

CONFUCIAN VALUES

GRADE LEVEL: Middle School

SUBJECT: Social Studies

TIME REQUIRED: One to two class periods

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

1. Describe how Korean customs relate to Confucian principles.
2. Analyze the influence of Confucian values on Korean behavior.
3. Compare Korean behaviors and U.S. behaviors.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Although Korea is going through a transitional phase with the rapidly increasing industrialization of their economy, many Korean traditions are both valued and practiced in modern Korea. Many of the customs are rooted in the Confucian philosophy. Understanding Confucian principles will enable students to better understand the sense of loyalty and family that pervades much of the Korean culture. It is important to note that Korean society is hierarchical in nature.

Confucianism entered Korea from China and was accepted so eagerly and in such strict form that even the Chinese called the Koreans the "ceremonious people of the East." Confucianism dictated that there must be a proper order to all things in the universe, including human society. All persons within a society must know their place and uphold their responsibilities. Confucianism taught that there were five basic relationships to order and guide family and society. They are:

1. Justice and righteousness between sovereign and subject
2. Affection between father and son
3. Etiquette and justice between husband and wife
4. Younger should defer to elder
5. Faith and trust between friends

MATERIALS: Three handouts accompanying this lesson.

PROCEDURES

1. List on the board or overhead the five basic relationships that guide family and society according to Confucian principles. Discuss what each of these relationships means. Have

students read each and discuss how these principles might be seen in U.S. culture.

2. Separate the groups of sentences listed on the handout "About Korea" into strips. Distribute one description to each student. Have students, in groups, read their sentences to each other and discuss what each custom might mean and how it relates to the five Confucian relationships on the board, trying to relate a Confucian principle with a specific behavior.

3. Return to the group and share the various sources of the students' information. Have each group describe how and why they listed what they did as a Korean belief or behavior. Then have the groups resume and try to come up with American customs that are similar to those that were listed about Korea.

4. Using handouts "Koreans believe Americans..." and "Korean Behaviors," list some of the behaviors that many Koreans believe many Americans participate in. Following each item ask the students why this behavior might be uncomfortable for a Korean person. List Korean behaviors and ask students how these behaviors are perceived by Americans. Ask students if they can generate some other American customs that could be new and different for a Korean person. Remember, the behaviors on these handouts represent "common perceptions." Since there is variation in any society, these behaviors may not describe the actions of any particular person.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. Have students write a paragraph explaining how beliefs can affect a person's behavior and how this behavior can vary from culture to culture.

2. Have students identify the similarities between Korean and U.S. customs.

ABOUT KOREA

- The family is the most important part of Korean life. In Confucian tradition, the father is the head of the family and it is his responsibility to provide food, clothing and shelter, and to approve marriages or moves by family members. The eldest son has special duties first to his parents, then his brothers from older to younger, then to his sons, then to his wife, and lastly to his daughters. Family welfare is much more important than the individual.
- Many marriages are still arranged by families through a matchmaker. While Koreans may date, often those dates are with individuals chosen by the family or matchmaker as possible mates. Koreans wouldn't consider displaying affection in public, and holding hands, hugging or kissing would be considered a strong breach of etiquette. Repressing emotions, according to Confucianism, is a sign of culture.
- There are many family rituals tied to Confucian tradition. You might see a string of dried red peppers hung across an entrance to a Korean home. These signify the birth of a boy within a week.
- Confucian tradition also demands that the elderly be treated at all times with the utmost respect. When elders are present, young Koreans would never lounge around, wear sunglasses, or expect to eat first.
- Because 60 years is considered a cycle in the Asian zodiac, a large birthday celebration is held for those who turn 60 years old. In the past, living to the age of 60 also exceeded the average life expectancy in Korea. It is also an age when a man can retire and let his sons support him.
- Traditional Korean homes are one-story designs with three to five rooms. The house is separated from others by a wall from three to six feet high. Windows are covered with rice paper to offer additional privacy.
- Korean homes are kept very clean and neat. To keep the floors clean, shoes are not worn in the house.
- Gift giving is an important part of Korean tradition. Gifts might be given to cultivate a personal relationship, before conducting business, or to encourage aid from someone in a position above. A return gift or favor is usually expected. Koreans seldom open a gift in public.
- Large outdoor markets can be found throughout Korea. Spirited bargaining goes on as the buyer hopes to pay the lowest prices for foods, clothing, shoes and cooking supplies.
- Koreans enjoy hot and spicy foods. Rather than pouring their own drinks, Koreans pour for one another. It is a bad breach of etiquette to pour your own drink.

