

12. TIGERS! A LOOK AT KOREA'S FOLK STORIES

GRADES: 4-8

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SUBJECT: Literature, Social Studies

TIME REQUIRED: Four class periods

OBJECTIVES:

1. Recognize the tiger as a symbol of Korea.
2. Tell a Korean folk story that includes a tiger.
3. Draw a tiger in a pose expressing the Korean tiger's personality as depicted in folk stories.
4. Identify aspects of the story intended to reflect social, religious, and/or economic norms of Korea.

MATERIALS REQUIRED:

- Stories from the Korean folk tradition about tigers
- Pictures of tigers: photographs and illustrations
- White drawing paper
- White writing paper and pencils, pens, or computers

BACKGROUND:

The purpose of this activity is to introduce students to Korean culture by looking at its folk stories. We will concentrate on stories that include a tiger. We will look at the stories for the lessons they teach us about Korean culture and social norms. We will look for evidence of Confucianism, Shamanism, and Buddhism. We will examine the varied personalities of the tigers in different stories and draw conclusions about the symbol of the tiger in each story. We will see the wonderful sense of humor and fun that the Koreans have with their stories.

PROCEDURE:

1. Begin by looking at a map of Korea, and point out that it is a peninsula divided into North and South Korea by a four-kilometer-wide strip of land called the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Tell the class that the DMZ is uninhabited by people except for Taesong village and that it has become a wildlife refuge. If tigers still lived in Korea, this is probably the only place they could. Check out reports stating where wild tigers live in other parts of Asia (e.g., Russia, northern India, and especially western China).
2. Read the four short stories included in this lesson to the students, each showing a different characteristic of the Korean folk hero tiger. Follow each story with a discussion.
3. Pass out books with other stories about tigers. Some students may already have their ideas and begin writing or drawing. Others will read more Korean folk stories about tigers.
4. Remind the students of certain parameters of the assignment: (1) Writing — The story must be rewritten in his or her own words to show the main points. Details and elaboration may be added as the student sees fit as long as they are consistent with the content and ethos of the story. (2) Drawing — No cartoons. Stripes on the tiger must follow realistic stripes; no straight lines up and down. The pose of the tiger will show his or her personality as reflected in the story. The whole tiger must be drawn. The setting may be included as long as the tiger is the focal point of the artwork, which should be completed with black pen and colored with colored pencils. Shading and detail in the drawing is

encouraged.

5. At the beginning of each class, show or read a work in progress that a student offers to share with the class. Offer positive feedback to the student whose work is shown.
6. Display every students' finished artwork and writing.

EVALUATION:

Each student will write an evaluation of the experience addressing the following questions: What did I learn? What did I like? What will I remember?

ENRICHMENT:

Look for stories about tigers in the literature of China, Russia, Africa, and India. Research the present state of the tiger in the world with regards to its endangered status. Find out where you can see a live tiger in your state or community. Research the statistics on the weight, height, life span, mating habits and diet of the tiger. How many kinds of tigers are there?

REFERENCES (an annotated bibliography):

Kathleen J. Crane Foundation. *Tiger, Burning Bright*. Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym, 1992. This is the single most important reference. The stories are all about tigers. They were translated in honor of an Ewha Womans University professor by her students on the occasion of her retirement.

Han, Suzanne Crowder. *Korean Folk and Fairy Tales*. Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym, 1991. Good reference for stories with tigers as well as ogres, ghosts, dragons, and other fantastic creatures.

Kim, Dong-sung. *Long Long Time Ago, Korean Folk Tales*. Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym, 1997. Beautifully illustrated.

Lee, Kyu-hee. *The Brother and Sister Who Became the Sun and the Moon*. Seoul: Borim, 1996. An off-beat story with unusual illustrations.

Lee, Mi-ae. *Half a Loaf*. Seoul: Borim, 1997. Story of a child who was born deformed but did amazing things in spite of his physical limitations.

Rhee, Nami. *Woodcutter and the Tiger Brother*. Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym, 1999. Wonderful longer version of the story told above.

Yang, Jae-hong. *Five Wonderful Superhero Friends*. Seoul: Borim, 1996. Great story, but as with all of the stories, it needs to be read by the teacher before reading it directly to the students. This one may offend certain sensibilities.



