

Comparing Cultures

A Cooperative Approach
to a Multicultural World

Revised Edition

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Unit I: Learning About World Cultures

Activity 6. Seoul Family

Introduction

The Republic of Korea has a long history of occupation by foreign powers. Despite this occupation, a distinctive Korean culture exists with roots more than 2,000 years old. Hosting the 1988 Summer Olympics helped introduce Korean vitality to people in other parts of the world. However, the complexity of such an ancient culture is impossible to capture in snapshots—either of the Olympics or in this brief presentation. Recently, political corruption and economic difficulties have left the Korean Republic more reliant on aid from the United States, many other nations, and the World Bank.

Objectives

- 1 To have students discover and record the major features and history of the culture of the Republic of Korea
- 2 To develop students' ability to identify in another culture examples of customs, traditions, values, and technology

Time to complete

A minimum of three class sessions, with more time required if supplemental activities are undertaken

Materials

- Exercise 16. Map of Korea
- Exercise 17: Seoul Family—Cultural Features
- Exercise 18: History of Korea
- Exercise 19: Letter to Grandparents in Kongju
- Exercise 20: School Report on Korean Traditions

Procedure

- 1 Use the class map of Korea to identify the following: Korea's neighbors, the 38th parallel, with the demilitarized zone dividing North and South Korea, Seoul; Kongju; and bodies of water surrounding Korea. Ask the students to add this information to their map in Exercise 16. Have them use what they already know to make predictions about Korea's history and economic situation. They should write down their predictions and save them for later use.
2. Read to the students Exercise 17: History of Korea. Compare their predictions with the actual history, focusing on the clues from the map that helped them make their predictions.
- 3 Distribute to the students Exercise 18: Seoul Family—Cultural Features. Then ask each group to read together Exercise 19: Letter to Grandparents in Kongju. When they have finished, have them write the appropriate information on the Seoul Family activity. Use the same procedure with Exercise 20: School Report.
- 4 Ask each student to write a one-paragraph statement explaining why he or she would choose to live in either Kongju or Seoul. Have them share these statements with their groups.
- 5 Assign to each group one of the cultural features not adequately covered in the material on the exercises. Each group should give a brief presentation to the whole class sharing the information they have found. Students should write this information on Exercise 18.
6. Divide the class in half. Have one group work on the activity suggested in (a) and the other half work on the activity suggested in (b) below. When the pairs from each half are through, form teams of four by putting together one pair from (a) and one pair from (b). Have them present their ideas to each other.
 - (a) Compose a list of reasons why the Republic of Korea might have wanted to host the 1988 Summer Olympic Games. Compose a list of reasons that might have been given for not hosting the Summer Olympics.
 - (b) Compose a list of reasons why South Korea might want to unite with North Korea. Compose a list of reasons that South Korea might give for not uniting with North Korea.

Exercise 17

History of Korea

Korea is a 600-mile-long peninsula the size of Utah. Well before 300 B.C., powerful leaders called feudal lords gathered around them people who would farm their land and, when necessary, fight against other feudal lords. For many centuries fighting was a way of life for the settlers of Korea.

Over a period of seven centuries, starting around 57 B.C., small groups of people began to unite into more powerful groups. Three kingdoms emerged, and toward the end of the seventh century A.D., the Silla kingdom cooperated with the Chinese to defeat both the Paekche and the Koguryo kingdoms. Shortly afterward, Silla pushed the Chinese out and unified the Korean peninsula under its rule. What followed was a blending of Korean and Chinese customs. Buddhism became the dominant religion, but Confucianism also was very strong. Many temples were built, art was encouraged, and education became very important. During the next century the city of Kyongju became the fourth largest city in the world. The rule of the Silla continued for the next several centuries; by A.D. 935 the leader Wang Kon grew strong enough to unite the peninsula under a new state, Koryo, and to begin a dynasty that was to last for 450 years.

Continuous conflict with the Chinese weakened the power of the dynasty and led to the Mongol invasion from the north in the middle of the thirteenth century. The Mongols took large annual tributes of gold, silver, horses, and women. Nevertheless, during their occupation, the Koreans gained knowledge of astrology, medicine, cotton cultivation, and artistic skills.

After the Mongols had been driven out, there emerged a major new leader, Yi Song-gye, who resumed relations with China and established Confucianism as the dominant religion. All during its rule, the Yi dynasty had to deal with attempted invasions by Japan and strong pressure from the Manchus in China. In the 1800's, despite some financial progress, Korea experienced major social unrest. Contact with people and ideas from the West was discouraged. Japan and China continued their struggle for Korea. In 1876 Japan and Korea signed a peace treaty.

From 1910 to the end of the Second World War in 1945, the Japanese had possession of Korea. During that time, Korean ideas and language were discouraged. During the Second World War, Korean workers took jobs vacated by Japanese workers, who were required to fight.

(continued)

