

# ANCESTOR WORSHIP

**GRADES:** 3-6

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**SUBJECT:** Religion, Social Studies

**TIME REQUIRED:** Two class periods

## **OBJECTIVES:**

1. Understand the reasons for ancestor worship in Korean society.
2. Compare and contrast Korean ancestor worship to our respect for the dead in the United States.
3. Participate in a classroom ritual for the honoring of our ancestors.

## **MATERIALS REQUIRED:**

- Pictures of a Korean ancestor worship ritual
- Pictures of students' ancestors
- Flowers
- Table for displaying pictures of ancestors

## **BACKGROUND:**

The ritual of ancestor worship in Korean culture is based on the belief of the continuity of the family. It demonstrates respect for previous generations in the family line. The ritual is performed at the home of a family's eldest son, who bears the traditional responsibility for performing necessary customs and rituals, such as recitations and offerings of food. These ceremonies are performed on New Year's Day, on the anniversary of the ancestor's death and on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the eighth lunar month, called *Ch'usok* (a holiday comparable to Thanksgiving in America). On *Ch'usok*, Koreans perform an ancestor worship ritual with an offering of food from new crops, visit the tombs of their immediate ancestors and trim the plants around the tombs.

There are similarities between Korean ancestor worship and the American way of showing respect for the deceased, especially in the Catholic religion. Veterans Day and Memorial Day are specific holidays on which we visit the graves of veterans and the graves of family members to place flowers or a flag. A recitation of prayers and a sharing of memories to express our gratitude and respect are ways to confirm our belief in an afterlife.

## **PROCEDURES:**

1. Explain the custom of Korean ancestor worship using pictures.
2. Discuss our reason for placing flowers on graves of the deceased and for offering prayers for them.
3. Compare Korean and American rituals of showing respect for ancestors.
4. Assign students to bring in pictures of some of their ancestors.

5. The next day, perform a ritual of placing flowers before the pictures, allowing each student to share something about her/his ancestor and recite a prayer of thanksgiving for each. (If it is possible, the class could visit a cemetery to place flowers and pray.)

**EVALUATION:**

- Evaluate students based on their contributions to class discussion and follow-through in bringing a picture of an ancestor. (They may draw a picture if they don't have a photo.)
- Assess students on their cooperation and participation during the ritual.

**RESOURCES:**

Clark, Donald N. *Culture and Customs of Korea*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000.

Kim, Yong-duk. "Ancestral Rites." *Korean Cultural Heritage*, Vol. 4. Seoul: Korea Foundation, 1997.