

“THE PRINCESS AND THE BEGGAR”

A KOREAN FOLKTALE

GRADES: 3-6

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SUBJECT: Language Arts

TIME REQUIRED: Two class periods

OBJECTIVES:

1. Understand the plot and theme of the folktale, “The Princess and the Beggar.”
2. Recognize the value attached to filial piety in Korean families.
3. Dramatize the story.

MATERIALS REQUIRED:

- Copies of “The Princess and the Beggar” (attached)
- Construction paper
- Assortment of clothes for costumes

BACKGROUND:

“The Princess and the Beggar” is a classic tale of a kindhearted princess who shows compassion to a poor beggar despite her family’s objections. When it is time for the princess to wed the son of a nobleman, she refuses and asks to marry the beggar instead, which her father allows, even though it is seen as shameful. She marries the beggar and teaches him to read, write and become a fine hunter. Not knowing who he is, the king witnesses the beggar hunt and recite poetry. The king is very impressed with this skilled hunter and scholar and asks to meet the esteemed wife who taught him these skills. The king is amazed and delighted to learn that this man’s wife is his own daughter.

PROCEDURES:

1. Have the students read the folktale silently.
2. As a group, discuss the story’s plot, characters and theme of filial piety.
3. Conclude that the daughter is the true reason for the beggar’s success and esteem.
4. Divide the class into groups of six to seven and have them choose which characters to act out and make costumes for.
5. Allow time for students to practice acting out the folktale.
6. Have the students perform folktale as a skit.

EVALUATION:

- Evaluate each student on her/his contribution to the discussion of the story.
- Evaluate how they work together to create costumes and practice acting out the play.
- Assess the final performance on the students’ ability to speak clearly and convey the theme of the folktale.

RESOURCES:

Ha, Tae-Hung. "Pabo Ondal and the Weeping Princess." In *Tales from the Three Kingdoms*, 32-37. Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1970.

PABO ONDAL AND THE WEeping PRINCESS

During the reign of Pyongwon-wang (the 25th sovereign of Koguryō) there lived a grotesque looking youth whose name was Ondal. He lived in a low hut with his mother and went to cut wood in the forests, and sometimes wandered about in the streets, begging for food from door to door in his ragged dress and worn-out straw sandals. He looked so odd and awkward that all people stared at him and laughed as they called him Pabo Ondal (in Korean it means “Ondal the fool”) and his family name rang throughout the country even in the king’s palace.

Now the king had a favorite daughter who always wept and cried, whether in joy or sorrow, from the hour of her birth.

“She is more beautiful in her weeping face, like a dew-pearled sea rose in the sunrise. None but a gallant noble by his kisses warm like the sunlight can dry her tear blurred eyes to sparkle and smile on the first night of her marriage,” said her mother, the queen, and all the court ladies.

But the king shook his head and said frequently, “My daughter, a weeping princess cannot become the wife of a nobleman. You had better take Ondal for your husband.”

When the princess turned 16 her royal father said to her:

“My daughter, I have picked a fine young man in the noble Ko family for your husband, and I command you to prepare for your happy wedding.”

“My royal father, you make me more sad than ever,” the princess said, weeping. “You told me to marry Ondal all the time. Your solemn words have been ringing in my ears and the name of Ondal is deeply carved in my heart. How can a king change his words and how can a princess change her heart? I have already promised to take Ondal for my husband by a pledge in my soul. I cannot take another man. I am sorry but I cannot obey your command.”

“Indeed, I said it for a joke. But a princess cannot marry a beggar,” laughed the king.

“No, a king never jokes to his people, much less to his daughter about such a serious question as marriage,” replied the princess.

“If you do not obey my command,” the king said angrily. “You are not my daughter. Get out of the palace and go to Ondal or any beggar you like.”

The princess burst into loud tears. She opened the jewelry box in her cabinet and picked up rings, necklaces, bracelets and other personal ornaments of gold and precious stones. She packed them in a kerchief, tied it to her sash under her skirt and left the palace unattended.

