

KOREAN CUSTOMS AND EDUCATION SYSYEM

GRADES: Middle to High School

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SUBJECT: History, Culture, Education

TIME REQUIRED: One to Two Class Periods (90 minutes)

OBJECTIVES:

- Learn about Korean Family Values
- Learn about Korean Educational System
- Learn about Korean customs
- Current Korean Education System strengths recognized by US President

MATERIALS REQUIRED:

Handouts:

- 1- Korean Family Values
 - 2- Everyday Korean Customs
 - 3- Korean Customs when Meeting
 - 4- Korean Customs when Gift Giving
 - 5- Korean Customs When Eating
 - 6- Korean Education Today and History
 - 7- Confucianism in Action today on the Korean Peninsula
 - 8- US Presidents Comments on Korean Education and Technology
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- Large Post It Papers or Butcher Paper
 - 10 Packs of parkers to Record and Report Out and Share

BACKGROUND:

Impetus to Develop this Lesson

As a public school educator who works with a diverse public school community of students, parents and community members who are American born and Immigrants from Asia, Central America, South America and Africa I sense there is a need to learn and share about all cultures. Our study tour of Korea inspired me to create a first lesson for our school stakeholders to learn about Korean Customs and Korean Education System to learn about differences in the educational experience, but at the same time show, there are some distinct similarities. In addition, to show how other cultures approach education, have distinct customs so all students will reflect on their own attitudes towards their own customs and learning and appreciate our diversity in the US.

Definition of Custom

- Custom definition: a usual practice or habitual way of behaving.
- 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.

PROCEDURE:

1. **KWL** – whole class Ice breaker and connector
 - What they already **Know** about Korean Values, Customs, Education, Confucianism?
 - What they **what** they want to Learn about Korean values, customs, education, Confucianism?
 - We will assess what they **learned** at end of lesson and connections to their own culture.
2. Divide class into 8 Groups
3. Each group will get 1 of the 8 different handouts
 - 1- Korean Family Values
 - 2- Everyday Korean Customs
 - 3- Korean Customs when Meeting
 - 4- Korean Customs when Gift Giving
 - 5- Korean Customs When Eating
 - 6- Korean Education Today and History
 - 7- Confucianism in Action today on the Korean Peninsula
 - 8- US Presidents Comments on Korean Education and Technology
4. Task A- Each Groups will have 20 minutes to review the handout and write out on their poster paper 5 key Points about their assigned KOREAN topics and prepare a presentation to the whole group.
5. Task B- Each Groups will have 20 minutes to review the handout and write out on their poster paper 3 key Things they know about AN OTHER CUTLURES that may be similar or different
6. Task C- Prepare a 3 minute Presentation to the whole class about what they learned about the Korean topic and similarities and differences they discussed about other

cultures: Values, customs, meeting, gift giving, eating, education, religions and/or belief systems.

ASSESSMENT

1. Assessment A- Each group member will make a 3-minute presentation about what they about their Korean topics: values, customs, meeting, gift giving, eating, education, religions and/or belief systems.
2. Assessment B: Make a connection between the Korean culture and another culture and explain the similarity or difference to the class about their group's topic on: values, customs, meeting, gift giving, eating, education, religions and/or belief systems.
3. **EXTENSIONS:**
 - Role play customs and do's and don'ts of cultures
 - Have each group or class become experts on a specific culture and learn about their values, customs, meeting, gift giving, eating, education, religions and/or belief systems and share with class and/or school.
 - Make multicultural bulletin boards in schools to highlight all the rich cultures at your school.
 - Have a parents and student night to celebrate and share cultural foods, dance and customs and/or perform a skit to highlight each culture.
 - Do a film festival of short movies made by students about customs and cultures at your school. Moreover, give out multicultural awards led by the History department.
 - Response journals, chalk talk, writings prompts may include:
 - Select two customs that are different and write a comparative essay
 - Create a Travel Brochure to identify Customs for Korean Visitors
 - Draw pictures of customs- the way one behaves when greeting another friend or a grandparent.
 - Write why it is important to learn about other countries' customs in a persuasion essay and how it prepares them to be prepared for 21st century global careers.
 - How does it feel to learn about other countries and cultures- feel less strange or foreign?
 - What are some ways that students can help other people respect customs of other people?
 - What is the role of travel, students and teacher exchange programs?
 - Have students share the customs from their family's countries and/or countries they have visited and their holiday traditions.
4. **TAKE AWAY GOAL:**
 - By learning about Korean Culture we can build a stronger school community
 - We can learn about cultural similarities and differences and celebrate
 - By learning about Korean Culture schools can reduce and eliminate Asian myths, stereotypes and name calling that may exists in schools.

