

# Cultural Customs in Korea

## OVERVIEW

Korean customs are an integral part of social interactions. Many customs and traditions are rooted in Confucian philosophy and are hundreds of years old. Although modern society is changing and intermingling with other cultures, many customs and traditions persist.

It is important to know and understand customs from other countries to familiarize students with the idea that while people in different parts of the world share many similar customs, they also have customs that are unique to their country.

## PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

- Students will learn that some customs in Korea differ from the customs of the U.S.
- Students will learn to respect customs and traditions of other cultures.

## MATERIALS

- paper or cloth flags, optional
- worksheet #1 (customs)
- worksheet #2 (explanation of customs for students)
- 11"x 18"paper
- glue

Time Frame: 1 day

## THE LESSON

1. Begin this lesson with a definition of custom.

*Custom: a usual practice or habitual way of behaving.*

List or talk about some customs that are familiar to the students. They may include:

- Customs when meeting new people
- Customs when greeting familiar people
- Customs when eating
- Customs when having conversations with someone older than you
- Customs when receiving a present from someone

2. Have students demonstrate accepted customs from the above list.

3. Discuss the origin of customs. Are customs the same around the world? Ask students to help list customs that may be different in other countries from the ones that they follow. Due to their cultural backgrounds, some students in the class may offer examples of customs from different countries.

4. Conduct the following activity:

Write out each custom from worksheet #1 on a piece of paper, then cut out so that each custom is on a separate slip of paper.

- Tell students that each of them will receive a slip of paper with an example of a custom. Their assignment is to read the custom and determine if it is a custom from Korea, the U.S., or from Korea and the U.S. Designate locations in your classroom for "Korea", the U.S., and "Korea and the U.S." Paper flags of each country can indicate the locations.
- Distribute one slip of paper to each student so that each student has a custom. Ask the students to determine which country or countries the custom best represents. Students may talk with others if they are unsure. Have each student, One at a time, read the custom and stand under the correct sign or flag.

- Once the customs have been read aloud and reshuffled so that they are under the correct grouping, students can glue or tape each custom on a large piece of paper or the blackboard that has been divided into three columns ("Korea," "the U.S.," and "Korea and the U.S.").
5. Follow up the activity by asking students to discuss why each custom belongs in the category that was selected for it. Use worksheet #2 to guide the students. Note that several explanations may be appropriate to each custom.

## EXTENSIONS

1. Role-play customs and discuss do's and don'ts.
2. Research customs in other cultures and compare with Korean culture.
3. Discuss the role of customs in a family or society. What do customs help us do?

## ASSESSMENT

1. Have students select two customs that are different from each other by country. Have students explain each custom and how it differs within each country. Younger students can use pieces of paper to draw pictures of the way one behaves when greeting another friend or a grandparent.
2. Ask students to write why it is important to learn about other countries' customs. Does it help students understand other countries and make them feel less strange or foreign? What are some ways that students can help other people respect customs of other people?

## WORKSHEET #1

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Remove your shoes before entering a home.
2. Eat ice cream while walking down a street.
3. Open a present in front of the giver.
4. Tuck your feet under you when you are sitting.
5. Stand up when an elderly person enters the room.
6. Blow your nose in public and put the tissue into your pocket.
7. Laugh and talk while eating.
8. Bow to another person when introduced.
9. Shake hands when introduced to another person.
10. Touch the shoulder, arm or back of a person you don't know well.
11. Walk on the right side of a crowded sidewalk.
12. Stand in line to buy something or to get on a bus.
13. Brag about yourself and your accomplishments.
14. Serve food to older people before serving or eating yourself.

## WORKSHEET #2

1. In traditional Korean houses, people sit and sleep on mats on the floor. Therefore, keeping the house free of dirt that is tracked in on shoes is essential. In addition, Korean houses have been heated for centuries from beneath the floor. The floor is warm and inviting for sitting and sleeping. This unique system is called "ondol."
2. It is considered impolite and in bad taste to eat while walking down a public street. Eating is to be done at home, or in a restaurant.
3. Koreans wait until they are in a private setting before they open a gift because it is considered impolite to open it in front of the gift giver.
4. It is disrespectful of other people to stretch out when sitting on the floor.
5. Older people receive much respect in Korea. Young people show respect by standing up when an elderly person walks into the room, or by bowing and other similar actions.
6. Koreans consider blowing one's nose in public a rude gesture. Putting a used tissue in one's pocket is also inappropriate.
7. Koreans feel that food should be savored and lingered over. Excessive talking takes the focus away from the food.
8. When people meet or say good-bye, a bow is usually the appropriate gesture. Men may bow and then shake hands. The younger generation in Korea may wave good-bye to each other. Young children bow or nod when greeting adults.
9. Although what is the usual greeting in the U.S., bowing is still more common in Korea. Hand shaking is also seen in Korea. (See above.)
10. Such gestures are considered too personal for anyone except good friends.
11. It is appropriate to walk on the right of the sidewalk on a busy street in the U.S. In Korea, it is the left side that is appropriate.

12. Generally, Koreans do not line up for things. Since personal space is limited, a little shoving and pushing may be expected and is not considered impolite. Until a person is formally introduced to a Korean, he or she does not need to be considered important enough to respect in lines and getting on buses and trains. However, once a person is introduced, respect is given and expected.
13. Humility is an important concept in Korean thinking. Therefore, it is unacceptable to brag about oneself. In addition, when compliments are given by others, making slight protestations is expected.
14. Older people receive much respect in Korea. Young people show respect by standing up when an elder person walks into the room, bowing, and other actions.