

# USING KOREAN LITERATURE

**GRADE LEVEL:** High School

**SUBJECT:** Literature

**TIME REQUIRED:** 45 minutes

## **OBJECTIVES:**

To have students examine and understand Korea's recent tragic past as reflected in modern Korean poetry.

## **MATERIALS REQUIRED:**

- Poem: "Homethought" by Kim Kwangs p (attached)
- Poem: "The Mind of Korea" by Py nY ngno (attached)

## **BACKGROUND:**

Few nations in East Asia have had a more turbulent recent history than Korea. Since the turn of the century, Korea has been subjected to the loss of its national identity, the suppression of its history and language, colonial rule, World War II, a Cold War division, the Korean War, and rapid industrialization. Today, the Korean peninsula is the most heavily armed piece of real estate in the world. With such a tragic history, it is not surprising that modern Korean poets have used the nation's fate as a subject. Because poetry is the expression of feelings on emotional subjects, for Korean poets the topic of Korea's recent history is an obvious one.

## **PROCEDURE:**

1. Make a list of major events in Korea's recent history. Ask members of the class to characterize the nature of Korea's recent history using just one word. Then, ask for the reasons and explanations of word choices.
2. Discuss with the class the nature of recent Korean history based on the words provided by the students. Then, relate to the class how poetry has struggled with the turbulence of recent Korean history.
3. Read the poem "Homethought" aloud.
4. Direct discussion based on analysis of what students know of Korean history and the words and emotions of the poem. Questions one might consider are:
  - 1) What feelings are left in the reader after reading this poem? Explain.
  - 2) What is the source of grief for the poet? What is causing the anguish in the poet? What does the poet miss from his home? Explain.
  - 3) What question does the poet pose? Does he seem optimistic about a future answer to the question? Explain.
5. Read aloud "The Mind of Korea."

6. Direct discussion around the issues raised in the poem. One might consider the following questions:
- 1) What is your reaction to this poem?
  - 2) What is the effect of the poet asking so many unanswered questions? Why do you think he does this? Do you think that there are any answers to the questions posed by the poet? Explain.
  - 3) What is the effect of the use of a single final word in the poem? Given what you know of Korean history, do you think that the choice of the word "sad" was a good choice, and why?
  - 4) Look at the list created at the start of the lesson which describes Korea's past. Do you think that one of the words listed would have been a more effective final word for the poem, and why?

**EVALUATION:**

Using one of the words listed to describe Korea's recent history as a basis, write a descriptive passage, a brief poem, or word-picture in which the word plays a prominent role on the topic of Korea.

**REFERENCE:**

Kim, Jaihiun. *Korean Poetry Today*, Seoul: Hanshin Publishing Company, 1987.

### **Kim, Kwangs p (1905-1977)**

Born in Ky ngs ng, north Hamgy ng province, Kim majored in English at Waseda University, Japan. Affiliated with *The Overseas Literature* school, he began his literary career in the early 1930's by introducing to Korea overseas literature in translation. He was also active in promoting theatrical arts in their infancy at the time. Like many of his contemporaries, he published his poems in *The Poetry Garden*. *Longing* (1938), his first book of poems, epitomizes the general mood of the age against the backdrop of agony. His work includes *Longing* (1938), *Heart* (1949), *The Sunflower* (1958), *The Pigeons at Songbukdong* (1969) and *Social Reaction* (1972).

### **HOMETHOUGHT**

I did not voluntarily leave; I was driven out.  
When flowers flare on this alien soil, the same as blooming at home,  
my heart sinks, sad and heavy.

White clouds will be drifting about  
over the sea at home;  
the moon will be rising bright  
over the mountains at home.

Let me gather those shells tossed up by the waves.  
I miss those boulders cropped up on the shore  
and dry kelp on the strands;  
those waves at home.

We had hardly been freed from manacles\*  
than the war-storm took the hills by force;  
All of us were torn apart overnight  
from one another; we had no time to say goodbye.

Will waiting with patience bring us together?  
I take the road, but my native landscapes flicker  
blinding my sight.  
O seagulls that pursue me, say something;  
you know where my hometown is.

\* The Japanese colonial rule

**Py n, Y ngno (1898-1961)**

Born in Seoul, graduated from San Jose College, U.S., Py n taught at Ewha Womens University, at S ng-kyunkwan University and at Naval Academy of Korea. Later, he worked with newspapers. In the initial stage of modern Korean poetry, Py n made himself conspicuous by his brilliant wit and rhetoric. He was awarded the 1<sup>st</sup> Cultural Prize (1948). His work includes *The Korean Mind* (1924) and *The Azaleas*, a book of poems in English (1947)

**THE MIND OF KOREA**

Where is the mind of Korea to be sought?  
Where is it to be sought?  
Shall we look into the cave?  
Shall we dredge up the bottom of the sea?  
Shall we clear the thickset branches of willows?  
Or shall we look for heaven's rim far off?  
Where is the mind of Korea to be sought?  
The mind of Korea has lost its direction.  
Sad.