

LESSON 10

The Two Koreas: Will They Ever Reunite?

For over 50 years, Korea has been divided. North Korea and South Korea are separated not only by a demilitarized zone (DMZ) but also by political and economic ideology. Troops from North Korea and South Korea face each other as enemies along the DMZ. Koreans in both the north and south see themselves as one people and hope one day to be reunited.

Today many Korean families remain separated in the north and south. They are prohibited by their governments from exchanges of visits or letters. Recently, however, South Korea's President Kim Dae-jung has supported a more pragmatic approach to North Korea, which may affect economic cooperation and contact between people on both sides of the DMZ. As North Korea faced severe famine in the late 1990's, South Koreans offered aid. In 1998, the head of Hyundai, a leading South Korean company, Chung Ju Yung donated 1,000 head of cattle to North Korea. This gift — and its acceptance by the North Korean government — was a landmark occasion in the relations of the two countries. Some Koreans hope that the exchanges like this will pave the way for greater political and economic engagement between the two countries.

LINKAGE WITH CURRICULUM

*Contemporary World
History

MATERIALS

*Handouts
Accompanying
This Lesson
*Additional Reference
Sources

Purpose of Lesson and Overview

The purpose of this lesson is to help students understand the issues that have created two Koreas and have kept them apart for more than 50 years.

Objectives

After completion of the lesson, students should be able to:

- explain the historical circumstances that led to the creation of North and South Korea;
- compare the two countries using statistical information;
- analyze the issue of reunification;
- develop their own position paper on how reunification might occur.

Materials

The handouts 1 to 6 describe some issues involved in the division of Korea, the comparative economics of North Korea and South Korea and the status of reunification talks. Teachers and students should read newspapers and magazines to find articles about Korea today. Interested students should use the Internet or library facilities to study in more depth the issues raised in this lesson.

LESSON 10

Procedure

The lesson is divided into four parts; each might form a separate lesson or different group assignment. One pattern is to follow these four stages. First, have the class read and discuss how the two Koreas came to be created. You can supplement this stage with more readings as time permits. Second, have groups analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the two Koreas based on statistical data from the CIA Fact Book. In the third stage, have students debate the issue of reunification using the charts in Handout 5. Encourage students to do more research to supplement the charts. In the fourth stage, have students develop their own thesis on how unification might be achieved. Handout 6 suggests some possibilities, but students may develop their own scenarios as well. In the closing discussion, have students present their position papers and compare them with events taking place in Korea.

LESSON 10

The Lesson: The Two Koreas: Will They Ever Reunite?

OPENING A. Have the class read Handouts 1, 2, 3 and 4 on the historical background of the two Koreas.

READING B. Ask students to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of North Korea and South Korea based on statistical data in Handout 5.

INVESTIGATIONS C. Facilitate a debate on the issue whether or not Korea should reunite. Handouts 6 and 7 give some points, but students should do additional research.

ASSESSMENT D. In the final discussion, students should present position papers on the reunification issues. Discussion questions might include:

- 1) Is unification a likely prospect? Would North Korea or South Korea benefit most? Least?
- 2) What are the major obstacles to reunification?
- 3) How might other nations be affected by Korean reunification?
- 4) How might reunification affect Koreans who live outside of Korea?

Students might wish to do more research on the North Korean political and economic system and compare it to other communist states like Cuba. The issue of reunification could be viewed in the context of German reunification in 1990. Since reunification is a popular topic on the Internet, student may engage in dialogues in various electronic discussion groups. Handout 4 features an interview with a South Korean, taken as captive during the Korean War, who was held in North Korea from 1950 to 1994. While his experiences may be extreme, they suggest the nature of North Korean life in villages, where politically suspect people are sent. The handout may help students understand the issues of vengeance mentioned in Handout 6.

World Wide Web

- <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~korea>
- <http://www.odci.gov/publications/factbook/geos/ks.html>
- <http://www.odci.gov/publications/factbook/geos/kn.html>
- <http://www.unikorea.go.kr>
- <http://www.koreascope.org>
- <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/kptoc.html>
- <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/krtoc.html>

LESSON 10

Handout I

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

LESSON 10

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.

POINTS 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 invasion? Use research sources to answer this question.

