

## **KOREAN FOLK ART**

**GRADE LEVEL:** Middle School

**SUBJECT:** Art, Social Studies

**TIME REQUIRED:** Three to four class periods

### **OBJECTIVES:**

1. Identify specific motifs and common characteristics of Korean folk painting
2. Analyze Korean folk art according to artistic principles
3. Explore how motifs and artistic principles suggest values and customs
4. Create a folk painting

### **MATERIALS REQUIRED:**

- Copies of Handouts One, Two, Three and Four
- Copies of Photo Studies One, Two and Three
- Bamboo brushes of various sizes
- Ink stones or India ink in various colors: blue, red, yellow, green, orange, purple
- Small plastic cups
- Paper (inexpensive newsprint for practice drawings and to cover work area)
- Quality white, rice, handmade or *hanji* paper (Korean paper) for finished works

### **BACKGROUND:**

By studying the folk art of another culture we can expand our worldview and discover the pride people take in creating art for friends, family and special occasions. Simple designs often express a wish for good luck, wealth and happiness or provide protection against evil spirits.

The earliest examples of folk paintings are found on the stones and murals of royal tombs in Koguryo. Other works incorporated motifs from shamanism, Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism. As time passed, many of these symbols were used together in interesting decorative compositions on everyday items, royal palace screens, Buddhist temples, commercial buildings, homes and schools.

### **COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF KOREAN FOLK ART:**

Korean folk art is stylized and can be very abstract as it expresses the following:

- People's dreams
  - Imagination
  - Humor
  - Satire
  - Fantasy
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- The art does not seek to duplicate reality but fills in open space, positively expresses animals, and can be childlike and complex. The art uses bold compositions, dynamic brushwork and intense colors. Themes which appear

include: nature; yearning for happiness; honesty and simplicity

**PROCEDURE:**

1. Show some examples of American folk art, and ask the class what various symbols in art might demonstrate about the values and customs of our country.
2. Distribute the handouts. Divide students into cooperative learning groups to find motifs and artistic principles in one of three photo studies. Direct each group to address the task in the handout.
3. Regroup for class discussion of Korean folk paintings, having students explain what the key symbols were in their pictures, what their task was, and how they fulfilled it.
4. Determine basic characteristics of Korean folk art.
5. Discuss how these characteristics reflect Korean values and customs.
6. Have students list motifs they will use in their Korean-style paintings.
7. Encourage students to develop a folk painting according to the art principles and motifs they have studied. Have them first sketch out basic project.
8. Practice with bamboo brush and ink prior to actual project.

**If you are not set up to do an art project with ink and special paper, you can limit this lesson to the art analysis as discussed in steps one through five or can have students do a sketch without going to the final stage of bamboo brush painting.**

**EVALUATION:**

It should be based on the students' participation and comprehension of the lesson as exhibited through the art work and discussion.

**RESOURCES:**

Ho-Am. Masterpieces of the Ho-Am Art Museum. Samsung Foundation of Culture: Seoul, 1996.

Hollym. Korean Heritage. Hollym Corporation, Publishers: Seoul, 1996.

A Window on Korea. CD-Rom, Korean Overseas Information Service: ROK.

**HANDOUT 1: WISHING SOMEONE A LONG LIFE**

Photo Study One: *Sipchangsaeng-do* (Ten Longevity Symbols)

According to ancient popular beliefs, mountains are sacred. The cosmic force can be seen in the rocks, water, grasses and trees as well as in the clouds above. To wander in the mountains is an act of meditation and adoration. The figures of people or animals that can be seen are very small: the natural order will continue regardless of human intervention. The Taoists believe that it is important to follow the Tao, the path of rightful living, in order to live in harmony with the natural order of the world. Focusing intently on the surrounding natural world, one can gain a closer understanding of reality. To follow the Tao, it is necessary to embrace the fact that all life is in a constant state of change, and that one would know instinctively the best path to follow.

