

# WHAT DOES A BORDER MEAN? KOREA DIVIDED

**GRADES:** 9-10

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**SUBJECT:** World History, Geography

**TIME REQUIRED:** 5-6 Class Periods

## **OBJECTIVES:**

Students will:

1. Understand how the configuration of borders on the Korean peninsula has changed over the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
2. Make connections between historical events and shifting borders and nationhood through the example of the Korean Peninsula
3. Analyze the impacts political borders can have on daily human life by looking at life in North and South Korea.
4. Examine human agency in changing borders by analyzing perspectives on Korean reunification

## **STANDARDS:**

### **National Council of Social Studies Standards:**

Standard 2: Time, Continuity and Change

Standard 5: Power, Authority and Governance

### **Common Core Standards:**

RH 1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources

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

WHST 1 Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content

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

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

SL 6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated and appropriate

## **MATERIALS REQUIRED:**

- Maps of Korean Peninsula
- Handout 1: BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF KOREAN HISTORY (attached)
- Handout 2: INFORMATION SHEET ON NORTH AND SOUTH KOREA
- Handout 3: LIFE IN NORTH AND SOUTH KOREA GRAPHIC ORGANIZER
- Handout 4: WHY TWO KOREAS BACKGROUND READING)
- Handout 5: KOREAN UNIFICATION PROS AND CONS

## **BACKGROUND:**

The Korean Peninsula has been more or less unified since the 7<sup>th</sup> century under the Silla Dynasty. The 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, has been one of contestation and division on the peninsula.

Many students who study history and geography have little sense that borders can actually change, and, in fact, may have done so a number of times over the course of history.

Studying the history of division and potential unity on the 20<sup>th</sup> century Korean Peninsula is an excellent way to help students see the impacts of human agency on borders, as well as examine the impacts of borders on people's everyday lives.

In the Joseon Dynasty period, King Sejong and King Sejo ruled over a united peninsula. A Japanese invasion in 1592 was fought off and the peninsula remained united. However by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Japan's eyes turned again to the Korean Peninsula and the "Hermit Kingdom." At the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, Japanese troops moved into Korea and announced the Japan-Korea Protection Treaty. In 1910, Japan officially annexed Korea.

By 1945, World War II had ended and the question of what to do with the Korean Peninsula was not in the hands of Koreans, but rather in the hands of the Allies. Political turmoil about the future of Korea was enhanced by the newly begun Cold War. An initial division of the peninsula at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel was made by the United Nations in 1945 to secure it under 'trusteeship' of the USSR in the north, and the United States in the south. In 1948, the two trusted areas became two separate nations, North and South Korea.

In 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea. The war lasted three years and killed over 2 million people. When the armistice was signed, the dividing line between the two nations was again put at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel.

The two separate nations have grown up in the following 50 years with different ideological bases and economic systems. Each nation's international relationships have impacted their economic and social realities as well. Life in North Korea is very different from life in South Korea. Though reliable statistics on the daily life of average North Koreans is difficult if not impossible to find, it is clear that the standard of living of North Korea is significantly lower than South Korea.

The possibility of unification has long been on the mind of Korean politicians and the Korean population. Though prospects have rollercoasted, the division of families and the peninsula as a whole, has been at the center of politics in Korea since the end of the Korean War.

## **PROCEDURE:**

### LESSON ONE:

Step 1: In small groups, students will examine a series of four maps – each map is connected to a different historical period,

- Chosŏn Dynasty era map
- Japanese Occupation/Colonial period
- 1945 Post-World War II
- Post-Korean War truce /present day

After examining each of the four maps, students will respond to the following three questions:

1. Is there a nation called Korea on each map?
2. How do the borders of different countries on the Korean peninsula change over time?
3. What are three possible explanations to explain the ways in which borders have changed on the Korean Peninsula over time?

