

25. LESSON IN LITERATURE: STORYLINE MAP OF "SIX" AND "ELEVEN"

GRADE LEVEL: 8-10

AUTHOR: Mary Ellen Baron

SUBJECT: Literature

TIME REQUIRED: 1-2 class periods

OBJECTIVE:

1. Construct a storyline map for "Six" and "Eleven," including rising action, climax, and resolution.
2. Compare and contrast the main characters in each story.
3. Formulate ideas about our world's interconnectedness.

MATERIALS REQUIRED:

- Handout 1: "Six," an excerpt from *Still Life with Rice* by Helie Lee,
- Handout 2: "Eleven" by Sandra Cisneros.

BACKGROUND:

Reading and responding to literature from Korea encourages students' understanding of the interconnected themes of our world. By comparing writing from the Korean community with that of a better known community, students will distinguish similarities and differences.

PROCEDURE:

1. Introduce the concept of a storyline map. All stories begin with a rising action; continue until its highest peak, a climax; and finish with some type of resolution, even if not a favorable one.
2. Next, have students write for five minutes in which they explore disappointments. When do they remember being disappointed? What did they do about it? What solutions were provided either by themselves or by someone else?
3. Read "Six" by Helie Lee and "Eleven" by Sandra Cisneros. This will take two class periods with time at the end of each story for reflections and a brief summary from students.
4. Have the students work in pairs to explore and answer the following in depth: Compare and contrast the main characters from each story. What is the critical event for each character? How are the stories similar and how are they different? Where is the climax, the most intense part, of each story? What is the universal message from each story? Could these stories have taken place in another town, time, or country? If so, where and when?

EVALUATION:

You know this lesson has been successful if:

- the students create a correct storyline map;
- the students are actively responding to the questions above; and
- the students draw connections between the two stories, which take place in very different surroundings.

Handout 1

"SIX"

An excerpt from
Still Life with Rice
by Helie Lee

When I was six, I ruled my small kingdom, Hongyang's world. Every room in our house, including the men's quarter, was mine to explore. "Hongyang-Tah, young girls must not be too curious," Mother would warn, but even she could not refuse me the tiniest or most greedy request, for I was Father's favorite.

I loved our huge one-story home. It formed double Ls, with the Ls fitting perfectly together to construct a stretched-out square. In the center, a courtyard was bordered by a walkway and living quarters. Gently curving tiles roofed the house, and mud plastered the walls. We had very little furniture: a small dining table, wooden chests to hold bedding, and a black lacquer stand for the jade Buddha. We sat, slept, and ate on the floor; thus all the furniture and ornaments were built low to harmonize with our way of living.

Every room in the house had *ondol* floors. Flues ran heat from the kitchen stove to the adjoining rooms. Layers of cement, sand, lime, clay, and rocks were pressed under the sturdy paper called *janpan*, which was derived from mulberry wood. Then a polish made of ground soybeans and liquid cow dung was spread over the sheets and dried, turning the floor a lustrous yellow, smooth and easy to clean.

"There is no floor as great as ours in all the Orient. Koreans are a highly innovative and intelligent people," Father would boast.

Mother spent most of her time in the *anbang*, or inner room, near the back of the house next to the kitchen. The men's quarters, *sarangbang*, is separated from the women's *anbang* by sliding lattice screens covered with

paper. The division of the house symbolized just how separate men's and women's lives were. Young boys and girls from an early age were properly trained to stay in their respective quarters with their own kind.

The front room Father converted into a shop. Large swinging doors opened to the busy street. Rice, corn, millet, nuts, dried salted fish, fruits, vegetables, sugar, rice candies, and *pan-chan*, side dishes, were colorfully displayed to tempt those who passed by. Other businesses along the streets sold everything from handwoven silk to utensils and rubber slippers. Each day was an exciting adventure of new faces as people from the neighboring villages and provinces came to shop for bargains in the capital of Pyongyang, located in the northern region of our boot-shaped country.

Safely insulated in my father's house, I had no worries or fears. Thoughts of rice cakes and mischievous games filled my days. I was too young and naïve to comprehend the ruthless oppression of our people outside by the Japanese, who marched into our country on August 29, 1910, two years before my birth.

All day long three-year-old Second Sister and I clung to Father's side, basking in his affection and generosity. He adored us as much as sons. He lavished sweets on us, making sure our bellies never hungered for anything. Whatever we craved, he provided. If I desired a pomegranate, he would give me a basket loaded with the finest and reddest from his store.

Whenever he could close the shop and slip away for an afternoon, he would walk me to his favorite spot down by the river. I was delighted that Second Sister and Baby Sister were too young to tag along. The stroll always seemed a wink of time, as Father filled the long road with amazing folktales of heavenly maidens, foxes, tigers, and dragons. Just a few miles from our house, the Taedong River cut right through Pyongyang. During the warm summer months, private

fishing boats and ferries hauled people back and forth while on the banks women washed their family laundry and gossiped.