Tigers are a popular subject for paintings in Korea, where they are known as “the gentlemen of nature” and the “kings of the animal kingdom.” Such images are also thought to ward off evil. The painting depicted above is often credited to Shim Sa-jung (1707-1769), a Choson-era scholar, due to the sobriquet written on the upper right corner. However, most historians doubt this attribution, due to problems with dating the painting and as the writing style differs from other known works of Shim. In any case, the painting is a wonderful expression of the majesty of the tiger, with a composition that stresses the animal’s immense power.

behalf until the time comes.

The tiger felt sad as he left the woodcutter to go home to mother safely.

The next morning, a very strange thing happened in the woodcutter’s back yard. A wild pig was left there for them to eat. And from then on at the beginning and the middle of every month there would be

FOUR SHORT STORIES

Story 1: The Woodcutter and the Tiger Brother

(adapted from Rhee)

The tiger as the dutiful son

One day the woodcutter met a terrible tiger on the mountain. The woodcutter was frightened because he thought the tiger was going to eat him.

The woodcutter said to himself, “I will try to trick the tiger so I don’t die.”

The woodcutter went to his knees and bowed to the tiger. He said, “Brother, brother, where have you been?”

The tiger was surprised. “What are you talking about? Why do you call me brother?”

The woodcutter said, “Brother, don’t you remember me? You used to be a human being. Don’t you remember? Let’s go home and ask mother.”

The confused tiger was speechless. The woodcutter went on. “Mother told me about my big brother. She told me about him being lost in the mountains and becoming a tiger. Mother was so deeply hurt that she became sick. She always told me that I had to find my tiger brother who was very tall with a long tail. Her only wish has been to see you again. Oh brother, let’s go home and see mother!”

Listening to this story brought tears to the tiger’s eyes. He almost felt like he was getting memories back that he had lost. “My little brother,” the tiger said, “please, forgive me. I feel so ashamed. I cannot go to see mother like this. I am a big tiger now. I will only frighten her. So please take good care of mother on my

another wild animal left for them to eat.

The woodcutter realized that these were gifts for his mother from the tiger. The woodcutter said to himself, “The tiger really believed me. What a dutiful tiger he is!” He was impressed with the devotion the tiger son had to his mother. The woodcutter served his mother even more faithfully from then on.

Three years later, the woodcutter’s mother died. After that the gifts were not brought any more. Because there had never been a time that the gifts hadn’t arrived since the woodcutter met the tiger, the woodcutter assumed that the tiger knew of his mother’s death.

A few days later, the woodcutter went to the mountain and met five little tigers playing around his mother’s grave. Each baby tiger had a black ribbon on its tail. They ran toward him. “Uncle, we have waited for you. Our father died a few days after grandmother died. He used to be a human like you.”

The woodcutter now became very quiet. He realized now how very dutiful a son his tiger brother had been to their mother. Now her grandchildren were showing respect to her grave.

Story 2: The tiger as a matchmaker (adapted from Kathleen Crane Foundation).

Kim, a man from a high-class family, had a daughter whose name was Ok. She was very beautiful. Her best friend was a commoner boy named Pal-bong. They lived in the same village. The two children were of a different social class, but they played happily as children do.

As they were getting old enough to get married, Kim could see that Ok and Pal-bong were getting serious about each other. “What a waste it would be if my daughter married a commoner,” said Kim to himself. He was determined to marry his daughter to Tol, who was also from a high-class family. He decided that Ok should not play with Pal-bong anymore.

Ok was very unhappy and despaired over losing her best friend. She was a very obedient daughter, however, so she did not disobey her father, even though she wanted to see Pal-bong again. She lost her appetite, and began to lose weight. She was so sad that she lost interest in her life. Her father didn’t worry about Ok’s sadness; he thought that she would be happy once she was married to Tol and would forget about Pal.

Pal-bong was also unhappy. He was angry and sad that there was nothing that he could do to prevent his best friend from marrying someone else. He gritted his teeth, and his eyes became fiery balls of pure fury.

Kim got everything ready for the wedding right away.

The wedding day came. After the wedding, Ok went with Tol to the house that had been prepared for them. She sadly took off her fancy dress and decorations in her hair. She was depressed as she began to face her fate of being married to Tol.