Step 2: Students read a brief history of the Korean peninsula and overview of the border changes. (Handout 1: BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF KOREAN HISTORY)

Step 3: Students create a 3-5 sentence caption for each of the maps explaining the map for a proposed textbook. Students base their proposed captions on the information that they have gathered explaining how the border changed and why.

## LESSON TWO:

Step 1: Students complete a background reading on the division of the Korean Peninsula and the subsequent impact on the North and South Korea. (Handout 2: INFORMATION SHEET ON NORTH AND SOUTH KOREA)

Step 2: Students complete a graphic organizer comparing elements of history and life in North and South Korea. (Handout 3: LIFE IN NORTH AND SOUTH KOREA GRAPHIC ORGANIZER)

## LESSON THREE:

Step 1: Divide students into even-numbered small mixed-ability groups, ideally four students per group.

Step 2: Students complete a background reading and questions on the history of the division of the Korean Peninsula. (Handout 4: WHY TWO KOREAS BACKGROUND READING)

Step 3: Students receive a handout setting out different sets of points for and against the reunification of North and South Korea in small groups. (Handout 5: KOREAN UNIFICATION PROS AND CONS)

Step 4: Think Pair Share - Students will individually circle the points they think are the strongest. They will pair with another student to discuss the points they think are the strongest and why. The pair of students will then join with the other pair of students in a group of four to decide as a group whether they favor reunification

Step 5: Students will individually write an initial explanation of their group's strongest three reasons in favor of their position and a refutation of the strongest reason offered against their position.

Step 6: If you have the time and resources, student can divide up research to help them support their position in an oral debate and well as for their final paper. Otherwise they can work with the information given in the handouts.

Step 7 Students will prepare a poster outlining their group's position and illustrating their main points which they will use as a visual aide during the class debate.

(The teacher may choose to use more defined group roles in the preparation for the debate. Roles could include: a *Spokesperson* who would give the groups initial presentation; a *Graphic Artist* who would create the poster outlining the group's position; a *Counterpoint Expert* who can respond to the arguments of other groups; and a *Cross-Examiner* who would develop questions for the other groups to find out more about their positions)

Step 8: Students will debate the question: is it feasible to envision a reunification of Korea?

## **EVALUATION:**

As a final activity, students will write an analysis of the challenges to reunification, including historical and political information they have gathered from all three lessons.

## **RESOURCES:**

Cumings, Bruce. *The Two Koreas: On the Road to Reunification*. New York, NY: Foreign Policy Association, 1991.

Henriksen, Thomas H. and Lho, Kyongsoo eds. *One Korea? Challenges and Prospects for Reunification*. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1994.

Koo, Hagen ed. *State and Society in Contemporary Korea*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993.

Oberdorfer, Don. *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (Revised and Updated Edition). Basic Books: 2001

Korea, South, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ks.html> CIA The World Factbook. Sept 9, 2010

Korea, North <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kn.html> CIA The World Factbook. August 19, 2010

Oberholtzer, Carl. *Interpreting the Causes of the Korean War* The Korea Society. [http://www.koreasociety.org/k-12\\_resources/](http://www.koreasociety.org/k-12_resources/)

*The Two Koreas: Will They Ever Reunite?* The Korea Society [http://www.koreasociety.org/k-12\\_resources/](http://www.koreasociety.org/k-12_resources/)

## **HANDOUT 1: BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF KOREAN HISTORY**

Korea, located on the Korean Peninsula in Northeast Asia, has been divided into two countries since 1948: the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (South Korea). The following article discusses the history of Korea up until its division.