Now look at all the symbols: the sun, moon, mountains, trees and water. These are common symbols in the world and are a few of the most popular symbols used to wish someone a long life in Korean folk art. How might these symbols express longevity?

Other longevity symbols include:

deer	clouds	crane	rocks	tortoise
bamboo	fungus	pine		

Now picture living in a small Korean village surrounded by beautiful mountains. The New Year holiday is approaching and a traveling painter, known as a "passing guest," visits your household. He offers to paint your cards of good wishes for you so that you will be able to distribute them to your friends on the holiday. You inform him that you want to wish them a long life, and you choose the symbols that you want on your cards.

Task:

1. List the longevity symbols that you see in the picture.
2. Discuss how the symbols might express the idea of longevity.
3. Sketch out a card the painter might make for the holiday.
4. Write a summary of your conclusions for class discussion.

## HANDOUT 2:

### WISHING TO DISPEL EVIL SPIRITS AND INVOKE HAPPINESS

Photo Study Two: *Chakho-do* (Magpie and Tiger)

Many Korean folktales have stories of small and peaceful animals making fun of big and powerful animals. The magpie (*chak*) is believed to be a harbinger of good fortune. Traditionally Koreans believed that the magpie carried news regarding the fortunes of humans from shrine deities located throughout the four directions and reported them to the tiger (*ho*), who is smiling. For this reason, the magpie and the tiger became symbols of good news and, in this case, implied that one is never alone in the face of adversity.

Picture living in a small village where most of the people do not read. A common form of entertainment would be to share stories at night. These stories would sometimes try to encourage children not to be afraid of what seems big and mighty. The stories would take monstrous threats and trivialize them—not because the threats were not real but because they would always be there, and life offers a simple solution to overcome them or to live harmoniously in their presence without getting hurt. These allegories transformed the monstrous shapes into something that looked ridiculous and would remind the children that the best way to get through life is sometimes to just laugh at how you make big problems out of little ones.

Now look at the tiger in Photo Study Two. Does he look frightening? Why or why not? Look at the magpie. What impression does it give you?

Picture living in a small village and that your best friend is about to be married. She is very nervous because she does not know her future husband very well. She is imagining the worst-case scenario. You want to get her to relax and laugh by sending a picture with a large beast that can cause anxiety and a small animal that laughed it off.

Task:

1. List large animals that seem fearful and small animals that can easily appear to be threatened.
2. Discuss how the size or proximity of a threat can increase anxiety.
3. Sketch out the card you would make for your friend.
4. Write a summary of your conclusions and discuss with the class how humor is a powerful tool to dispel anxiety.

### **HANDOUT 3: WISHING SOMEONE SUCCESS AND GOOD FORTUNE**

Photo Study 3: *Munja-do* (Scholar's Study)

Confucius was a Chinese sage who had a tremendous influence on the Koreans' view of the world. He presented an ethical, moral system to govern the world based on a series of human relationships:

1. Righteousness between sovereign and minister
2. Proper rapport between father and son
3. Separation of function between husband and wife
4. Deference for elder siblings
5. Faith and trust between friends

At the heart of Confucian thought, one can find moral principles that govern how individuals should behave. In Confucian thought, the notion of the state is that of an extended family; thus, it was thought that it should be governed like a family. Filial piety, a reverence for one's ancestors and great faithfulness to one's friends are considered a very important social norm. In order to promote these ideas, numerous rites and ceremonies became part of everyday life. The symbol of the person who best exemplified these teachings was the scholar who passed rigorous exams in the Confucian classics, in poetry and essays and in the skill of calligraphy.

The teachings of Confucius became the political ideology of the Choson Dynasty (1392-1910) of Korea. The Choson Dynasty promulgated Confucianism through education and civil service examinations. A genre of paintings called *Munja-do* (pictorial ideograph) was developed during the Choson Dynasty. *Munja-do* superimposed depictions of symbolic animals, plants or even scenes with human figures on the flat forms of the Sino-Korean logographs. *Munja-do* embodies the eight cardinal principles of Confucian morality: filial piety; brotherly love; loyalty; trust; propriety; duty; honor; humility.