LESSON 10

Handout 2

Syngman Rhee: A Brief Biography

When United States forces occupied the southern half of Korea in 1945, they assisted Syngman Rhee in gaining political power. The following is an overview of the life of the first president of South Korea.

EARLY LIFE

Syngman Rhee came from a family of scholars and royalty. Born in 1875, Rhee was descended from an older brother of King Sejong. Rhee's mother was the daughter of a Confucian scholar. As a child, he studied the Confucian classics.

After he saw the defeat of China in the Sino-Japan War (1894-5), Rhee decided to learn English and entered the Baejae Academy run by American missionaries. He felt it was important to adapt to modern ways and communicate with westerners. While in school, Rhee was exposed to western political ideas and became actively involved in revolutionary activities in Korea. He was very critical of the royal government and was sent to jail from 1899 to 1904. During that time, Rhee became a Christian.

In 1904, Rhee moved to the U.S. to pursue higher education. He attended George Washington University, Harvard University and received his Ph.D. from Princeton University in 1910. But he never forgot about the struggles in the country he left behind.

While he was abroad, Japan annexed Korea. Japan took over Korean schools and businesses. It used the country as a military outpost for its efforts to expand into China and Russia. When he returned to Korea, Rhee worked for the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in Seoul. It was a gathering place for young Koreans to meet with missionaries from the U.S. and Canada. The YMCA had close ties to the West and Japan. Because of these ties, the Japanese government did not interfere with it. At the YMCA, however, Rhee and others organized activities to support the Korean independence movement.

In 1915, Rhee returned to the U.S. because the Japanese government began to crack down on Christian leaders in Korea. He became a leader of the independence movement in the U.S. In 1918, Rhee unsuccessfully presented a petition to President Woodrow Wilson to ask support for Korea's independence from Japan.

Koreans staged a nation wide, non-violent independence movement against Japan on March 1, 1919. After its failure, Korean exiles fled to Shanghai, China, where they created the Provisional Government of Korea. Rhee became its prime minister. During his years of exile, Rhee worked tirelessly to establish Korean independence. He met with U.S. leaders and supported the efforts of Koreans in the U.S. After World War II, U.S. forces moved into South Korea. Rhee then returned to Korea with U.S. support and established a constitutional assembly. He was elected the first president of the Republic of Korea on August 15, 1948.

LESSON 10

IN POWER

By the time Rhee became president, he had spent nearly 40 years abroad and was over 70 years old. Because of his long resistance to Japanese rule, Rhee allowed no easing of tension with Japan while he was president. He believed in reunifying the Korean peninsula by military force. During the Korean War (1950-3), Rhee rallied to defend South Korea. As president, however, Rhee was unable to improve South Korea's economy. In 1960, his government was overthrown.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

1. How might have Rhee's Confucian upbringing and U.S. education influenced his career?
2. How did Rhee try to free Korea from Japanese rule? Give at least three examples.
3. How did Rhee contribute to lay the foundation for Korea's democratic evolution? Was he a democratic leader or a Confucian leader?

LESSON 10

Handout 3

Kim Il-sung: A Brief Biography

When Soviet forces occupied northern half of Korea in 1945, they supported a communist and Korean nationalist, Kim Il-sung to gain power. The following is a brief excerpt from a biography on Kim Il-sung written by Su Dae-sook, a South Korean scholar.

EARLY LIFE

Kim's life from his birth to his return to Korea in 1945 is not a complicated story. Kim was born Kim Song-ju on April 15, 1912, in Pyongyang to a peasant couple named Kim Hyong-jik and Kang Pan-sok. He was the eldest of three sons and followed his family into Manchuria and attended elementary school there. He returned briefly to Pyongyang to attend fourth and fifth grades, but he finished grammar school and two years of middle school in Manchuria attending Chinese schools. His formal education ended in 1929 at the eighth grade when he was expelled from school for participation in unlawful activities.

