prepared to celebrate these holidays.	
Young people dress in their best outfits, sometimes traditional <i>hanbok</i> , for these occasions.	
The government of South Korea permits three-day vacations for the celebration of these events.	
Family members attend to the graves of the ancestors, cleaning and performing ceremonies.	

Handout 2
PHOTOS OF SOL-NAL



Handout 3

SOL-NAL—NEW YEAR'S DAY

The first day of the lunar calendar year usually falls in late January or early February. Because the entire family should gather at the home of the eldest male, a three-day holiday is given to allow time for a visit to one's hometown.

On New Year's Eve, there are several customs associated with the coming new year. People may prepare special sieves made with straw (*bokjori*) and hang them outdoors to protect their family from evil and bad luck. Koreans also customarily hang ladles on the wall to pray for good luck in the New Year. Another custom is telling a playful joke warning against sleep for fear your eyebrows might turn white during the night. Children may try to stay awake all night for fear this might happen!

On the morning of Sol-nal, all family members dress in their best clothes called *solbim*. This clothing traditionally contains five colors. The *hanbok* is commonly worn as well.

The family performs *cha-rye*, ancestral memorial rites with *ttok-kuk*, a bowl of sliced thin white rice cake soup boiled in a thick beef broth topped with bright garnishes and green onion. People believe that if they have a bowl of *ttok-kuk*, they will become a year older. For this reason, Koreans traditionally add a year to their ages after Sol-nal, not their birthdays.

After breakfast, the younger people bow to their elders in a ceremony called *jol* or *se-bae*. Children bow to their parents, grandparents, and relatives, and adults bow to their elders. Comments such as, "I wish you a happy New Year" or "I wish you to be healthy" are given as the New Year's first greetings. The elders give the good wishes back with such comments as, "Take care of yourself," "Study hard," or "Get a job and take a wife within this year!" The young children receive *sebaet-don* from their elders, money rewarded for the bowing. Some children may have prepared small beautifully decorated purses called *bok-ju-mony* for the receipt of this special money.

The *jol* or bowing is performed in a ritualistic fashion. The man brings his hands together in front of his eyes and sits on his knees touching the floor, and then bows his head on his hands, which touch the floor. The ritual bow for a woman is more difficult and may require assistance. She has to sit with her hands brought together, keeping them in front of her eyes, and without touching her knees on the floor, she must sit down with her hip to the floor.

After bowing, the young people go outside to fly kites, and boys spin tops, and girls seesaw the Korean way. Inside, they might play *yut-no-ri*, a stick game using four wooden sticks and checkers. The family will eat, talk, and play all day, enjoying their large family reunion.

Handout 4
“HARVEST MOON FESTIVAL”
BY Ku Sang

Mother,
your unworthy son is older now
than you were when I took my leave of you
for the last time,
and it seems my hair and beard are whiter
than my father's when he died.

Mother,
I have heard that after my elder brother, the priest,
was taken away by the communists, you found refuge
in the house of your god-daughter Johanna
Until you died,
but were you laid in a coffin?
Were you provided with a grave?
I do not know,
and I cannot picture your burial-place,
to my greater grief.

Mother,
today is the festival of the Harvest Moon,
they say a million people have left Seoul
to go and venerate their ancestors' tombs,
while groups have come from Japan and China
for the same purpose,
but I just attended a Requiem Mass this morning
and now, sitting here absently
at the window of my study,
I am gazing up at the clouds as they drift northward

Oh mother.
Mother.

Ku Sang

Ku Sang was born in Seoul in 1919, but when he was a small child his family moved to the northeastern city of Wonsan, where he grew up. His parents were Catholics, and his elder brother became a priest, but Ku Sang underwent a crisis of faith during his student years in Japan, where he studied the philosophy of religion. He only slowly found his own understanding of Catholicism. He returned to the northern part of Korea and began work as a writer and journalist, but after the Liberation in 1945 he was soon forced to flee to the south because of his refusal to conform to the demands of the communists.

He was for many years an editorialist for the *Kyonghyang* Newspaper in Seoul. His first poems were written while he was a student in Japan, and he has steadily written and published volumes of poetry as well as essays on social, literary, and spiritual topics. He has also written a number of plays and edited literary anthologies.

His poetry is marked by a rejection of the refined symbolism and artificial rhetoric found more often in the highly esteemed work of poets such as So Chong-ju. Instead, Ku Sang begins his poems with the evocation of a personal moment of perception, in the midst of the city or of nature, and moves from there to considerations of more general import, in which the poem frequently turns into a meditation on the presence of Eternity in the midst of time. A number of poems refer to the poet's struggle with tuberculosis, but many are hymns celebrating the wonder of being alive. Ku Sang has spoken out clearly on the ecological issues that are now popular, pinpointing the pollution of the Han River as not only a crime against nature but also as a symbol of the moral corruption of contemporary humanity.