The eight categories of moral principles remind people that they have a greater responsibility to the group than to themselves. Further, it is a reminder that everyone has a place and role in the hierarchy and that these factors determine how one should behave in various situations. Now look at the symbols in Photo Study Three: The Sino-Korean character *chung* suggests that subjects always help their kings keep the heavenly way.

Now picture yourself at a neo-Confucian school in Korea. Your classmates have been studying rigorously to pass the civil service exam, and your closest friend has difficulty mastering his brushstrokes. You look up the Chinese character for perseverance and you quickly send him a copy. He is appreciative of your good wishes.

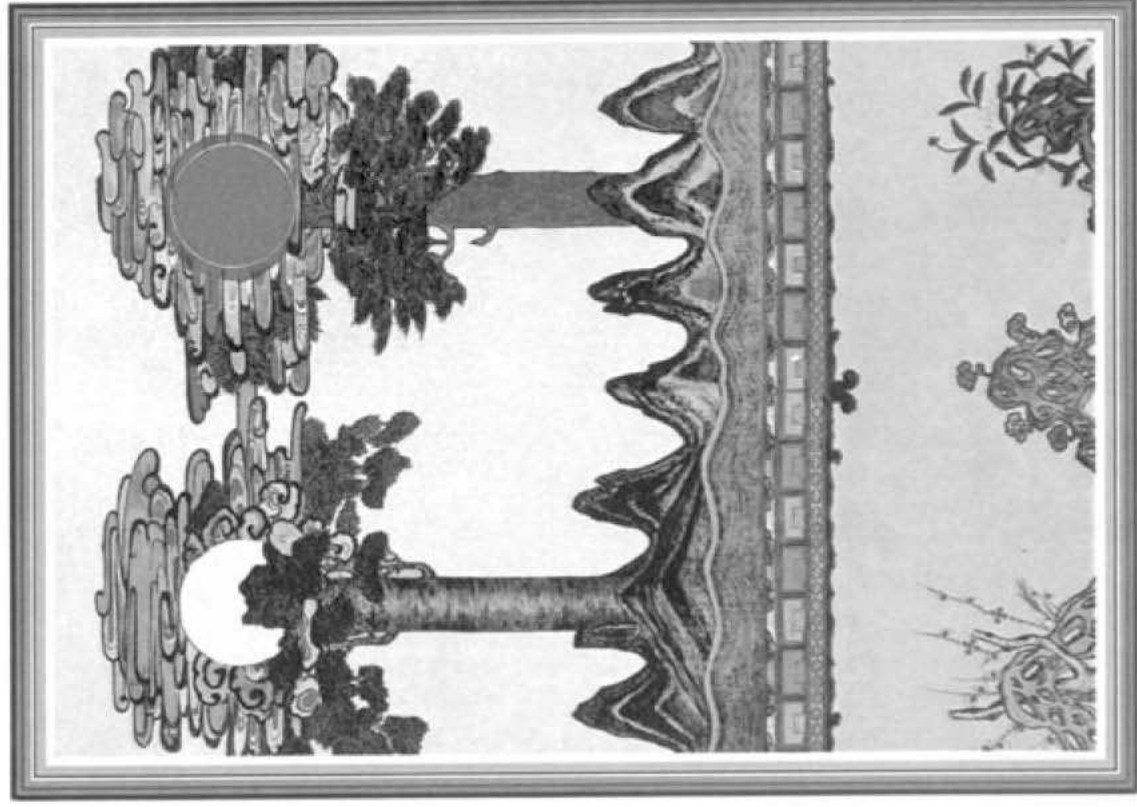
Task:

1. Make a list of what a scholar needed to attain academic success.
2. Make a sketch of how you might illustrate perseverance at study.
3. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of choosing government officials in this manner.
4. Write a summary of your conclusions and tell the class how personal success in Korea may restrict one's personal freedom to act spontaneously.