The earliest known Korean state was Old Chosŏn, in what is now northwestern Korea and northeastern China. Old Chosŏn was conquered by the Han Chinese in 108 BCE. The Chinese set up military outposts in Korea that spread Chinese culture and civilization. The first of the three main Korean kingdoms to come into contact with the Chinese was Koguryo, which emerged in the first century BCE in the northern part of the Peninsula. Paekche in the southwest and Silla in the southeast, which emerged in the third and the fourth centuries CE, respectively, had contact with China as well.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, foreign powers attempted to increase their influence on Korea. These attempts were rejected by Koreans, who believed the Confucian society they had achieved required little or nothing from countries other than China. Christianity, quietly introduced from China in 1784, was slowly and covertly propagated by underground French Roman Catholic missionaries. The Korean government, however, attempted to stop the spread of Christianity because it was not compatible with Confucianism. In 1864 the taewŏn'gun (grand prince), father of the boy-king Kojong, seized power, outlawed Christianity and sought to curb foreign contact. He subsequently faced attacks from France (in 1866) and the United States (in 1871), both of which were attempting to establish trade relations with Korea. These attacks were repulsed. The taewŏn'gun also tried to strengthen the Korean state by stamping out government corruption. The political fallout from these reforms, however, resulted in his downfall in 1873.

In 1876 the Japanese forced Korea to establish diplomatic relations in order to facilitate trade between the countries, thus weakening Korea's traditional ties to China. China then sought to balance Japan's new influence by promoting Korean ties with Western countries, as embodied in the Korea–U.S. treaty of 1882. During the next decade Korea made many efforts to reform its government and modernize its economy, but these efforts were frustrated by the continued influence of foreign powers. In 1895 Japan defeated China in the Sino–Japanese War, and ten years later Japan beat Russia in the Russo–Japanese War. These victories cemented Japan's power in Korea, leading to the formal Japanese annexation of Korea and the end of the Chosŏn kingdom in 1910.

Japanese domination of Korea formally began with the Protectorate Treaty (1905), forced on Korea after the Russo–Japanese War. Under this treaty, Japan assumed control of Korea's foreign relations and ultimately its police and military, currency and banking, communications and all other vital functions. These changes were tenaciously resisted by the Koreans. In 1910 Japan formally annexed Korea when it realized Korea would not accept nominal sovereignty.

From 1910 to 1919 Japan solidified its rule by purging nationalists, gaining control of Korea's land distribution system and enforcing rigid administrative changes. These measures, along with the general demand for national self-determination following World War I, led millions of

Koreans took to the streets in nonviolent demonstrations for independence on March 1, 1919. But the massive protest was quickly and violently suppressed. Japan tightened its control over Korea and reacted quickly to suppress other nationalist activity. As the Japanese imperial government became more militaristic throughout the 1930s and 1940s, it imposed measures designed to assimilate the Korean population, including outlawing the Korean language and even Korean family names. Korea was liberated from the Japanese by the Allied victory that ended World War II in 1945.

Shortly before the end of the war in the Pacific in 1945, the United States and the Soviet Union (USSR) agreed to divide Korea at the 38th parallel for the purpose of accepting the surrender of Japanese troops. Both powers, however, used their presence to create separate, friendly governments. The USSR suppressed the moderate nationalists in the north and supported Kim Il Sung, a Communist who had led anti-Japanese guerrillas in Manchuria, as the leader of a new North Korean state. In the south, leftists were opposed by various groups of right-wing nationalists. Unable to find a congenial moderate who could bring these forces together, the United States ended up suppressing the left and promoting Syngman Rhee, a nationalist who had opposed the Japanese and lived in exile in the United States, as the leader of a new South Korean state.

From INTERPRETING THE CAUSES OF THE KOREAN WAR AUTHOR: Carl Oberholtzer, [www.koreasociety.org](http://www.koreasociety.org)

## Handout 2: COMPARISON OF NORTH KOREA AND SOUTH KOREA

The following information comes from the *CIA World Fact Book*. Students may wish to access the Internet for more information on the two Koreas. Students should be aware that it is difficult to obtain accurate information about North Korea.