RESOURCES:

Clark, Donald N., *Culture and Customs of Korea*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008.

The Collection of the National Folk Museum of Korea. South Korea, Sigong Tech Publishing Co., 2007

Source: Kwintessential, South Korea-Language,Culture,Customs and Etiquette
<http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/south-korea-country-profile.html>

Source: The Korea Times
Korea Times."Obama says South Korea's education, Internet outperforming US."January 26,2011.
<http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/art/2011/01/182_80399.html>

Source: The Washington Post. In speech to South Korean students, Obama describes a North Korea their social networks can't reach". March 26, 2012. http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/in-speech-to-south-korean-students-obama-describes-a-north-korea-their-social-networks-cant-reach/2012/03/26/gIQAnkFQbS_story.html

Source: *The Korea Times*
"Obama lauds Korea for Education, IT", March 27, 2012
http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/biz/2012/03/182_107800.html

Source: The Korea Society
The Top 10 Things to Know About Korea in the 21st Century

Handouts

Korean Family Values (Handout 1)

1. The family is the most important part of Korean life.
 2. In Confucian tradition, the father is the head of the family and it is his responsibility to provide food, clothing, and shelter, and to approve the marriages of family members.
 3. The eldest son has special duties: first to his parents, then to his brothers from older to younger, then to his sons, then to his wife, and lastly to his daughters.
 4. Family welfare is much more important than the needs of the individual.
 5. Members of the family connected to each other because the actions of one family member reflect on the rest of the family.
 6. In many cases, the family register can trace a family's history, through male ancestors, for over 500 years.
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Your Family Values

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Korean Customs (Handout 2)

1. Remove your shoes before entering a home. *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. Eat ice cream while walking down a street. *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. Open a present in front of the giver. *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. Tuck your feet under you when you are sitting. *It is disrespectful of other people to stretch out when sitting on the floor.*

5. Stand up when an elderly person enters the room. *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. Blow your nose in public and put the tissue into your pocket. *Koreans consider blowing one's nose in public a rude gesture. Putting a used tissue in one's pocket is also inappropriate.*

7. Laugh and talk while eating. *Koreans feel that food should be savored and lingered over. Excessive talking takes the focus away from the food.*

8. Bow to another person when introduced. *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. Shake hands when introduced to another person. *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. Touch the shoulder, arm or back of a person you don't know well. *Such gestures are considered too personal for anyone except good friends.*

11. Walk on the right side of a crowded sidewalk. *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. Stand in line to buy something or to get on a bus. *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. Brag about yourself and your accomplishments. *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. Serve food to older people before serving or eating yourself. *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.*

Korean Customs When Meeting a Person (Handout -3)

- Greetings follow strict rules of protocol.
- Many South Koreans shake hands with Korean Americans in the US after the bow, thereby blending both cultural styles.
- The person of lower status bows to the person of higher status, yet it is the most senior person who initiates the handshake.
- The person who initiates the bow says, "man-na-suh pan-gop-sumnida", which means "pleased to meet you".
- Information about the other person will be given to the person they are being introduced to in advance of the actual meeting.
- Always wait to be introduced at a social gathering.
- When you leave a social gathering, say good-bye, and bow to each person individually.

