

THE DISAPPEARING TIGER

GRADES: 4-12

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SUBJECT: Social Studies, Geography

TIME REQUIRED: Two to three class periods

OBJECTIVES:

- Learn Korean values and culture through folktales
- Identify similarities and differences between Korean folktales and those of other cultures
- Analyze the reasons behind the disappearance of the tiger from the Korean Peninsula
- Translate a Korean folktale into “Story Theater”

MATERIALS REQUIRED:

- Handout: “The Tiger and the Three Wise Rabbits” (attached)
- Background information (under Resources)

BACKGROUND:

“Animals of all kinds feature in rituals, legends and folk tales throughout world culture, reflecting the curiosity humans have always had about other species with which they share the earth ... and the desire to share the remarkable powers of other species.” (David Pickering, *Animals: A Dictionary of Folklore*. New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1999:10-11.)

Like many cultures around the world, Koreans have a strong tradition of storytelling. Many Korean tales are about tigers that had roamed the Korean Peninsula long ago. The tiger was once an integral part of Korea’s ecosystem. This lesson explores the ecology of Korean through folktales.

Tigers have a special place in Korean culture. Korea was known to have many tigers living in its mountains. There are numerous Korean folktales, fairy tales and proverbs containing tigers. Korean tigers had long brown bodies and black lines from head to tail. According to historical accounts, tigers once roamed in the Seoul area which, during the Koryŏ kingdom, was deep in the middle of forests. According to the founding myth of Tan’gun, a tiger and a bear wanted to become humans. God told them to stay in a cave for a hundred days eating only garlic and mugwort. The bear stayed long enough and become a woman but the tiger could not endure the wait. Later the bear who became a woman married the god’s son and gave birth to a son, Tan’gun, the founder of Korea. Koreans think of tigers as courageous, fearless, majestic and royal animals. Koreans decorated their front gates with either pictures of tigers or the letter *ho* (which symbolized tigers) and covered the top of a bride’s carriage with the tiger blanket, in order to protect newlyweds from evil spirits. Korean women used to wear decorative brooches with tiger claws to protect themselves from bad spirits. Generals and rich patriarchs used to sit on pillows embroidered with tiger images. Throughout their many cultural manifestations, tigers were associated with power and courage. So pervasive was the tiger in Korean culture that to this day, many Korean parents give their male children names with the syllable *ho* (tiger).

PROCEDURE:

1. Have students research definitions of folktale.

2. Divide the class into small groups of three to four students.
3. Assign each group a different folktale to read and analyze for Korean cultural traits.
4. Ask students to find similar folktales from the United States or any other culture they know.
5. Use questions such as the following to stimulate discussion: What is the folktale's theme? What lesson or moral is being taught?
6. Cast the students for parts in a story theater production of the folktale *The Tiger and the Three Wise Rabbits* (Handout) Cast the remaining students as scenery and effects. Give narrators and oral readers time to rehearse their lines and work on their expression.
7. Have students perform the folktale for another class.

EVALUATION:

Evaluate students according to their participation, the originality of their ideas, their analysis of the folktales and quality of their oral presentations.

ENRICHMENT:

- As a culminating activity, have the students write their own animal folktales based on elements of those tales learned in the lesson. (For this task, the students could work in small groups or with partners.) Either in class or as homework, the students should write a rough draft, edit the draft and write a final version including illustrations. The students should then read their folktales aloud to other groups or act out their folktales in class.
- Review the above statement about how animals are important to folktales, and ask them to make comparisons between the roles animals play in helpful animal tales and the roles they play in their ecosystems.
- Introduce students to the concept of "keystone species" from www.bagheera.com. Keystone species are ecologically helpful animals that maintain balance in their ecosystems. Protecting keystone species is a priority for conservationists because the loss of these species causes destructive ecosystem changes. The keystone species page includes links to case studies of specific keystone animals, one of which is the tiger.
- Construct a diagram that illustrates how a keystone animal supports other plants and animals in its ecosystem. Then, remove or cross out that animal as if it were extinct, and ask students what would happen to the "tower" of animals and plants that rested on the keystone species. For example, you might place people on top of fish on top of kelp beds on top of sea otters, the respective keystone species in that system. If the otters were removed, sea urchins would move in, destroying the kelp beds, which would eliminate the fish, which would leave less food for people. Remove or cross out the kelp beds, fish and people as you go, in order to illustrate the effects of extinction.

