

**ECHOES OF THE WHITE GIRAFFE:
A STUDY GUIDE TO SOOK NYUL CHOI'S NOVEL**

GRADE LEVELS: 6-8

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SUBJECT: Cultural Studies, Social Studies

TIME REQUIRED: One class period to introduce the novel and its background and 2-3 weeks for students to work on independent study/reading.

OBJECTIVE:

1. Learn more about how events occurring in modern world history affected Korea
2. Learn specific cultural aspects of the Korean people
3. Learn how geography impacted Korean history
4. Connect quotes from historical fiction to historical events
5. Use critical thinking and processing skills to summarize past events and make predictions for the future

MATERIALS REQUIRED:

- Oh, Young Jin. "Two Koreas Yet to Cross Mine Field to Conclude Sub Incident." *The Korea Times*, 4 July 1998.
- Choi, Sook Nyul. *Echoes of the White Giraffe*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1993.
- Choi, Sook Nyul. *Year of Impossible Goodbyes*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991. [Epilogue]

PROCEDURE:

1. Begin by playing the game, "Lost Names" (Kim, Richard. *Lost Names: Scenes from a Korean Boyhood*. University of California Press, 1998.). As the students enter the classroom give them each a piece of paper with a new name written on it. Tell them that the name on the paper is their new name, and they are forbidden to use any name but their assigned ones and are forbidden to speak in English. Explain this to them in English, and then begin speaking and explaining to them in another language, if possible. Continue this until you make a point and then explain to them that this is what happened to the boys and girls in Korea during the Japanese occupation. (A list of possible Japanese names are included at the end of this lesson).
2. It is suggested to read aloud the historical fiction piece *Year of Impossible Goodbyes* by Sook Nyul Choi. Write the names of the characters and setting of the story on the board. Pass the quotes out to the students and have them read them, and let the rest of the class try to place the context of the quote to tell the story.
3. Read the epilogue from *Year of Impossible Goodbyes*.
4. Pass out the map of Korea and orient the students to the placement of Korea in Asia and the location of key places on the map such as P'yongyang, Seoul and the 38th Parallel.
5. Read the notes about the author, Sook Nyul Choi to the class. Sook Nyul Choi was born in P'yongyang, North Korea. She immigrated to the United States to pursue her college education. After graduation, she taught in New York City schools for almost

twenty years. She now resides in Cambridge, Massachusetts. On the reason she began *Year of Impossible Goodbyes*, Choi reports, "having lived through this turbulent period of Korean history, I wanted to share my experiences. So little is known about my homeland, its rich culture and its sad history. My love for my native country and for my adopted country prompted me to write this book to share some of my experiences and foster greater understanding."

6. Pass out their units and novels and have them begin by reading the introduction to the book.
7. Review the book *Echoes of the White Giraffe*, chapter by chapter, using the questions below.
8. Upon answering the questions, have students write a letter to a friend and recommend the book *Echoes of the White Giraffe*. Cite examples from the text in your letter.

EVALUATION:

- Grades should be based on the students' preparation in answering the questions, comprehension of the story, and written assignments.

ENRICHMENT:

- Do a biographic sketch of the author Sook Nyul Choi.
- Panmunjom is the area that separates North and South Korea. Many hostile activities still occur there. Have the students do research on the internet to find a current event that emphasizes some of these problems.
- Interview a senior citizen who lived during the Korean War. If possible, interview more than one person and get different perspectives.
- Look at a map of Korea and find the following places on the map: Seoul, Inchon, Kwangju, Pusan, the 38th Parallel and Panmunjom. Write a short paragraph on each place to explain their importance.
- How is the 38th Parallel in Korea similar to the old Mason-Dixon Line in the United States?
- Read the newspaper article, "Two Koreas Yet to Cross Mine Field to Conclude Sub Incident," from *The Korea Times* dated 4 July 1998, and reflect on the struggle between North and South Korea as it exists today. Summarize South Korea's management of this crisis.