Your Customs When Meeting a Person

Korean Customs for Gift Giving (Handout 4)

- Gifts express a great deal about a relationship and are always reciprocated.
- It is inconsiderate to give someone an expensive gift if you know that they cannot afford to reciprocate accordingly.
- Bring fruit or good quality chocolates or flowers if invited to a Korean's home.
- Gifts should be wrapped nicely.
- The number 4 is considered unlucky, so gifts should not be given in multiples of 4.
- Giving 7 of an item is considered lucky.
- Wrap gifts in red or yellow paper, since these are royal colors.
- Use yellow or pink paper since they denote happiness.
- Do not wrap gifts in green, white, or black paper.
- Do not sign a card in red ink.
- Use both hands when offering a gift.
- Gifts are not opened when received.

Your Customs for Gift Giving

Korean Table Manners (Handout -5)

- Always wait to be told where to sit. There is often a strict protocol to be followed.
- The eldest are served first.
- The oldest or most senior person is the one who starts the eating process.
- Never point your chopsticks.
- Do not pierce your food with chopsticks.
- Chopsticks should be returned to the table after every few bites and when you drink or stop to speak.
- Do not cross your chopsticks when putting them on the chopstick rest.
- Do not pick up food with your hands. Fruit should be speared with a toothpick or fork.
- Bones and shells should be put on the table or an extra plate.
- Try a little bit of everything. It is acceptable to ask what something is.
- Refuse the first offer of second helpings.
- Finish everything on your plate.
- Indicate you are finished eating by placing your chopsticks on the chopstick rest or on the table.
- Never place them parallel across your rice bowl.

Your Table Manners

Korean Education History (Handout - 6)

- Korea educational policy has been influenced by the ancient philosopher Confucius that stated, “*When people are educated, the distinction between classes disappears;*” “*Education is the Meaning of Life*” -Confucius
- Korea culture has embraced these ideas by placing great importance on the education of their young and on lifelong learning.
- East Asian students consistently score at the top of international standardized tests and as a rule spend more time in the classroom per year than their Western counterparts.
- Attitudes of parents, teachers, and students towards learning and the school environment can also be found to be very different from East to West. Is one system better than the other? What can the West learn from the East and vice versa?
- The Korean passion for education is an important reason for the country’s rapid economic development and successful educational system. It is rooted in the respect for the educated *yangban* class and the awe with which uneducated Korean commoners used to look upon anyone who could manage the magical process of reading and writing. Under the monarchy, educated men were appointed to public office, ruled over others, and education was reserved for few at the top of the social class.
- Mass education did not begin until 1910 when under Japanese rule a system of government schools began to spread the power of literacy. Missionaries also created a schools system that taught secular systems and welcomed children from all social classes. In 1945 when Korea was liberated from Japan, only 20% of Korean peopled had attended a school of any kind. After 1945, Koreans possessing education became leaders and this was the impetus for Koreans to demand access to education for their children and forced the government to put a high priority on educational development.
- The Korean War from 1950-53 was a serious setback for these efforts and many schools were destroyed and were forced to meet their classes outdoors, on hillsides and riverbanks without textbooks or paper. The post-war result was the government to spend more money on education than on anything other than national defense.
- Today’s South Korean educational system is based on a 1968 charter that defines the government mission to educate every Korean child. Education policy is set by Ministry of Education and determines curriculum, textbooks, and uniform standards for all levels of schooling nationwide.

