

# EXPLORING KOREAN CULTURE THROUGH CONTEMPORARY ART

**GRADES:** 9-12

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**SUBJECT:** Social Studies, Art

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

## OBJECTIVES:

1. Students will learn and appreciate the importance of creative cultural expression in documenting history.
2. By reviewing and studying a wide range of modern Korean films, music, art, mixed media and essays, students will gain a thorough understanding of the social, political, economic and ideological forces that have contributed to Korean history and identity.
3. Students will analyze and interpret primary and secondary documents.
4. Students will compare and contrast the political, cultural, social, artistic and economic characteristics of contemporary Korean culture to those of neighboring Asian countries as well as Western civilizations.
5. Students will synthesize a variety of multimedia-related documents on Korean culture and produce their own creative visual project that evokes an important cultural characteristic of Korea or something related to the Korean experience in the United States.

## MATERIALS REQUIRED:

- DVD player
- DVD copy of *My Teacher Mr. Kim* by Director Jang Gyu-seong
- CD Player
- Music CD: *Crying Nut* vol. 4. CD. KM Culture (December 2002).
- Excerpts from: Rhie, Won-bok. *Korea Unmasked: In Search of the Country, the Society and the People*. Gimm-Young International (October 2002).
- Handouts of photojournalism profiles of Koreans from the book: Lee, Je-hoon. *Glimpse of Seoul*. Seoul: JoongAng Media. (see References)

## BACKGROUND:

Since this project will emphasize contemporary visual expressions of culture and society, our primary texts will include the comic documentary publication, *Korea Unmasked*, written by Won-bok Rhie, one of Korea's most famous cartoonists and a professor of graphic design at Toksong Women's University in Seoul. Rhie's book provides compelling historical, religious, cultural and political analysis in a visually stimulating way that will make this assignment appealing for students interested in creative expression and documentary. Won-Bok Rhie's introduction to *Korea Unmasked* will be provided as a handout at the start of this lesson. In his forward, Rhie states:

It has been some time since Korea, once known as the "hermit kingdom" emerged from obscurity and transformed itself into an economic powerhouse. Unfortunately, however, despite its status as the 11<sup>th</sup> largest trading nation in the world, Korea continues to be

misunderstood by the outside world, which tends to pass judgment on the country solely based on the manifestations of the Korean attitude, but without taking into account the mindset that drives that very attitude. In fact, to a foreigner, Korea is an enigma, and it is often difficult, for example, to distinguish Korea from China or Japan. I believe that this is partly attributable to the dearth of English materials on Korea and its society and people. It is my hope that the English addition of this book will help such an audience better understand the inner workings of the Korean mindset and spark more interest in Korea. It is also my hope that this book will help young overseas Koreans in establishing their identities as people of Korean descent and in understanding what it means to be Korean, especially in this day and age.

Through a variety of mediums including music, animation, film, photojournalism and fine art we hope our art and multicultural issues offer students a better understanding of the “inner workings” of contemporary Korea.

## **PROCEDURES:**

### Introduction

Students will be given a brief history and geography presentation on modern day Korea. They are to supplement this information with their own research (from the World Wide Web or library periodicals) and will be given Handouts 1 and 2 to be read as homework. They are to bring to the next class a two-paragraph summary on modern Korea describing its economy, politics, religion, history and geography.

### Class Period One

Using an enlarged map of the Korean Peninsula as a backdrop, the class will be divided into five groups by counting out from one through five. The groups will then be subdivided into five categories: economics, politics, religion, history and geography. They will coordinate their individual summaries and present, as a group, what they have learned about their respective categories. Following these presentations there will be a group discussion on Handouts 1 and 2. Both handouts are unique visual mediums for presenting historical and informative aspects of Korean life and culture. As a class, discuss the nuances as well as the pros and cons of portraying culture and history through visuals. Assign Handout 3 (“Punk Rock Comes to Korea” written by Stephen Epstein) to be read for homework. In addition to the short article, students will be encouraged to view the website [www.kpopmusic.com](http://www.kpopmusic.com), a site dedicated to the current music scene in Korea. Ask students to print some materials from the Web site.

### Class Period Two

The class will be divided into two groups consisting of students who want to discuss the article and those who visited the Web site. The teacher will have the following review questions on the board: How is the popular Korean music scene different or similar to that in America? What are some of the social issues and concerns addressed by the current punk rock music in Korea? Are these issues and concerns similar to those shared by American youth? Towards the end of the discussion play some tracks from *Crying Nut 4* and have students discuss their reaction to the music. Also pass the CD artwork around the room so students can observe the visual liner notes and graphics. Assign articles “The New Golden Age of Korean Cinema: Modern Korean Films

are Well Worth Seeking Out,” published in *MovieMaker* magazine, and “Korean Animation: Fighting Spectacle with Substance” published in *Koreana Magazine*.

#### Class Periods Three and Four

Following a short discussion on the Korean film article, students will watch the film *My Teacher Mr. Kim* over the next two class periods. They will also be asked to submit a one paragraph outline on day two detailing their final project. They have the option of writing a music review of a Korean album, creating a photojournalism piece on a Korean American or on someone they know who has been to Korea (anything related to the country or culture), reviewing a Korean film or writing a piece on Korea. They will be given a handout on local Korean cultural events and resources.

#### Class Period Five

Have students present their projects to the class. They should be encouraged to use technology and be visually creative.

#### **EVALUATION:**

Grades will be based on the students’ degree of creativity, cooperation, research, participation and comprehension as exhibited in the final projects.

#### **REFERENCES:**

Epstein, Stephen. “Punk Rock comes to Korea.” *Koreana* (Spring 2000).

Lee, Je-hoon. *Glimpse of Seoul*. Seoul: JoongAng Media.

Park, In-ha. “Korean Animation: Fighting Spectacle with Substance.” *Koreana* (Spring 2003).

Rhie, Won-bok. *Korea Unmasked: In Search of the Country, the Society and the People*. Gimm-Young International (October 2002).

Smith, Lenny. “The New Golden Age of Korean Cinema.” *MovieMaker* 44.

Sullivan, Meg. “Searching for Punk Rock in Korea.” *UCLA Today* (October 2002).

*Crying Nut* vol. 4. CD. KM Culture (December 2002).