STUDY GUIDE FOR *ECHOES OF THE WHITE GIRAFFE*

Chapter 1

1. Summarize the necessity of building a new school.
2. Explain the sentence, "Teacher Yun and a few other teachers from Ewha School in Seoul had managed to flee to Pusan, and they were anxious to teach refugee students like Bokhi and me."
3. Find Pusan on a map. Describe its location in relation to Seoul.
4. Explain how Inchun and Sookan bought their new house. Do they seem to get along as brother and sister?
5. How would you react if your school was destroyed? Describe the satisfaction you might have once felt on the completion of a project.
6. Where does their mother work? What are some of her duties?
7. How are the refugees' lives different from those who permanently live in Pusan?

8. "I stared at the steep mountain before me. How ominously it loomed above us." What does ominous mean in this sentence?
9. What does Nuna mean? Why does Inchun call Sookan by that name?
10. Instead of crying and being upset after Mother slid down the mountain, they all laugh. Why do you think the author wrote the scene this way?
11. Describe the scenes on "refugee mountain" as the small family climbs to their shack at the top.
12. "I pretended that the ugly huts were special guest houses for the stars that came to visit Earth for the night." Why does Sookan describe her mountainside home this way?
13. Despite the apparently difficult times this family faces, they still seem cheerful. Would you react the same way? Why or why not?

Chapter 2

1. Describe how the community responds to the shouting poet. What does Sookan think of this "bold and enchanting man"?
2. Sookan climbs to the top of the mountain and shouts back to the poet. How do Mother and Inchun respond to this?
3. Sookan complains that her family is not perfect anymore. Why is this so?
4. The author describes the scene at the well as, "...bold heroines waging a daily battle." How would you describe it?
5. What are Sookan's duties at the church? What are Inchun's?
6. Explain this sentence, "But I think Inchun was tone deaf." You may need to go back and read page 19 again.
7. If you were Sookan, how would you treat your younger brother?

Chapter 3

1. Sookan seems to relate many things to music and poetry. Give one example.
2. The author ties historical events by having Sookan describe her first day in Pusan. Summarize her memories.
3. Explain how the word "refugee" can elicit different emotions depending on how it is used. Use an example from this chapter.
4. Why is Sookan uncomfortable when she first meets Haerin? How does Haerin respond?
5. What common interests would eventually bring Sookan and Haerin closer?
6. Describe the new character Junho. Can you foresee any problems with this character?
7. Why does Sookan like singing in Latin?
8. How does Sookan's and Junho's singing talent bring them closer together?
9. Sookan has an uneasy feeling about Haerin. Why might that be so?
10. Describe how the author reveals that Mother is an artist. Why is Haerin surprised that they do not bring Mother's artwork with them?
11. How does Junho make Sookan feel?
12. Junho and Haerin seem truly interested in Sookan and her past life. Write one experience of her life that Sookan shares with them.

Chapter 4

1. The school children from Seoul are eager to return to their new "Ewha School." How do the students and the community support the opening of the Ewha School in Pusan?
2. What are Sookan's favorite subjects? What are Bokhi's favorite subjects?

3. Why are the students so eager to start attending school again?
4. Some of the refugees have problems adjusting to their new lives. Describe Bokhi's problems. What is Sookan's solution to her problem?
5. How do you think people got separated during the bombing? What does Mother do to try to reunite people?
6. How did Bokhi's elation in finding her Uncle Lee Changil turn to disaster?
7. Describe how Bokhi responds to such news. How would you help your friend at a time like this?
8. "Chateau de sable." How does this phrase describe how Bokhi is feeling?
9. What is the significance of the black armband?
10. What does Bokhi want to be when she grows up? What does Sookan want to be? Do you think it is still possible for them to accomplish their dreams?