His father died early in 1926 when Kim was only fourteen. In the spring of 1930, when he was released from jail, he began to follow various bands of guerillas [against the Japanese occupation] leaving his widowed mother and two brothers behind. His mother died two years later, in 1932 and his two brothers became orphans. When the Chinese anti-Japanese forces absorbed most of the Korean partisans [guerrilla] for operations against the Japanese, Kim fought in a group organized predominantly among Koreans within the Chinese groups, changing his name from Song-ju to Il-sung in the process. He led a small band of Koreans several times into Korea attacking Japanese outposts in remote northern villages. He fought well within the Chinese guerrilla groups during the peak of the Chinese Communist guerrilla activities from 1937 to 1939. The Japanese expeditionary forces eventually crushed the guerrillas and the survivors of these groups fled to the Russian Maritime Province in 1940 to 1945. He returned to Korea with the Soviet occupation authorities when Korea was liberated in August 1945.

IN POWER

Kim took over North Korea largely by playing factions against each other, i.e. other contending communist leaders who had stayed in Korea or others who had continued to fight with the Chinese communists. But Kim's relationship with the Soviet Union aided him in taking over. By 1949-50, he thought he could unite all of Korea and gained the support of Stalin [Soviet Union] and Mao Zedong [China] for his venture to take over South Korea. The Korean War resulted, with the eventual need for massive Chinese troops to prevent Kim's defeat.

After the Korean War, Kim did a balancing act as his two main supporters, Russia and China, had disagreements with each other. Kim was caught between competing states. He declared a policy *Juche* – self reliance for Korea. He still, however, relied on Soviet and Chinese aid. Kim consolidated his domestic standing by making a cult of his leadership with huge statues of himself. The leaders taught the people to think of Kim as “Great Leader.” Kim also isolated North Korea so that western ideas, media and visitors could not interfere with the rosy picture he painted of North Korea and himself. Kim Il-sung died in 1994 and his son, Kim Jong-il, continues family control over North Korea.

(Source: Suh Dae-sook. Kim Il-sung: The North Korean Leader. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988: 3-4)

LESSON 10

POINTS TO CONSIDER

1. How might Kim's time in the Soviet Union and his education in Chinese schools have helped his career?
2. Find out more about Kim's cult of personality. How did Kim's cult of personality contradict communist ideal of equality and service to the state?
3. Compare Kim Il-sung to another dictator who ruled elsewhere in terms of how each gained and maintained his power.

LESSON 10

Handout 4

A South Korean POW Escapes After 43 Years in The North

The following are excerpts from a 1996 interview with Cho Chang-ho, a South Korean soldier in the Korean War who was captured and held prisoner in North Korea for 43 years. In 1994, he escaped through China and eventually was reunited with his family in South Korea.

“I was the most dangerous man in the village,” Cho Chang-ho says with a shake of his head. A soft spoken man now, he goes on to explain. He was dangerous because he was a South Korean, who had had some university training and because he had endured thirteen years in prison camp before being released to the small coal mining village near the Chinese border.

In the village, conditions were harsh. On holidays, the government gave us white rice, but otherwise we survived on millet and whatever we could raise in gardens after work. There would be daily assemblies where we would have to tell what we did wrong that day or where others might criticize us. There were lectures on Kim Il-sung’s greatness and on the current slogans. When I first came to the mining village, knowing any English was suspect, but later there was a campaign, ‘We shall be very shameful if we don’t communicate in English.’ However, there were few textbooks and those printed were done poorly. The most prized object you could get for your child was a notebook for school.

There was no freedom in the village and I had to keep my thoughts to myself. There were people in the village who spied on each other and so social contact was fairly limited. Two watchmen were assigned to keep track of the people and one lived next door to me. We had no books — it was a ‘pig’s’ life — work with no outlet for the mind. Though sometimes, because I had had an education and was ‘different,’ some villagers would come to me secretly for advice. Communications with the outside world were controlled. There were radios and a TV for every four families so that other people would know what you were watching and listening to. The only telephone was in the government office and the only car was for the party leader. A village loudspeaker gave us most of the news from the national government.

A few men who had gone to Libya to be ‘guest workers’ brought back some audio tapes and smuggled in Western music. But otherwise we knew little of the outside world. That is why I do not think a North Korean revolution is possible — the people are so deprived of information and so worn down by work.

Work in the mines was terrible — you can see by the scar from my leg where a coal cart rammed into it. There were very few safety devices. Many of the miners, including me, suffered from black lung disease. People tried to survive by their gardens and by brewing illegal liquor which could be bartered or sold for smuggled goods. There was a secret saying about drinking, ‘Having a drink is the only happiness.’ Some of this liquor was traded to Chinese traveling merchants who were our major contacts with the outside world.