Ku Sang's work has always found a welcome among readers eager for poetry that addressed the essential meaning of life and sang the simple experiences of truth that mark the poet's own life. The apparent simplicity of Ku Sang's poetic world has meant that until quite recently his work was undervalued in the world of critical opinion. It is now seen that in Ku Sang, Korea has a major religious poet of great originality and utter personal integrity, the authenticity of whose vision is attested by the publication of translations of his poems into French, English, German, and Japanese.

Go to the poems "Wastelands of Fire," "Infant Splendor," and "River and Fields."

Handout 5

CHUSOK—THANKSGIVING IN KOREA

Chusok, the Korean Thanksgiving Day, is the most famous traditional event in Korea. The fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month is called Chusok (the harvest moon). Families gather at the oldest member's house for a great feast to offer thanks and to show respect to nature and to their ancestors.

In modern Korean society, many families have moved from their traditional family towns to larger cities like Seoul. For Chusok, these families normally return to their hometown. This big movement of people results in major traffic delays during the holiday season. In compliance with this annual cultural traditional heritage, the Korean government has declared as public holidays not less than three consecutive days to enable families to visit their rural ancestral homes.

On the first day, Koreans prepare lots of food in order to perform the ancestral rites or *Je-Sa*. *Songpaen* is one of the more important of the foods prepared. It is a crescent-shaped rice cake. The rice cakes are made of dough made from flour milled from newly harvested rice, and steamed on a layer of freshly picked pine needles. The pine needles give the rice cakes a nice fragrance and help preserve them. Fillings for the rice cakes vary from region to region, but the most common are sesame seeds, chestnuts, beans, and jujubes. Other foods include rice, soup, kimchi, fish, meat, fruits, and wild greens.

On the second day of Chusok, Koreans put on their best outfits. Often the traditional *hanbok* is worn as a symbolic link to the past. Homage is paid to the ancestors by placing the previously prepared food on a large table. It is offered to the ancestors in solemn rites that include bowing to the ancestors. Then it is customary to visit the graves of the ancestors and perform rites, which again include bowing and the offering of food. The graves are cleaned in preparation for winter.

Various folk games can be played during the remainder of the day. As a culminating event, family members view the full moon.

The third day of Chusok is travel time or additional hours spent with family.

Handout 6

The Korea Times **"Chusok Holiday Festivities in Full Bloom"** **September 9, 2000**

With the Chusok holiday season just around the corner, people are very busy shopping for food and gifts for their families, relatives and friends.

In the midst of an euphoric mood across the nation, many museums and cultural institutions have also geared up efforts to use the coming three-day holiday, which falls on Sept. 11-13, as an occasion to awaken the general public to the values of traditional culture.

As usual, four major palaces, 14 parks with royal tombs and 23 cultural sites in Seoul are open free of charge on the full moon of Chusok, Sept. 12, one of the nation's most festive days. During the remaining holiday period, entrance will be free of charge, at national museums as well for those wearing traditional Korean costumes, or hanbok.

At most of these places, visitors will partake in a variety of traditional games and entertainment typically enjoyed during the Chusok season, from yutnori (four-stick game) and shuttlecock to tug-of-war. They will also enjoy performances of samulnori (ensemble of four traditional percussion instruments) folk songs, mask dances and rituals.

Besides these typical Chusok activities, some state-run museums and institutions will offer special cultural programs and activities designed to educate as well as entertain the public on the meaning of the holiday season.

The National Museum of Korea will present a display of Choson period brush works depicting the full moon from Sept. 9-20, and

another exhibit of old roof tiles engraved with moon-dwelling rabbits on Sept. 10-13.

The roof tiles date back to the late seventh century of the Silla Kingdom. Visitors are allowed to make imprints of them and keep them as mementos.

The fairy tale of rabbits pounding rice with wooden bats in the full moon is one of the most endearing stories told to children even today.

On Chusok, the museum will offer a puzzle game of relics such as the Silla period observatory "Chomsongdae" located in Kyongju, Kyongsangnam-Do, and Koryo period celadon.

For those interested in ceramics-making, it will also open a special class on the making of moon-shaped pots on Sept. 13. Call 02-398-5077 for details about all activities at the museum.

Meanwhile, rituals, food and entertainment pertaining to Chusok are on view at the National Folk Museum in Kyongbok Palace. Foreigners are encouraged to take part in a session of songpyon (half-moon shaped rice cakes enjoyed during the Chusok season) making from 13:00 to 14:30 on Sept. 7.

The ability to make shapely songpyon is particularly appreciated among locals, who used to say that makers of smooth, well-shaped songpyon will have a pretty daughter.