CIA Website for South Korea: <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/ks.html>

For North Korea: <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/kn.html>

### Geography:

|                   | North Korea  | South Korea   |
|-------------------|--|---|
| Area              | Total area: 120,540 sq.km  | Total area: 98,190 sq.km  |
| Terrain           | Mostly hills and mountains separated by deep, narrow valleys; coastal plains wide in west, discontinuous in east               | Mostly high hills and mountains; wide coastal plains in the west and south  |
| Natural Resources | Coal, lead, tungsten, zinc, graphite, magnetite, iron ore, copper pyrites, salt, hydro-power                                   | Coal, tungsten, graphite, molybdenum lead, hydropower   |
| Land use          | Arable land, 14%; permanent crops, 2%; meadows and pastures, 0%; forest and woodland, 61%                                      | Arable land, 19%; permanent crops, 2%; meadows and pastures, 1%; forest and woodland, 65%                               |
| Environment       | Localized air pollution; attributable to inadequate industrial controls; water pollution; inadequate supplies of potable water | Air pollution in large cities; water pollution from the discharge of sewage and industrial effluents; drift net fishing |

### Population:

|                          | North Korea                    | South Korea              |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Population               | 22, 665, 345 (2010 est.)       | 48, 508, 972 (2010 est.) |
| Pop. Growth Rate         | 0.42% (2010 est.)              | 0.26% (2010 est.)        |
| Migration Rate           | - .09/1000 people              | - 0.33/1,000 people      |
| Fertility Rate           | 1.94 children born/woman       | 1.22 children born/woman |
| Urban Population         | 63% of total population        | 81% of total population  |
| Infant Mortality         | 51.34 deaths/1,000 live births | 4.26/1,000 live births   |
| Life Expectancy at Birth | 63.81 years                    | 78.72 years              |

## Economy

**North Korea:** More than 90% of the economy is socialized; that is, agricultural land is collectivized and state-owned industry produces 95% of manufactured goods. State control of economic affairs is very tight. Economic growth during the period 1984-88 averaged 2-3% per year, but output declined by 4-5% during 1989-1996 because of systemic problems and disruptions in socialist-style economic relations with the former USSR and China. North Korea has not yet become self-sufficient in good production. North Korea has been plagued by chronic food shortages, famine and starvation, due to flooding, shortages of farming supplies, and distribution problems.

Periodic international food aid has helped stave off starvation. Improved climate conditions and energy assistance from other countries has helped the North Korean economy in recent years. Additionally, large portions of the North Korean economy are used to maintain the military.

- National Product      GDP \$40 billion (2009 est.)
- National Product Real Growth      3.7%
- GDP – per person      \$1,900
- Percentage of Labor force by occupation (2004 est.)
  - Agriculture: 37%
  - Industry and services: 63%
- Unemployment rate: Not Available

**South Korea:** The driving force behind the economy's dynamic growth has been the planned development of an export-oriented economy. Real GNP increased by more than 10% annually between 1986-1991. This growth ultimately led to an economic situation characterized by low unemployment, high inflation, and rapidly rising debt. As a result, in 1992, the government made efforts to slow the growth rate and reduce the deficit. After a financial crisis that impacted all of Asia in 1997-1998, South Korean GDP fell by 6.9%. The country was pressured into taking emergency loans from the International Monetary Fund. The economy would eventually recover, however, the global economic downturn has caused slow current growth.

- National Product      GDP \$1.364 trillion (2009 est.)
- National Product Real Growth      0.2%
- GDP – per person      \$28,100
- Percentage of Labor Force by occupation (2007 est.)
  - Agriculture: 7.2%
  - Industry: 25.1%
  - Services: 67.7%
- Unemployment rate: 3.7% (2009 est.)

From [The Two Koreas: Will They Ever Reunite?](#) [www.koreasociety.org](http://www.koreasociety.org) and CIA Factbook [www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov)



## Handout 3: COMPARING THE KOREAS - GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

### Life in the North and South

1. Explain how the two population-related factors, Migration Rate and Fertility Rate, might work against each other in terms of impacting the future population of both North and South Korea?