Chapter 5

1. How does the refugee mountain change over time?
2. Sookan sees the mountain differently when she returns from spending time at the seashore with Bokhi. Describe what she sees as she returns home.
3. What does Mother tell Sookan about the shouting poet? How does Mother try to comfort her? Describe their plan to honor him.
4. Baik Rin is the poet's name. Reread the part that compares the folklore with Baik Rin. What is odd about this name for the shouting poet? What made sense?
5. How does the planting of seeds symbolize life?
6. In this situation the poet ignores his own pain to give people hope. Have you ever known anyone else who was also unselfish?

Chapter 6

1. How does the weather match Sookan's mood? Why do you think Sookan reacts so strongly to the death of the poet?
2. Summarize how Sookan and Junho's relationship begins to change?
3. Why does Sookan have so many mixed feelings about Junho's visit? What is his excuse for a visit?
4. What special talents does Mother have? How does this add to their lives?
5. How do you think Sookan feels about Junho being dishonest? Might this be a warning for her?
6. How do Junho and Father Lee honor the shouting poet?
7. What is ironic about people still finding time to look for beauty during the war?
8. How do you know Junho understands Sookan by the gift he gives her? What is it?
9. How would you react if a boy or girl that you liked gave you a special gift? Why does Sookan respond the way she does?
10. Mother seems to enjoy Junho's company and invites him for tea. She suddenly seems so sad. Why?
11. How does the continual rain save their afternoon?
12. How does the author introduce Sookan's dog Luxy? Why does the family not speak of Luxy?
13. Throughout the book the author weaves the history of the times into the story. How does she do so during the discussion about Luxy?
14. Who bombs Seoul? What is your opinion of why they did this?
15. What does Mother think happened to her three sons and husband?
16. Sookan and Junho share their plans for the future after high school. What are Sookan's plans?
17. How will Sookan's plans help her and her people? Why is Junho not as confident?
18. "A truce is being negotiated." How will this affect Mother and her family?

19. What countries are fighting over Seoul?

Chapter 7

1. How does the outing turn out? Why is it planned?
2. Describe the contrast of the army base and the picnic.
3. How does this chapter show that Haerin was forever thinking about music?
4. Why does Junho ask Haerin to practice the duet?
5. The author still conveys the feeling that communication between a boy and a girl would be inappropriate. How does Junho work around this?
6. Why is Sookan so confused? What is her dilemma? What would you do?
7. If Sookan had shared her problems with Bokhi how could things have worked out differently?
8. Why does Sookan eat such a large dinner? Did the plan work?

Chapter 8

1. What problems does the photograph create for Junho and Sookan?
2. How can lying about something small lead to more betrayal?
3. Mother waits until Inchun leaves the house to reveal the secret. How does Sookan feel when Mother tells her she would not be going to choir practice anymore?
4. How does Dr. and Mrs. Min react to the secret between Sookan and Junho? They seem to react in different ways. Why is Mrs. Min afraid?
5. Do you think that Sookan's mother understands the actions of Sookan and Junho? Why or why not?
6. Explain why you think Junho wants to become a priest?
7. How does Sookan's family deal with this embarrassment?
8. If you were Junho or Sookan what would you do to cope with this situation?

Chapter 9

1. Summarize how the armistice would change everyone's life.
2. How do the teachers prepare the students for the end of the war?
3. What is the result of the division along the 38th Parallel?
4. What does Sookan mean when she says, "Would my life ever be orderly enough to afford me the chance for a simple goodbye?"
5. What do Mother, Inchun and Sookan take with them as they return to Seoul?
6. Sookan looks back over the past 2½ years of her life on the mountain and says goodbye. What purpose do you think this reflection has on the understanding of the plot?
7. How does Sookan remember the shouting poet?
8. "The small family was filled with uncertainty as they boarded the train." How would you feel?
9. Junho takes a brave step in coming to the train station to say goodbye to Sookan. How might this be the first step in a new life for him?
10. How do the words in the poem express his feelings?
11. "I held the lily and the poem to my heart, and concluded that my life was not a series of sand castles." What does Sookan mean by this?
12. Why does mother suddenly appear worried and "pensive" on the train?
13. Describe the scene as the family leaves the train station and heads into the streets of Seoul.
14. How does the author paint a picture of hope for Korea?