Father taught me to fish there. For hours, we sat at the river's edge, side by side, waiting for a fish to nibble on our homemade line. A clump of rice, a rock, and a hook were all we needed. They were wrapped tightly in a cloth mesh, tied with a long string, then lowered into the water. Father and I lounged in each other's company as we waited patiently for a tug. Sometimes when the fish were too clever to bite, I would watch Father float in the water, putting his hands under his chin and squirting a jet of water from his pursed lips.

One day on our trek back from the river, I overheard a man describe a big round machine that popped corn kernels into large fluffy balls. I begged Father for that magical machine, and the next day a servant returned, balancing it on his back. It had a large, round metal body with a hatch. A low fire blazed underneath it as the servant cranked the handle, and we heard the corn roll and fall, then roll again. Faster and faster he churned. Sweat dripped from his forehead. The temperature rose, the metal glowed red-hot. A cloth sack was placed over the hatch just in time to catch the fluffy white corn that shot out. Pong!

Dozens of small hands reached into the steaming bag. The freshly popped corn scorched our fingers, but we kept grabbing. The puffy corn was as light as winter snowflakes, only it tasted better. As the sack was being passed around for the second time, I snatched it and barricaded myself in the farthest corner of the courtyard. I dared anyone to try to wrestle it away from me. I was ready to beat them down with my fist. No one did; even the boys twice my size refused to challenge me.

The servant promptly poured in a second batch rather than confront my greediness. I watched, plotting my strategy to swipe the next one. Minutes passed and the temperature rose again. All watched with anticipation, pressing

their hands to their ears. But there was no explosion.

"Something must be wrong. What are we going to do?" Second Sister cried as smoke spiraled between the cracks.

In a crazed panic, the servant quickly opened the hatch, and a plume of black smoke filled the courtyard and seeped into the rooms. The other servants frantically ran through the large house, flapping their arms like birds, trying to chase the smoke out.

Hearing the commotion, Father rushed in, thinking it was a fire. The smoke was so thick, his presence went unnoticed. He cleared his throat loudly as he always did when he commanded our attention. It was his way of announcing, "I have arrived." Everyone immediately froze.

"What happened here?"

The servants all dropped their heads and clasped their hands in distress. Father scrutinized their many faces, staring hard and long at each one. "This machine is dangerous. I will not have it disturb the peace of my house," he said authoritatively. There was no arguing with Father when he had made up his mind. His word was law, but Second Sister, being too young to hold her tongue dared to ask Father what he planned to do with it.

"It must be destroyed," he declared.

We watched helplessly as he plunged an ax down the center splitting it in half. Again and again he swung the ax until there was nothing left but scrap metal. For a week, the mutilated pile cluttered our yard like an odd piece of sculpture, the kind no one wanted to buy. It was there to remind us of the hazards of modern machines, to remind me of my selfishness.

Helie Lee is the author of the national best-seller Still Life With Rice (Scribner 1996), and In The Absence of Sun (Harmony Books 2002), memoirs in which she chronicles her family's experience in war-torn Korea from the 1930s to 1997. Born in Seoul, Korea on August 29, 1964,

Ms. Lee's family immigrated first to Montreal, Canada when she was four, then to California one year later. Ms. Lee's family pursued their American dream, settling in the San Fernando Valley where Ms. Lee attended El Camino Real High School, then graduated from UCLA in 1986 with a degree in Political Science.

Handout 2

"ELEVEN"

By Sandra Cisneros

What they don't understand about birthdays and what they never tell you is that when you're eleven, you're also ten, and nine, and eight, and seven, and six, and five, and four, and three, and two, and one. And when you wake up on your eleventh birthday you expect to feel eleven, but you don't. You open your eyes and everything's just like yesterday, only it's today. And you don't feel eleven at all. You feel like you're still ten. And you are—underneath the year that makes you eleven.

Like some days you might say something stupid, and that's the part of you that's still ten. Or maybe some days you might need to sit on your mama's lap because you're scared, and that's the part of you that's five. And maybe one day when you're all grown up maybe you will need cry like if you're three, and that's okay. That's what I tell Mama when she's sad and needs to cry. Maybe she's feeling three.

Because the way you grow old is kind of like an onion or like the rings inside a tree trunk or like my little wooden dolls that fit one inside the other, each year inside the next one. That's how being eleven years old is.

You don't feel eleven. Not right away. It takes a few days, weeks even, sometimes even months before you say eleven when they ask you. And you don't feel smart eleven, not until you're almost twelve. That's the way it is.