Korean Education Today

- Today the system consists of three years of elementary schools, three years so middle school and three years of high school. Elementary school is free and compulsory and fees are charged in middle and high school. 90% go on to middle school and 88% v to high school. The school year begins in March to make the 220 days (compared to 175 days in California or 9 additional weeks. Students attend class five an half days a week with Saturdays afternoons and Sunday off.
- Elementary school main purpose is for children to become literate in Korean. Other purposes include scientific knowledge, arithmetic, social studies, physical education, art, music, English, and moral knowledge. “Moral knowledge” includes a sense of social responsibility, ability to share and seek justice, practice self-reliance and respecting the country laws and institutions.
- Middle School students study the same subjects and add vocational training, knowledge of simple mechanics and home economics. They study Korean heritage, World History and English a required second language for all Korean students. Their teachers evaluate their aptitudes and help them decide whether to go on to high school. Most go on to high school, take an achievement test and decide to pursue a general (i.e. college bound) or vocational tracks.
- High school student routine involves classes from 8- until mid afternoon, with time for athletics, extracurricular activities, and study for advanced classes. They pursue a third language of Mandarin, Japanese, and Spanish in high schools today. Vocational schools may study home economics, agricultural, engineering and many boys into the ROTC with hopes to serve as officers after they complete their required military service. Many Korean high school students get up early to study before school and after school “cram classes” to help those master topics for the all-important college entrance exams they take in their senior year.
- Families put a lot of pressure on Korean students to excel for both the family’s reputation and the students’ future. This pressure drives students to work long hours in the evening at the cram schools and at home doing homework. Few students have outside jobs or much social life outside school. Breaks in routine allow students to squeeze in a little time for fun.
- Mass education in Korea has created so many college graduates, that unemployment and underemployment is a serious problem. Settling for a high diploma will limit a student’s opportunities making the college entrance exams extremely competitive for the freshman class to be accepted to the top universities. The competition provides useful motivation for most students but for some others it is too much and leads to a sense of failure and depression even before they finish high school.

You can still see Confucianism in Action on the Korean Peninsula (Handout-7)

- From the time Confucianism entered Korea, as early as the fourth century, it has remained an important philosophy in guiding the lives of the Korean people. Stressing the importance of human relations and reciprocal ties among people, Confucianism helped bring social stability and authority to Korea's rulers.
- By stressing the importance of loyalty, it fostered respect and service to leaders and the state. By emphasizing filial piety, it caused families to accept paternal leadership and thereby regulated social interaction.
- Confucianism is hierarchal and mandates subordinates to respect the wishes of superiors, but it also dictates that those in authority be responsible and look after their subordinates. Many South Koreans at the start of the twenty-first century still adhere to these traditional principles, ones most clearly seen in family dynamics. Generally, the father is treated with respect and is deferred to in decision-making. Newspapers sing praises of those noted for filial action, and to many South Koreans, the obligation to serve one's elderly parents on a daily basis is central to their existence.
- The importance of the family emerges clearly, when a youth talks about marriage. To marry a spouse not approved by one's family can lead to severe hardship and even ostracism. Major holidays center on venerating deceased parents and grandparents.
- In interacting with friends, many Koreans place a strong emphasis on loyalty; once friendships are firm, rarely do they fall apart.
- Schools play an especially important role in binding people together, and classmates, whether primary school, high school, or college, continue to support each other for the duration of their lives. These links extend to tight bonds between upperclassmen (*sonbae*) and lower classmen (*hubae*) as well

"Education is the Meaning of Life"- A Confucius Perspective

- Education is an institution found in every culture on earth; however, the importance placed on education and the ways used to instill knowledge in the young are very different around the globe.
- East Asian educational policy has been influenced by the ancient philosopher Confucius.
- Confucius stated, "When people are educated, the distinction between classes disappears;"
- East Asian culture has embraced these ideas by placing great importance on the education of their young and also on lifelong learning. Asian students consistently score at the top of international standardized tests and as a rule spend more time in the classroom per year than their Western counterparts. Attitudes of parents, teachers and students towards learning and the school environment can also be found to be very different from East to West. Is one system better than the other? What can the West learn from the East and vice versa?