And then! What’s that! A tiger in the house! Everyone in the house was upset and running around to

save themselves and their family members. In the confusion, the tiger escaped with the bride!

Pal-bong did not go to the wedding, of course, so he was at home sleeping. Suddenly, there was a loud thump! When he went to see what it was, he saw Ok lying there on the floor! She was unconscious.

Meanwhile Tol sent out a search party to find the tiger and Ok. They went all over the hills and woods. Some stayed home to console Kim, who was so unhappy at the thought of losing his daughter.

Pal-bong was a man of honesty and responsibility. He reported what happened to Kim right away explaining everything in detail.

On hearing what happened, Kim and the others nodded. "It's the mountain spirit doing matchmaking again," they said. "What else can we do but go along with this match?" Even Tol saw that he could not go against it. All agreed that Pal-bong and Ok could be married.

When she woke up, Ok and Pal-bong were married and lived a long and happy life together.

Story 3: The tiger in disguise (adapted from Kathleen Crane Foundation).

Many years ago when Seoul was a small town, it was surrounded by mountains, woods, and wild animals. After the sun went down, people in the village were afraid to go out for fear that they would be eaten by a tiger.

They found out that if they traveled in a group of one hundred people at a time, and they banged their gongs and drums, the tigers wouldn't attack them. But they realized that they could not always travel in a group of a hundred, so they must have another way.

They called upon General Kang who was known for his ability to solve problems with animals. He wrote a message and asked two men from the village to take it to the Buddhist monk on the top of the hill. The men from the town were afraid to go there because they thought a tiger might get them on their way.

"How can we go up there to the monk? It's too scary! The monk must be friends with the tigers, or they would eat him up because he lives there all by himself." But then they decided that the General wouldn't send them if he did not think it was safe, so they went on their way.

They reached the old monk, who was sitting on a rock picking lice out of his hair. They gave him the message. As soon as he started reading it, the two men ran down the mountains as fast as they could.

They went directly to the General to report that they had delivered the message. The door was open just a crack, and the General was talking to someone. It was the monk with whom they had just left the message! How could an old man get down the mountain faster than they did!

As they watched the General and the monk talking, suddenly the General said, "Take off that disguise right now!" Immediately the monk turned some somersaults in the air.

What landed wasn't a monk, but a tiger! The two men continued to watch through the crack in the door in shock!

The general said in a stern voice, "You may be the king of beasts, but you are still beneath people. I thought you would have enough intelligence not to kill innocent people. How dare you and your kind gobble up humans, the lords of creation! Don't you know that there is divine punishment for those who commit such terrible deeds?"

The tiger hung its head in shame.

The General continued, "I should kill all of you right now!" The General thought for a moment. "No, heaven is merciful. I will give you a chance. You have one week to get yourselves together for an exit from Korea forever. You can go across the river and live on Kollyun Mountain. It's a long trip, but there is a dense forest there and food for you to eat." The tiger cried as the General spoke.

The General continued. "What do you say to this?" he demanded. The tiger did somersaults in the air and became a monk again.

The monk was weeping and hung his head low. "I understand, General, and I shall do as you command."

"I shall see that you have a good meal before you leave. Return to the clearing above the village in one week, and I shall have enough food for all of you to make the journey."

In one week all the tigers met in the clearing and feasted on the pigs that the General had prepared for the tigers. As they got ready to leave, the monk had one last request. "General, we have one pregnant tiger among us. I fear that she is not able to make the trip. Is it possible for her to stay?"

The General, being an understanding man, said, "Yes. Pregnancy is as difficult for tigers as it is for humans. She may stay. After the cubs are born, she must leave, too."

And it is now said that all the tigers that remain in Korea today are descended from the cubs of this female tiger.

DISCUSSION TOPICS:

Story 1: What lesson is this story telling us? How are sons expected to behave toward their mothers? What is the role of the tiger in the story? With respect to Korean culture, why is it significant that the baby tigers visit the mother's grave?

Story 2: What role does the tiger play in the social stratification of society? What is the mountain spirit? How does the tiger make life better or worse for the people in this story? Was there a real tiger or an imagined tiger?

Story 3: What clues did we have that the monk might have been a tiger? Do you think this is the real reason there are few, if any, tigers left in Korea? Do you think this might be a good propaganda story for the General? How do the villagers see the monk?