

## WHEN DID SOUTH KOREA BECOME A DEMOCRACY?

**GRADES:** 9-12

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**SUBJECT:** World History

**TIME REQUIRED:** Five 50 minute class periods

### **BACKGROUND:**

Many World History textbooks simply state that after the Korean War, South Korea was a successful Democracy and North Korea was a dictatorship. In the context of the Cold War, it was simple to say that a South Korea supported by the United States would be Democratic while a North Korea supported by the Soviet Union would be a Communist Dictatorship. Such a simplified view of South Korean politics is inaccurate and not reflected in South Korea's history after 1953. This has direct application to current situations in Iraq and Afghanistan as they transition to Democracy with support from the United States. This lesson will provide a deeper understanding into the history of South Korean Democracy and provide fertile discussion and application to more current situations.

**OBJECTIVES:** Students will evaluate the causes and effects of the 1987 Democracy protests in South Korea.

### **MATERIALS REQUIRED:**

- Student Reading Handout
- Access to Internet (Alternatively, teacher can assign individuals to research with the suggested web sites the night before for homework or teacher can print out appropriate excerpts from the websites for the different groups).

### **COMMON CORE STANDARDS:**

SL 1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions

SL 4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically

RH 2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source

WHST 2a Introduce a topic and organize ideas, concepts and information

### **PROCEDURE:**

1. Ask students to answer the question "When did South Korea become a Democracy?" You may need to prompt them to recall that the United States supported the South Korean government after the Korean War and that the North was Communist. An easier question may be to ask the students if the United States always supports Democracies?
2. Divide the students into four even groups and assign them to one of the following former South Korean Presidents: Syngman Rhee, Park Chung Hee,

Chun Doo Hwan, or Roh Tae Woo. For each President they should answer the following questions:

- How did they come to power?
- How long were they in power?
- How did they leave power?

-For research, students could use resources in their Media Center or the web sites listed under the Resources section of this lesson.

\*Teacher Notes:

-Syngman Rhee (1919-1925 and 1948-1960): President first time for over 5 years and again for nearly 12 years. He was initially appointed by the United States to lead the government. Rhee was forced to resign to protests when police shot protestors. His presidency was filled with charges of political repression and embezzlement.

-Park Chung Hee (1963-1979): A military general that led a coup d'etat and took control of the government. Ruled for 18 years until his assassination. His presidency saw some of South Korea's most rapid economic growth and used the Korean Central Intelligence Agency to restrict opposition. After two assassination attempts (including one that killed his wife), he was killed by the director of the KCIA.

-Chun Doo Hwan (1980-1988): Was involved in a coup d'etat after the death of Park Chung Hee. Chun was elected by an Electoral College vote as the only candidate and began a repressive rule. He survived an assassination attempt in Myanmar that killed many in his group including cabinet ministers. Chun accepted the end of his term but later was sentenced to death for corruption and violence as president, but was later pardoned.

-Roh Tae Woo (1988-1993): Was handpicked by Chun Doo Hwan and under protest promised democratic reforms. He was elected president as the opposition candidates split the vote. Roh was also accused of corruption and mutiny/treason along with Chun Doo Hwan. Was sentenced to 22 years in prison and later pardoned.

3. When the research is complete, groups will present their findings to the class. As groups are presenting, students should be looking for similarities or common trends. The trends they should see include the role of military leaders taking power and the length of some of the terms. After discussing the trends and findings, have the students answer the question "Was South Korea a Democracy or Dictatorship?" They should answer their question in the form of a thesis statement and then list three to five reasons for their opinion.

4. Distribute the Student Reading for students to read. When they are done, divide students into groups and have them create a news broadcast describing the Democracy protests in South Korea that occurred from June 10 to June 29, 1987. Their broadcasts should include a script that answers the following questions:

- What caused the protests?
- Who was involved in the protests?
- What was the result of the protests?

5. Have the groups present their news broadcasts to the class.

**EVALUATION/ASSESSMENT:**

- Students should write an essay to answer the following question, “When did South Korea become a Democracy?” They should be prompted to decide if it was after the division of Korea after 1953 or the protests of 1987? Students should use a minimum of five supporting details to answer their question.

**EXTENSION:** Discuss with the students if any application of the material learned could be applied to Iraq or Afghanistan. For example, “are there there times when the United States may support authoritarian governments instead of true democracy?”

**RESOURCES:**

**Websites**

A History of South Korea

<http://www.asiarooms.com/en/travel-guide/south-korea/south-korea-overview/history-of-south-korea.html>

U.S. Department of State Background Note: South Korea

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2800.htm>

South Korea History

[http://www.worldrover.com/history/south\\_korea\\_history.html](http://www.worldrover.com/history/south_korea_history.html)

New York Times: Obsolete Politics in South Korea

<http://www.nytimes.com/1991/05/24/opinion/obsolete-politics-in-south-korea.html>

**Books/Articles**

Oberdorfer, Don. *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*. Basic Books, 2001.