2012 President Obama Statements about Korean Education System and Technology (Handout 8)

Source: *The Korea Times*: “Obama says S. Korea's education, Internet outperforming US”

- "Let's also remember that after parents, the biggest impact on a child's success comes from the man or woman at the front of the classroom," he said.
- "In South Korea, teachers are known as 'nation builders.' Here in America, it's time we treated the people who educate our children with the same level of respect", according to the Yonhap News Agency.
- Education fervor that contributed to South Korea's rapid economic development in recent decades and deplored the underperformance of American students, especially in math and science.
- Obama has called for the U.S. to look to South Korea in adopting longer school days and after-school programs for American children to survive keen global competition.
- "Our infrastructure used to be the best, but our lead has slipped," Obama said. "South Korean homes now have greater Internet access than we do."

Source: *The Washington Post*. In speech to South Korean students, *Obama describes a North Korea their social networks can't reach*”.

- The president was making a point that the South Korean youth are among the most technologically sophisticated and connected in the world — allowing him to draw a distinction with their impoverished, isolated counterparts across the North Korean border just 25 miles to the north of Seoul.
- The president referred to the South as a “modern miracle”, one of the world’s “most dynamic economies” that sprang from the ashes of war, crushing poverty and its own authoritarian regime to a modern reality of “thriving democracy” and “a truly global Korea”.
- In addition to having the world’s highest percentage of online households, South Korea also has a dynamic popular culture whose soap operas and pop music acts are among the most celebrated and successful in Asia. Obama made note of that when he cited “hallyu”, the Korean word for the spread internationally of its pop culture.
- “Korea’s success is a tribute to the sacrifices and tenacity of the Korean people,” Obama replied. “You show what can be achieved when people come together, educate their children, stand up for their values, and pursue a positive vision for their country.”

Source: *The Korea Times*: “Obama lauds Korea for Education, IT”

- Obama has often praised Korea since he took office.
- He lauded Korea for education zeal. He called for more investment in broadband and wireless to catch up with South Korea and other countries.
- Obama called for the United States to look to Korea in adopting longer school days and after-school programs for American children to help them survive in an era of keen global competition,
- "Our children -- listen to this -- our children spend over a month less in school than children in Korea every year," Obama said. "That's no way to prepare them for a 21st-century economy."

- In November same year, the U.S. president praised Korean parents for their enthusiasm in providing an excellent education to their children.
- At the launch of the "Educate to Innovate" campaign at the White House, Obama said, "I just want to mention the importance not only of students but also of parents," as he mentioned talks he had with President Lee Myung-bak in Seoul. "He said even if somebody is dirt poor, they are insisting that their kids are getting the best education."
- Since his visit to Seoul in 2009, Obama has often talked about the education fervor that contributed to Korea's rapid economic development in recent decades, and has deplored the underperformance of American students, especially in math and science.

KOREA is Technologically Advanced

- Technology is behind Korea's economic growth (it ranks thirteenth in the world in overall Gross Domestic Product). Koreans are among the most technologically - linked people in the world. More than 30 million people, 64 percent of the South Korean population, use cell phones, and South Korea has the eighth highest cell subscriber base in the world. More than 24 million South Koreans tap into the Internet, placing Korea in the world's top five internet-linked countries.
- Buying off the Web is a common practice in Korea. Its excellent computer technology allowed it to rank fourth in 2001 in sales in the global chip-making industry, and Korea holds the top spot in the dynamic random access memory (DRAM) sector.²
- Koreans have reached a position of leadership in technology through historical factors. Korean diligence and hard work is the key to this success story.
- Since the end of the Korean War, Koreans have stressed the importance of education, leading to an education mania that has resulted in a 98 percent literacy rate. Korea is one of the most literate societies in the world, allowing ease with new technology. South Koreans sent many of their talented youth abroad to learn about the latest systems in technology and then lured them back to Korea with plush economic packages. By fostering an environment of inquiry and support, South Korea has taken advantage of native talent to push itself into the ranks of the technologically advanced.