

Storytelling in Korea

OVERVIEW

Stories have passed on Korean history and culture for hundreds of years. Even today, well known stories are shared in schools and through festivals. The stories pass on the exploits of heroes, the wit of tricksters, the range of Korean humor and more, while also sharing Korean values of filial piety, friendship, loyalty, hospitality, kindness and other facets of the Korean world view.

One famous style of singing storytelling, called p'ansori, has kept several stories alive, including two stories Korean children know well: the tale of Simchong, the faithful daughter, and the tale of the greedy and kind brothers, Hungbu Nolbu. Also popular are Kongjwi Padjwi, the Korean Cinderella; various "how and why" stories; and tales of tricks played by the rabbit, Kim Sondal, or the witty poet Kim Sakkat.

Tales of real Korean heroes abound, too: those from earlier days, like Queen Sondok, Admiral Yi Sun-shin and the famous friends Osong and Hanum, as well as those featuring modern heroes from the Independence Movement, such as the teen-age patriot Yu Kwan Soon.

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

- Students will learn of several Korean folk figures and themes.
- Students will learn how their stories compare with Korean tales, following the sequence: individual, family, community and world.

MATERIALS

- worksheet # 1 (a cup of Rice)
- worksheet # 2 (the Naughty Green Frog)
- worksheet # 3 (Kim Sondal and the River)
- worksheet # 4 (the Gift of Flowers)
- worksheet # 5 (pattern of Korean fan)

Time Frame: One day

THE LESSON

1. Ask students if they enjoy storytelling. Invite them to share names or plots of some of their favorite tales. Explain that Korean children also like stories and that you will be sharing a few tales about favorite characters there.
2. Distribute worksheets. Each child can read all four stories, or children can be grouped in fours, with each child reading one story, then sharing it with others in group.
3. After stories are read, invite children to share their experiences in one or more of the following ways:
 - Have children retell a story in small groups.
 - Using the shape for Korean fan found on Worksheet #5, have children draw images from one story.
 - If your class enjoys drama, help the children to act out one of the tales, either as a class, with teacher as narrator and children grouped as characters, or in small groups where children create their own plays to share.

EXTENSIONS

1. Stories should first simply be enjoyed, then retold either visually or verbally. After that experience, you might wish to invite discussion around the stories. Possible questions:
 - How have you helped a friend?
 - Did you ever try to do the right thing, like the green frog, but have it turn out to be sadly wrong?
 - Can you think of a problem in your community that might be solved with a trick?
 - If you were Queen Sondok, what gift might you send back to China?
2. Each of these stories has a trick or problem in it. Students can follow-up this popular theme of tricks and tricksters. Invite children to find more popular tricksters or tricks from other countries, and to compare them. A class chart can be made, with names of tricksters, his/her characteristics or description, usual setting and types of tricks played.
3. Use the trickster theme as a story starter. Ask children to select a character from the tales here and to write or draw another trick or problem for them to solve.

ASSESSMENT

1. Ask each child to tell one of the stories to new listeners: either to his family, as homework, or in school to another class or group.
2. Have each child choose one story and make a small book to share, rewriting the story in his or her own words and illustrating important scenes.
3. Have children choose one character and write a letter to him/her. They might ask the character some questions and/or suggest other ways to solve the story's problem.

WORKSHEET #1

A CUP OF RICE

Osong's father was very mad, because his nice new floor was covered with holes.

"Who made these holes?" he asked his son.

"Father, I tried to sleep here today, but a silly flea bothered me. So I chased it with a drill," said Osong. "And I caught it!"

"But you ruined the floor and must be punished," said his father.

"Please, sir, punish the flea, not me!" replied Osong.

The next morning, Osong's father pointed to a big rice chest.

"To escape punishment, " he said, "tell me tonight how many rice grains are in that chest."

His father left. Osong looked at the chest so full of rice. He felt very sad. When his best friend Han-um came over, Osong told him the problem.

"That's easy," said Han-um. "I'll help. But let's play first." So they played and played until it was late and Osong became nervous.

"Don't worry," said Han-um, giving Osong a bowl. "Just fill this with rice and count the grains."

After a while, Osong said, "There are 100 grains."

"Good," said Han-um. "Now see how many bowls of rice are in the chest. Then multiply." Osong filled 10 bowls with rice. So $10 \times 100 = 1000$.