2. As you read over the handout, choose the three pieces of information that you think show the differences between North and South Korea most strongly. Fill in the chart below and explain why each fact comparison helps explain how people in North and South Korea are living very differently.

|  | North Korea | South Korea |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| Fact #1  |             |             |
| Explanation of what this fact comparison shows about the difference between life in North and South Korea. |             |             |
| Fact #2  |             |             |
| Explanation of what this fact comparison shows about the difference between life in North and South Korea. |             |             |
| Fact #3  |             |             |
| Explanation of what this fact comparison shows about the difference between life in North and South Korea. |             |             |

3. How can you explain the differences between life in South Korea and North Korea?

## Handout 4: Why Two Koreas?

*Below is a brief description of the events leading to the division of Korea. Students should consult other sources for a more detailed explanation.*

World War II ended with the defeat of Germany, Italy and Japan, but with peace came the question of what to do with the territories they had conquered. During the war and immediately after it, the Allied Powers agreed how to divide up and occupy these newly liberated lands. In general, when western powers, especially the U.S. and Britain, occupied a territory, they set about creating democratic, capitalist governments. Territories occupied by the Soviet Union generally became communist within a few years. Some nations — Germany, Austria and Korea — were divided among the victorious Allies. Thus, after the defeat of Japan, Soviet troops occupied North Korea while U.S. forces occupied South Korea. Korea, which had not previously been divided, now had a northern and southern zone of occupation.

In Austria, compromises were worked out among the Allies, quickly ending its division. Germany, however, remained a divided country; West Germany and East Germany, each with its own government, were not reunited until 1990. That event, which occurred when the Cold War ended, led some people to wonder if Korea, too, might be reunited. But its division continues.

The question remains: “Why two Koreas?” While the issue is complex, five major points help explain the division:

1. Koreans did not agree on the type of government their country should have after its liberation from Japan. Some wanted a communist state. Others supported capitalism modeled on the western democracies. Both sides sought support from other nations. In North Korea, the communists gained power and got supplies and financial aid from communist countries such as Russia and China. In South Korea, supporters of capitalism ran the government and they got aid from the U.S. and other powers.
2. Both North Korea and South Korea had strong leaders who saw each other as bitter rivals. The South Korean leader, Syngman Rhee, was tough on communism, while Kim Il-sung, who had embraced communism, eventually gained complete control in North Korea. Although other leaders later replaced Rhee, Kim continued to rule North Korea until his death in 1994. He was succeeded by his son Kim Jong-il.
3. The Korean War (1950-1953) turned North Korea and South Korea into heavily armed enemy states. Koreans fought the war to reunify their divided country, but after the loss of three million Koreans, almost 900,000 Chinese and about 54,000 Americans, Korea was more deeply divided than ever. While a truce agreement was signed on July 29, 1953, the two Koreas are still officially at war.
4. In almost 50 years since the war, the two Koreas have developed very differently. Their political and economic systems are a study in opposites. South Korea has become a capitalist nation with a democratically-elected government and private ownership of property, North Korea has become a totalitarian state dominated by the family of Kim Il-sung and a communist ideology.
5. Other nations, especially Russia, China, Japan and the U.S., have interests in preserving the peace in this part of East Asia and have sought to prevent a second Korean War. U.S. troops have been stationed in South Korea since the Korean War to help ensure the peace. Even the Russians and Chinese have accepted the U.S. presence as a guarantee of balance of power between North Korea and South Korea.

Despite the difference that separate the two Koreas, many Koreans (and outsiders) find the division unacceptable. Young people in particular, who did not go through the trauma of the Korean War,

have difficulty understanding why the country should be split. Families remain divided in North Korea and South Korea. Resources are constantly drained off to the military and Korean culture is fractured. All Koreans speak the same language and share a vibrant history, art, literature and culture. But the goal of reunification remains difficult to achieve.