Following the session, setting a traditional Chusok table and ceremonial procedures will be demonstrated along with a lecture on the meaning of such rites and customs of the Chusok traditional. The set table will be exhibited until Oct.9.

Performances of various rituals will also take place, helping viewers get in touch with old folk beliefs and shamanistic ideas. Among them is a show of "Kobuk-nori" (turtle play) presented by some 20 primary school children in the courtyard of the museum on Sept. 8. Call 02-734-1341, or 02-725-5964, for details about the events.

At the annex of the National Theater of Korea, a changguk (traditional musical drama) titled "The Tale of Pae Bi-jang" will be presented on Sept. 11-17, directed by veteran pansori singer An Suk-son and featuring some 60 performers, including An.

A well-known satire against the hypocritical Choson period upper class known as a "yangban," the story centers on the eccentricity of Pae Bi-chang, who tries to keep his dignity as a yangban in pursuit of his sexual desires toward Aerang, a kisaeng (Korean geisha). The tickets are 10,000 to 30,000 won. Call 02-2274-1173 for more information.

Handout 7

The Korea Times **"Chinese Food to Flood Ancestral Rites"** **February 2, 1999**

In preparation for ancestral rites held during the Lunar New Year's Day on Feb. 16, many consumers are flocking to department stores and supermarkets to stock up on ancestral rites goods. However, many of those products this year will most likely have originated from China.

According to the retailers, the majority of the vegetables sold for use during ancestral rites, such as bracken and balloon flower roots, will be from China. During the Chusok holiday during Oct 4-6 last year, about 20 percent of the vegetables were locally grown.

Most consumers are seeking out the Chinese vegetables as the local products are 2-3 times more expensive due to strange weather patterns last year that slashed domestic production.

In one department store, 100 grams of locally produced bracken sells for 1,490 won while its sino counterpart retails for just 390 won. Likewise, domestic royal fern sells for 1,900 won compared to 390 won for the Chinese royal ferns, and local balloon flower roots are priced at 990 won while the Chinese balloon flower roots are only 390 won.

Due to low consumer demand, some department stores are not even stocking their shelves with the expensive local products and only sell them to customers who specifically ask for the locally grown vegetables.

The percentage of tofu, bean sprouts, and mung bean sprouts from China are also increasing. During the Lunar New Year and Chusok holidays last year, about 50 percent of the tofu and bean sprouts sold were from

China. This year, retailers expect the ratio to go up to 70 percent.

However, the percentage of croakers from China naturally goes up during the Lunar New Year compared to Chusok as Koreans catch the majority of this fish in autumn.

During Chusok last year, 70 percent of the dried croakers sold were from China. The price per fish ranged from 17,000-23,000 for the domestic croakers and 8,000-12,000 won for the Chinese ones. During this coming Lunar New Year holiday, 90 percent of the croakers will be from China and prices will be 8,000-16,000 won for the Chinese fish and 18,000-25,000 won for the local fish.

``The Chinese supply of fish is steadily increasing," said a Hanhwa Store official. ``As prices of Chinese products are much cheaper than local goods, the Chinese fishing quota directly affects local prices," he added.

The Korea times **Rising Costs Cloud Ancestral Rites** **February 8, 1999**

The prices of agricultural and fishery goods used for ancestral memorial rites are skyrocketing, influenced by the declining number of agricultural products out on the market due to damage from last year's flood and the small number of fish caught on the heels of a rocky Korea-Japan fisheries agreement.

Merchants, who began full-scale sales of Lunar New Year products this week, are predicting even further price increases.

According to various agricultural distributors, prices of agricultural products have shot up as the Lunar New Year demands outpace the amount stored last year.

In particular, the cost of fruit has soared. Wholesale prices as of Feb. 5 of 15 kg of apples ballooned 35.3 percent from a year ago while the price of 15 kg of pears jumped 22.2 percent.

The price of rice, cabbage, Korean radish, green onions, potatoes and other major agricultural goods also grew 10-20 percent.

Vegetables used in ancestral memorial rites also saw a price increase. According to a recent survey by New Core Department Store, the prices of eight types of greens used in the rites rose an average of 8 percent.

In particular, the price of bracken grew 24 percent, leopard plant 29 percent, mung-bean sprouts 15 percent and spinach 4 percent.

The price of fish is also rising steadily due to the abnormally mild winter and the Korea-Japan fisheries agreement.

The noryangjin Fisheries market in Seoul is selling 1 kg of Pollack for 5,000 won, 29 percent more than last year, while the price of a kg of cod jumped 28.7 percent to 7,000 won.

The price of a 25-cm long dried croaker from Korea grew 10 percent to 20,000-25,000 won, while the same size dried croaker from China is a quarter of the price at 5,000 won.