She bent her timid steps toward the lonely hut of Ondal by asking the way now and then and at last she found it on the outskirts of a green forest. She entered the silent hut through a swinging straw mat door and saw an old blind woman sitting in the room by the dim light of pine-oil lamp.

“Madam, peace to his house. If I am not mistaken, this is Ondal’s house and you are his mother. May I have the honor to ask you where I can see your son?” asked the princess.

Ondal’s mother was surprised. “My son is a poor fellow, not worthy to be seen by a noble lady,” she said. “Judging from your fragrant scent like that of peony, and your soft hands like cotton-balls, you are from an aristocratic family. My son is gone to the hills to gather wild fruits and roots to satisfy our hunger. Perhaps he will be late in coming home tonight.”

The princess climbed up the hill and met Ondal, who looked at her with wondering eyes.

“I am the Weeping Princess. The king, my royal father, told me to take you and here I am to live with you as your wife,” she said.

Ondal was even more surprised than his mother had been. “Weeping Princess! Ah, I have heard of your story. But a real princess cannot be so unmaidenly and come to the hill at night and ask a bachelor like me to live as husband and wife. No, you are not a princess, but you are the ghost of a maiden who died of unrequited love. Away! Do not follow me. Be afraid of my hard fist.”

Ondal ran down the hill and closed the door in her face. The princess passed the night outside under the eaves of Ondal’s hut, and early on the following morning she told Ondal and his mother what had happened in the palace and why she determined to come and live with Ondal.

“Princess,” said Ondal “I apologize to you for having treated you so rudely last night, and how I am greatly honored to welcome you to my humble home, but. . . .”

“But how can a princess live in this poor hut?” Ondal’s mother asked.

“I will cook food and weave cloth,” the princess said. “I will even pluck cotton-balls and raise silkworms while Ondal grows millet and gathers wood. I will make a soft and warm silk dress for mother to wear. I will feed mother with rice while Ondal and I eat millet. If a poor family of three can live in peace and love why should it envy another family of wealth and nobility?”

Ondal and his mother were deeply moved by these words. So the wedding ceremony was conducted then and there with a bowl of cold water placed on a low table in the middle of the

room. Two strands of red and blue threads crossing each other on the bowl represented the symbol of the happy union as the royal bride and Ondal pledged their truth by bowing to each other three times.

A few days later the princess went to a jeweler in the market and sold her bracelets, and with the money she bought rice and millet fields, a plowing cow, furniture and kitchenware. She also helped her husband buy a horse and encouraged him to have target practice with bow and arrow on horseback. Ondal was a born general and in a few months he became a master of military arts.

Soon the princess said to Ondal, "My husband, today is the third day of the third month, on which deer and wild boar shot down in hunting are offered as sacrifices to heavens, mountains and rivers by annual custom of Koguryo, so you must go hunting on your horse to the hills in Nangnang. All the courtiers and generals of the five tribes are participating in the hunting contest, so you are expected to join these noble hunters."

Ondal spurred his horse and rode it to the hunting ground, where he won hunted the most animals and won the contest. The king, who presided over the hunting contest, called him to come near and gave him the first prize in recognition of his marksmanship. The king was surprised to know that it was Ondal.

At this time, Wuti of Hou-Chou conquered Liaotung and invaded Koguryo in Manchuria, but the dauntless king of Koguryo regrouped his defeated troops and made a counter-attack. Ondal stood in the vanguard and dashed on horseback into the enemy positions, where he cut off a score of heads and engaged the enemy general in a fierce battle.

The Koguryo hosts regained strength by the martial spirit and model valor of Ondal and, charging against the barbarian invaders with a thunderous warcry, put them to flight in great confusion.

When peace was restored, all the generals of Koguryo recommended Ondal to the throne as the warrior of the first merit. So the king praised Ondal for valor with a loud cry, "Are you my real son-in-law and good husband of the Weeping Princess?" Ondal said that he was.

The king received Ondal in audience amidst court-music and conferred knighthood on him and made him a favorite in the court.