Chapter 10

1. Describe the welcome home scene. What is missing from the happy scene?

2. Describe what Jaechun's job is during the war. Why? What do Hanchun and Hyunchun do during the war?
3. How does the family try to rebuild their life?
4. How do Teacher Yun and the other school officials help to restore a sense of normalcy for the children?
5. Why do you think mother works so hard looking through the piles of rubble in the yard?
6. What has become of Luxy?
7. What does Mother do with the jewelry she finds?
8. How do you know that Teacher Yun and Bokhi are close and supportive people in Sookan's life?
9. Describe how their lives continued. What is Sookan's life ambition? How do Father Lee and her family feel about this dream?
10. What plan does Sookan have to bring Hyunchun and Bokhi closer together?

Chapter 11

1. How is the family putting their life back together after the war?
2. How do Sundays serve as a way to unite the family and heal the community?
3. Why is Sookan so restless with her life?
4. Who is the surprise visitor? How has he changed? What is the reason for his visit? How have his plans changed?
5. "We'll always be friends. We're taking the same path, you know you will eventually go to the convent and I will be at the seminary." How was this conversation both happy and sad?
6. Why does Sookan not say what she really wants to say to Junho? How does Sookan's family respect her privacy and her feelings?
7. The author's craft is very evident in this chapter. She describes the scenes using all five senses. Give two examples.

Chapter 12

1. What steps does Sookan take to insure that she would travel overseas to study in the United States?
2. Reread the test-taking scene on page 125. What would be the most difficult part of testing?
3. How does Sookan's family react when her name appears on the bulletin board announcing she has passed the exam?
4. Describe her farewell party. Why is this event so important?
5. What do you think is the hardest part about leaving her family?
6. What is a *Hanbok*? If you are not sure, find out.
7. How would visiting Junho at Dongkuk University ruin her reputation? How does mother help her solve this problem?
8. How does their mission of saying goodbye to Junho Min become so complicated?
9. "Mother nervously looked down at her clasped hands. I was not a good daughter to make her go through all of this for me." Why is Sookan so upset in this scene? Have you ever done something embarrassing that your parents had to help you resolve?
10. Sookan and her mother are not granted permission to say goodbye to Junho. Why do you think they are not allowed to see him?

Chapter 13

1. How do Sookan's family and friends respond to her leaving for America?

2. Why is Inchun's present so special?
3. "The plane taxied away and I watched all of them wave their handkerchiefs until they looked like dancing snowflakes. I was suddenly filled with fear and remorse." How would you feel traveling to another country to attend college and not know anyone there or speak their language.
4. Sookan sees many visions as the plane traveled through the clouds. Explain why she may have experienced these visions.
5. Sookan's mother is a remarkable woman. She understands Sookan and bravely supports her. Describe one incident from the book that illustrates this.
6. Why is the title of this book *Echoes of the White Giraffe*, an appropriate title?

JAPANESE NAMES THAT CAN BE USED IN THE "LOST NAMES" GAME:

Ito Makuo
Koyama Goro
Nobuki Saburo
Nakamara Toshio
Komatsu Ko
Hatsano Yoshio
Saito Eishiro
Toyoda Tatsuro
Ito Hirobumi
Tokuyawa Yoshimitsu
Yasataka Horiata
Yoshida Shigeru
Takikawas Yukitoki
Michiko Kaya
Aoki Shuyo
Mutso Munemutsu
Komura Jutara
Kido Takayashi
Touami Yasuski
Mori Arimiji
Kukuyawka Yukichi
Kato Kisaburo
Bito Saburo
Yasotaka Fumi

Two Koreas Yet to Cross Mine Field to Conclude Sub Incident

By Oh Young-jin
Staff Reporter

With the return of the remains of nine crewmen and agents found dead in a North Korean sub that intruded into South Korean waters yesterday, there are many indications the two Koreas have passed the most critical phase following the latest sub incident.