Only today I wish I didn't have only eleven years rattling inside me like pennies in a tin Band-Aid box. Today I wish I was one hundred and two instead of eleven because if I was one hundred and two I'd have known what to say when Mrs. Price put the red sweater on my desk. I would've known how to tell her it wasn't mine instead of just sitting there with that look on my face

and nothing coming out of my mouth.

"Whose is this?" Mrs. Price says, and she holds the red sweater up in the air for all the class to see. "Whose? It's been sitting in the coatroom for a month."

"Not mine," says everybody. "Not me."

"It has to belong to somebody," Mrs. Price keeps saying, but nobody can remember. It's an ugly sweater with red plastic buttons and a collar and sleeves all stretched out like you could use it for a jump rope. It's maybe a thousand years old and even if it belonged to me I wouldn't say so.

Maybe because I'm skinny, maybe because she doesn't like me, that stupid Sylvia Saldivar says, "I think it belongs to Rachel." An ugly sweater like that, all raggedy and old, but Mrs. Price believes her. Mrs. Price takes the sweater and puts it right back on my desk, but when I open my mouth nothing came out.

"That's not, I don't, you're not...not mine," I finally say in a little voice that was maybe me when I was four.

"Of course it's yours," Mrs. Price says, "I remember you wearing it once." Because she's older and the teacher, she's right and I'm not.

Not mine, not mine, not mine, but Mrs. Price is already turning to page thirty-two, and math problem number four. I don't know why but all of a sudden I'm feeling sick inside, like the part of me that's three wants to come out of my eyes, only I squeeze them shut tight and bite down on my teeth real hard and try to remember today I am eleven....eleven. Mama is making a cake for me for tonight, and when Papa comes home everyone will sing happy birthday, happy birthday to you.

But when the sick feeling goes away, and I open my eyes, the red sweater is still sitting there like a big red mountain. I move the red sweater to the corner of my desk with my ruler. I move my pencil and books and eraser as far from it as possible. I even move my chair a little to the right. Not mine, not mine, not mine.

In my head I'm thinking how long till lunchtime, how long till I can take the red sweater and throw it over the schoolyard fence, or leave it hanging on a parking meter, or bunch it up into a little ball and toss it in the alley. Except when math period ends Mrs. Price says loud and in front of everybody, "Now, Rachel, that's enough," because she sees I've shoved the red sweater to the tippy-tip corner of my desk and it's hanging all over the edge like a waterfall, but I don't care.

"Rachel," Mrs. Price says. She says it like she's getting mad. "You put that sweater on right now and no more nonsense."

"But it's not—"

"Now!" Mrs. Price says.

This is when I wish I wasn't eleven, because all the years inside of me—ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, and one—are pushing at the back of my eyes when I put one arm through one sleeve of the sweater that smells like cottage cheese, and then the other arm through the other and stand there with my arms apart like if the sweater hurts me and it does, all itchy and full of germs that aren't even mine.

That's when everything I've been holding in since this morning since when Mrs. Price put the sweater on my desk, finally lets go, and all of a sudden I'm crying in front of everybody. I wish I was invisible but I'm not. I'm eleven and it's my birthday today and I'm crying like I'm three in front of everybody. I put my head down on the desk and bury my face in my stupid clown-sweater arms. My face all hot and spit coming out of my mouth because I can't stop the little animal noise from coming out of me, until there aren't any more tears left in my eyes, and it's just my body shaking like when you have the hiccups, and my whole head hurts like when you drink milk too fast.

But the worst part is right before the bell rings for lunch. That stupid Phyllis Lopez, who is even dumber than Sylvia Saldivar, says she

remembers the red sweater is hers! I take it off right away and give it to her, only Mrs. Price pretends like everything's is okay.

Today I'm eleven. There's a cake Mama's making for tonight, and when Papa comes home from work we'll eat it. There'll be candles and presents and everybody will sing happy birthday, happy birthday to you, Rachel, only it's too late.

I'm eleven today. I'm eleven, ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one, but I wish I was anything but eleven, because I want today to be far away already, far away like a runaway balloon, like a tiny o in the sky, so tiny-tiny you have to close you eyes to see it.

Poet Gwendolyn Brooks called Sandra Cisneros "one of the most brilliant of today's young writers." Cisneros won an American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation in 1985 for The house on Mango Street, a collection of sketches and stories, and a Lanan Literary in 1991.

Her other books include My Wicked, Wicked Ways(1987), a book of poetry, and Women Hollering Creek and Other Stories (1991).

Cisneros was born in 1954 in Chicago to a Mexican-American mother. She has been a teacher, poet in the schools, college recruiter, and an arts administrator. She lives in San Antonio, Texas.