RESOURCES:

Kim So-un, *Korean Children's Favorite Stories*. Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 2004

Carol J. Farley, *Korea: Land of the Morning Calm*. Minneapolis: Dillon Press, Inc., 1991.

Keystone Species:

<http://www.bagheera.com>

Four Korean Folktales:

<http://park.org/Korea/Pavilions/PublicPavilions/KoreaImage/hangul/litera/index.htm>

More Information about Korean Tigers:

<http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngexplorer/0311/articles/mainarticle.html>

HANDOUT: "THE TIGER AND THE THREE WISE RABBITS"



Ancient Korean Tale Retold by Carol J. Farley, 1991. (While many American tales begin with the words, "Once upon a time," most Korean stories begin with the words, "When tigers smoked long pipes...")

When tigers smoked long pipes, there were three rabbits in a large forest. They lived in constant fear of a huge tiger who often hunted nearby. One day, they decided to have a talk with the tiger.

"Uncle Tiger," the bravest one said, "what makes you think you have the right to chase us? All day, every day, we must worry. We could not enjoy our dinner in the bamboo garden in the spring because we feared you might pounce on us. We could not sit beside the forest pond in the summer and admire the lotus blossoms because you might have been lurking behind a tree. We can scarcely sleep these cool autumn nights because of trembling with fear of you. Why can't you live in peace and harmony with us?"

The tiger waved his paws. "What a foolish question!" he roared. "I must chase you because I must eat!"

"But couldn't you eat the fish?" the smallest rabbit asked. "They don't enjoy the bamboo grove or the lotus blossoms or the beautiful mountain scenery. Perhaps they wouldn't mind having you chase them."

The tiger swished his long tail. He ran his paw under the chin string of his fine horsehair hat. "But how would I chase them? I run on land. They live in the water."

"We have a plan," the wisest rabbit said. We can help you catch a whole bundle of those tasty fish. All you have to do is to sit right by the creek with your beautiful tail dangling in the water. We will lead the fish upstream to you while you relax and smoke your favorite pipe. When they reach you, you will feel them. Pull your tail up quickly, and you will have dinner attached to it."

The tiger, who was a vain, lazy fellow, switched his long tail back and forth again. Yes, indeed, it was a beautiful tail. No fish would be able to resist its beauty. And sitting beside the creek would certainly be easier than having to run all over the forest for his dinner. "I'll do it," he agreed.

Happily, he waved to the three rabbits as they began chasing the fish. "Be certain you sit quietly, Uncle Tiger," they called back, "or you will frighten those tasty fish away. Be patient and allow us time to fetch you a mighty bundle." As they disappeared around a bend and into the forest, the tiger dropped his tail into the cold water and took out his long pipe.

Soon his beautiful tail felt cold and heavy, but he continued to sit quietly. It would never do to have those unworthy rabbits see that he was unable to be patient. Still, though, he felt as cold as the stones on the mountains. As a fierce wind began to blow, he felt hungry, too. He grew hungrier as light snowflakes began to fall. Soon, the flakes grew large enough to drown the ashes in his pipe.

Finally, the sky darkened, and the stars began to twinkle. The tiger removed his cold pipe from his mouth, and stared up at them. He switched his whiskers, listening to strange noises. Were the stars whispering messages across the sky? Or was someone laughing in the forest? He pricked up his ears. Yes! The noises were coming from the forest! Who would dare laugh at a creature as fine as he?

The tiger angrily jumped up, and his tail jerked him back down. Impatiently, he yanked on it. Much to his surprise, he discovered it was stuck in the creek, frozen solid in the ice. He gave a mighty roar, but its sound was barely heard above the laughter of the many smaller beasts of the forest. The three rabbits had outwitted him. Until the ice melted in the spring, they were free to roam the forest without fear.