Just then, Osong's father came home. Osong told him there were 1000 rice grains. His father was very pleased with the boys' clever thinking. So Osong wasn't punished. Instead, both boys got nice rice cakes and a book to share. And they stayed friends for a long, long time.

WORKSHEET #2

THE NAUGHTY GREEN FROG

Once there lived a young green frog who never, ever did what his mother said. He always did just the opposite.

If his mother said, "Sit down," he jumped up high. If she said, "Hop here," he hopped there. And when she taught him to croak, "KAE-GUL, KAE-GUL," he croaked, "KUL-GAE, KUL-GAE."

This poor froggy mother worked very hard. And after her son was big, she grew sick and knew she would die. She wanted to be buried in a good, good place, on top of a hill.

"Yet," she thought, "if I tell my son to bury me on top of the hill, he will bury me at the bottom, by the river. And when it rains my body will slide away and be lost in the water. So.... I'll tell him to bury me at the bottom, by the river. Then he'll bury me at the top!"

The froggy son promised to do what his mother wanted. But after she died, he was very sad.

"I was not a nice son," he thought. "So now, I'll be very, very good. I'll do JUST WHAT she asked." Then he did. He buried her carefully by the river. Yet when the rains came, he worried.

"My mother's body may slide into the river and get lost," he cried. "How sad." And he started to croak, "KAE-GUL, KAE-GUL." Soon his relatives asked why he cried.

"I was good too late," he said. "Now my mommy's body may slide into the river and be lost in the sea." Those frogs felt sad too, so they cried, "KAE-GUL, KAE-GUL." The next time it rained, more green frogs heard the sad story and they croaked. And the next time it rained, even more green frogs heard and sang sadly too. So now if you go to that river today, and hear the sad cry of the green frogs, you will know why.

WORKSHEET #3

KIM SONDAL AND THE RIVER

A little town had a problem. The rich men of the town made workers carry heavy pots of water. But they didn't pay much, so the workers grew weak and poor. Then one night, clever Kim Sondal heard the workers complaining.

"I can help you," he said. "I'll give you each one coin. Every day when you come from the river, drop the coin on the cloth near me. Then every night I'll return a coin to you and you can drop it again the next day."

In the morning, the workers threw their coins as they passed by. That night, Kim Sondal secretly returned the coins. So the next day, the men threw the coins again. And the next day and the next. Every evening, Kim Sondal took a big bag of coins with him. Soon the lazy, rich men who loafed by the river asked him, "Why do you get so many coins every day?"

"I'm collecting my tax on the river water," he replied.

"But you don't own the river," they said.

"Of course I do. Don't you see how the men pay me when they take water?" asked Kim Sondal.

So the rich men became very jealous. Finally, they gave Kim Sondal much, much money, to buy the river. After they left, he happily shared the money with all the workers.

The next morning, the greedy rich men put down a big cloth to get all the river money. But every worker passed right by. Nobody dropped even one coin.

"Pay us for that water," the rich men cried to each one. "We own the river now." But the workers only laughed and walked on.

After a long hot day, the rich men still had a very empty cloth. So at last, they realized they had been tricked. They went home very mad, while the workers felt extremely glad. And the river stayed free to everybody.

WORKSHEET #4

THE GIFT OF FLOWERS

Long ago in Korea, a king had no sons. So he chose his oldest daughter to rule the kingdom. She became the wise Queen Sondok. Many people liked her and stories spread about her wit.

One day, she received a gift from the Chinese Emperor. He sent a beautiful scroll with lovely flowers painted on it. With it were flower seeds of the same flowers.

Everyone in the court admired the red, purple and white flowers. They had never seen them in Korea. The flowers, which were popular in China, were called peonies.

But Queen Sondok was not so pleased to receive the gift.

"These flowers have no smell," she complained.

"How can you be sure?" asked her advisors.

"My eyes tell me," she replied. "But plant the seeds and let us see."

So the seeds were planted in a pretty place and carefully watered.

After many months, the blossoms started to open. They were indeed lovely flowers--so rich-looking, so big and full. But they had no smell at all.

"You are right," her advisors said. "The flowers have no scent. How did you know?"

"Look at the painting," said the queen. "Do you see any bees or butterflies? If the flowers had a smell, then bees and butterflies would fly nearby, and the painter would paint them in."

People stared at the pretty painting. They saw only the flowers, nothing else. And they realized how clever their queen was. And how lucky they were.