Adessnik, A. David; Kim, Sunhyuk. *If at First You Don't Succeed: The Puzzle of South Korea's Democratic Transition*. Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law Working Papers, Number 83 July 2008. Stanford.

**HANDOUT- Student Reading**

“In June of 1987, Chun Doo Hwan found himself in a situation that would have been familiar to Park. Labor unrest was on the rise. Student protests had become widespread and increasingly violent. Church leaders insisted that democracy was a moral imperative. The parliamentary opposition demanded free and fair elections. Yet Chun had several advantages that his predecessor lacked. The economy was growing by leaps and bounds, often by more than ten percent each year. The regime was united, with no prospect of any fatal division. Chun also had an excellent relationship with President Reagan, who hosted Chun at the White House as recently as 1985. In spite of such advantages, Chun surrendered to the protesters’ demand for free and fair elections and for the restoration of civil liberties. The elections took place in December 1987, after a vigorous campaign. For two decades now, free and fair elections have taken place as scheduled. Civil liberties have also become a fixture, although room for improvement remains. South Korea is now a full democracy.”

“The pivotal date associated with South Korea’s second and more successful transition to democracy is June 29, 1987, the date on which Roh Tae Woo announced the government’s acceptance of the protesters’ demands for direct presidential elections and the restoration of civil liberties. According to the constitution imposed by Chun in 1980, the president of the republic would serve a single, non-renewable term of seven years in office. In light of Chun’s continual assertions that he would step down from office on schedule, South Koreans expected 1987 to be the critical year in which the succession process would be defined. Initially, the National Assembly served as the forum in which the succession process was debated. On February 12, 1985, legislative elections dramatically strengthened the opposition’s ranks in the Assembly. The balloting process was fair, although the government’s unusual process for distributing of mandates enabled it to preserve its majority in spite of receiving only 35 percent of the vote. On February 12, 1986, the opposition marked the anniversary of the election by launching a campaign to revise Chun’s imposed constitution. After extensive protests and rioting, Chun compromised in April by allowing the formation of a special committee in the National Assembly to propose a set of constitutional revisions. The committee’s negotiations dragged on for almost a year, at which point Chun declared the suspension of the process on April 13, 1987. As it had in 1980, an electoral college would choose the next president. Antagonism toward the regime intensified with the revelation on May 18 that a student at Seoul National University had been tortured to death in January during a police interrogation and that the regime had covered up its responsibility.”

“The succession crisis came to a head on June 10, 1987, when Chun nominated Roh Tae Woo as the ruling party’s candidate for president. That same day, violent protests erupted across the nation. Riot police attacked the protesters with clubs, tear gas and water cannons. Protesters attacked the police with fists, blunt objects and gasoline bombs. The battles raged in the streets one day after the next. Global media attention focused on South Korea. On June 19, the American ambassador in Seoul presented Chun with a personal letter from President Reagan calling for a non-violent response to the crisis. The rioting continued for another ten days with no end in sight until Roh Tae Woo suddenly announced on June 29 that the government would accept the protesters’ demands. The intensity of the protests immediately diminished. For the next several months, both the

government and the opposition focused on the presidential elections scheduled for December 16. Roh prevailed with 35.64 percent of the vote, in large part because the opposition failed to unite behind a single candidate, splitting its support between Kim Young Sam (28.03 percent) and Kim Dae Jung (27.04 percent). Initially, both Kims responded to their defeat by alleging a corruption of the vote, yet the charges were soon withdrawn.”

“It is harder to identify the closing date of Korea’s transition to democracy than it is to identify the climax of the process. The electoral system faced no challenges to its viability after 1987. Civil liberties rapidly expanded. Nonetheless, the presidency remained in the hands of an ex-general who played an integral role in the previous dictatorship. In 1992, democracy activist Kim Young Sam prevailed in the presidential elections by forging an alliance with Roh. Kim’s harsher critics considered this alliance both a betrayal of the democratic cause and an indication that ex-generals such as Roh still held the balance of power. Nonetheless, Kim moved aggressively to implement democratic reforms. In 1996, a South Korean court convicted both Chun and Roh of treason and mutiny, sentencing Chun to death and Roh to many years in prison. In 1997, Kim Dae Jung prevailed in the third free presidential election. Kim’s inauguration resolved any final concerns that South Korea had yet to finalize its democratic transition. As president-elect, Kim pardoned both Chun and Roh.”

Excerpts from

***If At First You Don’t Succeed:***

***The Puzzle of South Korea’s Democratic Transition***

Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law Working Papers

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