## **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. In what ways was Korea's division the result of international forces outside the control of Koreans? In what ways was it the result of differences between Koreans themselves?
2. South Korea has had several leaders since 1945; some were elected, others were not. However, North Korea, until 1994, was led by one person, Kim Il-sung. How might leadership have affected possibilities for unification?
3. Of the five reasons given for the continued division of Korea, which seems to you the most significant? Least? Why? What might be some other reasons for Korea's continued division? Use research sources to answer this question.

# Handout 5: Reunification - For and Against

## FOR: KOREA SHOULD BE REUNIFIED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

Reasons:

1. The two Koreas would be much stronger economically if they united. South Korea has a strong agricultural and industrial base while North Korea has more mineral and hydroelectric resources.
2. Korean families could be united almost 50 years after the Korean War. For Koreans, who value their families highly, this would be a major humanitarian benefit.
3. South Korea is part of the international community and has many trading partners, while North Korea has largely isolated itself. Unification could help improve the North Korean economy. Outside investment would help develop the Rajin-Sonbong Free Trade Zone that North Korea has planned.
4. Both sides spend heavily on the military. Reunification would reduce military spending and free up resources for civilian needs.
5. A united Korea would lessen tensions in East Asia. North Korea has been developing nuclear weapons creating anxieties across the region.
6. North Korea has a poor human rights record; South Korea has, at times, curtailed civil liberties. A united Korea might create a more secure government that would not need to restrict fundamental freedoms.
7. Since all Koreans speak the same language and share same history, the two Koreas could merge without much disruption.
8. Foreign troops, like those of the U.S., could leave South Korea. A united Korea could then determine its own policies without relying on other countries.
9. South Korea needs more cheap labor for its industries and North Korea can provide them. Currently, immigrants from other nations are coming to South Korea to work.
10. North Korea's economy is in desperate shape, Floods and declining harvests have led to widespread famine and illness. Reunification could make more humanitarian aid available to the people of North Korea.

## **AGAINST: KOREA SHOULD NOT BE REUNIFIED**

Reasons:

1. Economically, reunification would be very costly. South Korea's standard of living, which is much higher than that of North Korea, would drop if South Korea had to help North Korea rebuild its failing economy. Examples could be cited in the huge amount West Germany had to invest when it reunited with East Germany.
2. Kim Jong-un and his supporters control North Korea and would probably be ousted if Korea were reunited. Therefore, they would put up roadblocks to real unification.
3. North Korea has never had a free election. Its 3 million communist party members could disrupt any attempts to set up a government.
4. North Korea has an army of over 1.2 million; these troops would be unemployed after reunification and could pose a problem. Refugees from the impoverished north would flood south in search of jobs.
5. North Korea seized the property of over 5 million Koreans who fled south during the Korean War. South Koreans who wished to reclaim their property could cause major disruptions in the North Korean economy.
6. It has been almost 50 years since the Korean War. Unlike Eastern Europe, which had contacts with the west, North Korea has been almost totally isolated from the rest of the world. Cultural, political and ideological differences between the two Koreas are too great for real integration. In the case of Germany, the population ratio of West Germans to East Germans was 4:1. But in Korea, the ratio would be only 2:1 (South:North). As in Germany today, there would likely be resentment between the "haves" of South Korea and the "have nots" of North Korea.
7. In the Korean War, many civilians were killed and even today it is thought that some South Koreans are still held prisoner in North Korea. Further, an estimated 100,000 people in North Korea are currently imprisoned or in forced work camps. Reunification might lead to demands for revenge.
8. If Korea is united and U.S. troops pull out, Korea might have problems defending itself from nearby powers. Other nations, Japan, or China might see Korea as a potential rival and stir up the conflicts that have long been part of East Asian history.
9. South Korea received economic and military support from the U.S. as a buffer to communism. A unified Korea might end that special relationship.
10. South Korea has been successfully moving toward democracy after years of military rule. Tensions and the economic drain of helping North Korea could put that growing democracy to severe tests

From [The Two Koreas: Will They Ever Reunite?](http://www.koreasociety.org) [www.koreasociety.org](http://www.koreasociety.org)