- When dining with a group in a restaurant, it is considered polite for one person to pay the entire bill. The person who pays will often be the one who is younger or subordinate to the rest of the group.
- To be seen as an individual, a formal introduction, which includes bowing to signify respect and an exchange of business cards by offering it with both hands, is essential. It is at that point that an individual will be accorded the proper deference depending on his rank in the social hierarchy.
- In Korea, the surname is given first. First names are seldom used in addressing another because of the social hierarchy established by Confucianism. Addressing a person by title or position is most correct. These include *sangnim* (teacher) or *paksa* (doctor). Individuals who have achieved this title are given high respect because highest respect is deserved for scholars in the Confucian tradition.
- While women are not as secluded at home as they once were, it is still unusual for women to join their husbands for a night on the town. Many women are earning university degrees, but the care of the family is still considered most important.
- According to Confucianism, the essential qualities which would mark a superior person were: benevolence (humanity), uprightness (justice), loyalty (fidelity), decorum and wisdom.
- Korean etiquette includes interdependent, formal gestures designed to produce pleasant feelings and smooth relations. This is done by making certain a proper *kibun* (mood) is maintained through *nunch'i* (reading another's feelings by watching them) and then behaving with appropriate *mot* (taste.)
- Relationships with friends are the one area where Koreans can view each other as equals. Friends, however, really means those born the same year who are, therefore, the same age and capable of being equal.
- Koreans do not feel shame in doing nothing, but much shame in doing wrong. Making a mistake in action is much worse than taking no action. Because actions are important in Confucian tradition, it is desirable to do well. Often, because the group is important, there will be lengthy discussion before decisions are made. Seldom does a Korean make a decision on his/her own without consulting others.

KOREANS BELIEVE AMERICANS:

1. Point a finger at someone or put their feet up on tables.
2. Stand with their hands on their hips or in their pockets.
3. Offer or accept something with the left hand.
4. Start casual conversations with strangers.
5. Show attention to women by opening doors, carrying their bags, etc.
6. Are willing to show special politeness to people of higher status
7. Live in open houses which allow those outside to look in.
8. Walk on the right side of a sidewalk or hallway.
9. Reuse tissue or handkerchiefs and place them in their pocket.
10. Will laugh loudly and long with their mouth open.
11. Pay marked prices in shops.
12. Believe that everyone is equal and has the same rights.
13. Try to be considerate to everyone.
14. Feel no shame in trying anything, even if they cannot do it well.
15. Are loyal to ideas, such as the Constitution and laws.
16. Believe strongly in the rights of individuals.
17. Respect the government office but not necessarily the person who holds the office.
18. Display individual initiative and make decisions on their own.
19. Will stand in line in order to purchase an item.
20. Talk loudly and wave their hands.
21. Wave hello and good-bye.
22. Pay individual bills at a restaurant.
23. Pour their own drinks.

KOREAN BEHAVIORS:

1. Will give their family name first and given name next when writing their name or introducing themselves.
2. It is not considered rude to let men enter rooms and elevators before women.
3. Traditionally prefer sons to daughters because sons carry on the family line and are expected to look after their elderly parents.
4. Respect age and will serve elders first and children last.
5. Appreciate privacy and build high walls around their homes to cut off the view from anyone outside.
6. Will remove shoes when entering a room.
7. Will bow when meeting and leaving another.
8. Will walk on the left side of hallways and sidewalks.
9. It is not rude to push in lines or shove ahead to be waited on.
10. Touch or hold hands with a member of the same sex.
11. Exchange goods, money or business cards by presenting them with both hands.
12. Believe in a hierarchical system in relationships.
13. Will treat kindly or politely an individual to whom they have been introduced.
14. It is not considered rude to disregard strangers to whom they have not been introduced.
15. Will not feel shame in doing nothing, but lots of shame in doing wrong things.
16. Believe loyalty is a higher virtue than honesty.
17. Believe a group is more important than the individual.
18. Do not use self-initiative.
19. Consider life important.