## HANJOKU 4: CREATING A FOLK ART PAINTING

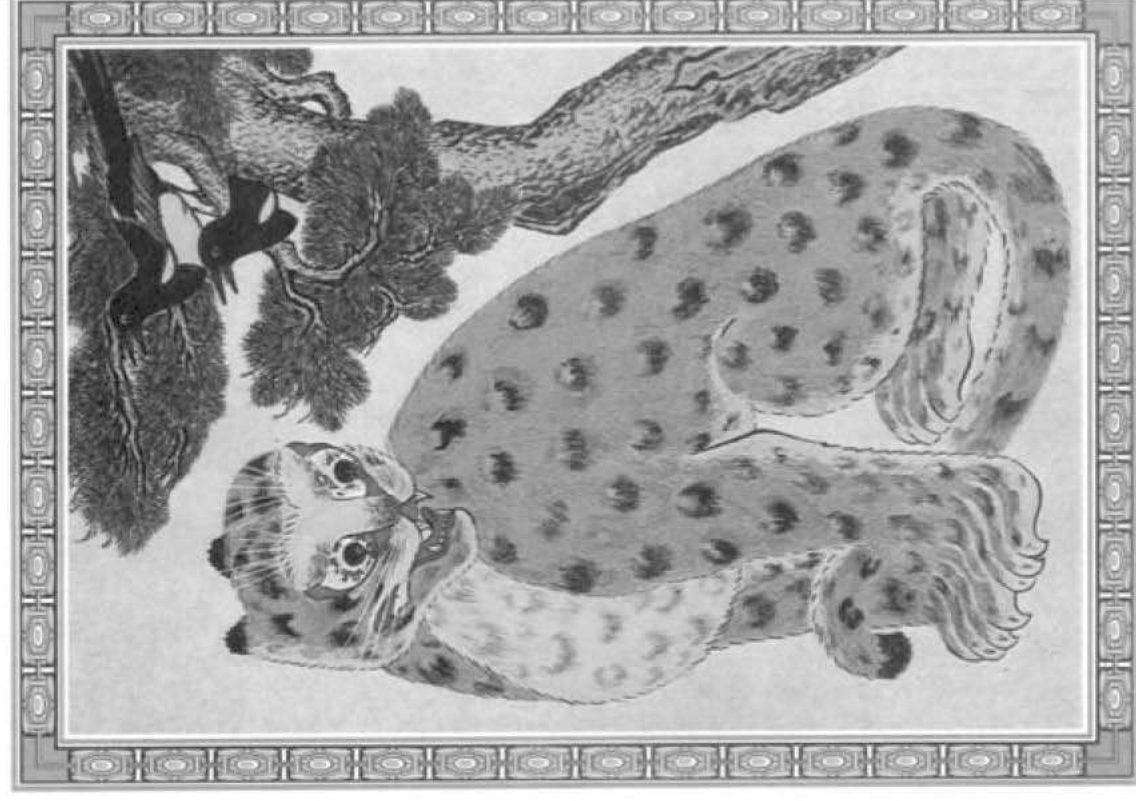
1. Make a list of the motifs that you will use and the message you wish to convey.
2. Indicate the following:
  - How will your lines look?
  - Will you use overlapping shapes to create depth?
  - Will your figures be stylized?
  - How will you balance your picture?
  - Which colors or values will you use?
  - Will your basic shapes be 2D or 3D?
  - What will be your point of reference?
  - Will your objects be realistically proportioned?
  - What kind of mood do you want to express?
3. Create a drawing by paying attention to the principles of design found in Korean art.
4. Hold your brush in an upright position and practice strokes with bold ink. Be sure that the ink is at the tip of the brush. Use pure colors and avoid washes.
5. Try the finished sketch on rice or *hanji* paper.

PHOTO STUDY 1



Boosang-iwol-do (The sea, the sun and the moon)

PHOTO STUDY 2



Jakho-do (Magpie and tiger)



### PHOTO STUDY 3



Kangryun-dol (with the Chinese symbol 'chung' 忠)