According to some observers, though, the two Koreas have yet to overcome a mine field of hazards in dealing with the aftermath of the June 22 sub incursion.

The return of the bodies was made less than two weeks after the communist sub was found entangled in fishing nets 11.5 miles off the east coast city of Sokcho and captured by the ROK Navy after it was alerted by South Korean fishermen.

In the September 1996 communist incursion, which can now be called "the first sub incident," the South took three months before sending the cremated remains of 24 commandoes back to the North through the United Nations Command (UNC) at the truce village of Panmunjom.

The swift return of the remains in this latest sub incident is seen as a mid-way acclamation point to the whole affair. The South has used kid gloves in handling this sub incident in contrast to the usual hard-line approach taken under the past regimes.

This approach owes much to the "sunshine policy" of President Kim Dae-jung, which aims to open up the North by conciliation, not by coercion. Dealing with perhaps the first test of his policy in the June 22 submarine incident, President Kim showed his commitment to sticking to his North Korea policy despite opposition in some sectors of society.

In response, the North has reportedly

acted cautiously in an effort to avoid raising tensions, and has refrained from using harsh anti-Seoul rhetoric.

With the situation being what it is, some might jump to the conclusion that the two Koreas have gotten over the sub incursion issue and are ready to press ahead with a fresh agenda of inter-Korean reconciliation.

But others warn against this premature conclusion.

"The situation is like live volcano in a dormant phase," one government official said. "Judged from outer appearances, it shows no activeness but it can erupt at any time."

Speaking on condition of anonymity, the official cited the worst case scenario that would occur if communist agents from the sub are caught or evidence supporting their existence are found.

After days of investigations into the hundreds of items found aboard the sub, the Defense Ministry concluded that there were no more crewmen and agents still to be accounted for other than the nine found shot to death in an apparent suicide pact.

The ministry said three agents had landed ashore and returned after installing an unmanned "drop-off" point during their two-hour infiltration operation. Military investigators based their conclusion upon a log which was retrieved from the sub.

But even at that time, some experts rebutted this conclusion and raised the possibility that a couple of infiltrators had not been accounted for and that they might have infiltrated inland on an unidentified mission after disembarking from the sub.

They argued that the 70-ton, 22-meter-long Yugo-class sub is capable of holding up to 11 people, two more than the nine found dead. Also they said that it is just not plausible that

the North had sent its sub and crew on a secret 24-hour voyage behind "enemy lines" at the risk of losing their men and turning away an international helping hand just to set up an unmanned post.

Also making the situation more suspicious is the fact that the military has yet to find the "debouche," as the unmanned posts are known among counter-espionage experts.

"In the event that a couple of communist agents are caught after an act of terrorism resulting in the loss of civilian lives and property damage, and it is discovered that they were from that sub, the consequences are not hard to imagine," the government official said.

There are other questions still to be answered in connection with the sub incident. Prominent among them is how to extract an apology from the North for its intrusion. At present, the North is standing by its claim that its sub was adrift in the South.

According to sources at the Defense Ministry, North Korean Lt. Gen. Lee Chan-bok acknowledged its sub's incursion during private moments with Maj. Gen. Michael Hayden in the general officers' (GO) meeting in Panmunjom, Tuesday.

The sources said the ministry, reflecting President Kim's views, expressed its wish to receive an "official and public" apology from the North in consultation with the UNC, which saw Lee's private expression of regret as being enough.

The North's official apology backed by its assurance that there won't be a repetition of the June 22 sub incursion is the least that the South can settle for to persuade the public to get over the sub incursion and go ahead with its appeasement policy toward the North, according to some observers of inter-Korean affairs.