LESSON 10

It was one of these merchants who made contact with my family and who eventually got me out of North Korea. He could see that I did not fit in the village even though I had married and had three children. The children were grown and my marriage ended in divorce. The merchant contacted my sister in Seoul [South Korea]. She sold her house to finance my escape. After all those years, she still felt strong family loyalty and sacrificed her financial future on the chance that I could come home. My escape route was a very long and hard one. It was planned for a dark, rainy night and I went with the Chinese merchant north into China. There I stayed and hid until arrangements were made with Chinese fishing men to put me on their boats to reach South Korean waters. Our first attempt failed — it was dark; their boats had no navigational equipment and no way of getting me across to other ships. Finally, my sister contacted the South Korean CIA who sent a ship that would be brightly lit so that the Chinese could reach it. They used a sling to hoist me board the South Korean ship. But the fear, the failed attempts and the worry about my children seriously damaged my health and it has taken a long time to recover.

What was it that sustained me through all this — especially the prison camp experience in which so many others died from torture and malnutrition? Part of it was my Christian faith — every year I would celebrate Christmas in my heart. Part of it was knowing that my family would help me if they only knew. It wasn't until I got back to South Korea that I saw my name on the Korean War Memorial as one of the dead.

One of the hardest parts of returning is the families who come to me and ask me about their relatives — if they too survive someplace. But almost always I have to tell them that they are dead. Do I fear that North Korea will bring reprisals against me for telling my story? I have some fears, but I have lived with fear all my life.”

POINTS TO CONSIDER

1. Judging from Cho's account, what do North Koreans know about life in South Korea and the rest of the world?
2. Why do you think North Korea has kept itself largely isolated from the world? Why do you think the North Korean government is so suspicious of intellectual thought or free thinking? What does that tell you about its government?
3. After 50 years of separation, Korean families divided by war want to be united. What do you think are the obstacles to family reunification? Why might North Korea be reluctant to open its borders?

LESSON 10

Handout 5

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>

GROUP EXERCISE

Each group should examine the information on the two Koreas. and considered this question:

WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF EACH KOREA?

Students should read the information on North Korea and South Korea and by each item mark an “S” for strength or “W” for weakness in comparison to the other Korea. At the end, the groups should decide if:

- 1) North Korea has more potential to survive on its own;
- 2) South Korea has more potential to survive on its own;
- 3) a unified Korea would be a better option for both.

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

LESSON 10

People:

	North Korea	South Korea
Population	24,317,004 (1997 est.)	45,948,811 (1997 est.)
Pop. Growth Rate	1.68% (1997 est.)	1.02% (1997 est.)
Migration Rate	0	0.33/1000
Fertility Rate	2.29 children born/woman	1.78 children born/woman

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 unusually tight even for a communist country. Economic growth during the period 1984-88 averaged 2-3%, per year, but output declined by 4-5% annually during 1989-96 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 goods production. Five consecutive years of poor harvests, coupled with distribution problems, have led to chronic food shortages, famine and starvation.

- National product GNP \$20.9 billion
- National product real growth rate -5%
- National product per capita \$900
- Exports \$805 million
- Industrial production growth rate -7% to -9% (1992 est.)

South Korea: The driving force behind the economy's dynamic growth has been the planned development of an export-oriented economy. Real GNP increased more than 10% annually between 1986-1991. This growth ultimately led to an overheated situation characterized by a tight labor market, strong inflationary pressures and a rapidly rising current account deficit. As a result, in 1992, the government paid attention to slowing the growth rate of inflation and reducing the deficit. These moves led to a slow down in growth. By the late 1990's, however, South Korea suffered the consequences of extensive growth and borrowing. In order to save the economy, the country had to take emergency loans from the International Monetary Fund.

- National product GNP \$647.2 billion (1996 est.)
- National product real growth rate 6.9% (1996 est.)
- National product per capita \$14,200 (1996 est.)
- Exports \$130.96 billion
- Industrial production growth rate 11.9 % (1995)

LESSON 10

Handout 6

Reunification: For and Against

Class Debate:

For this assignment, divide the class into two groups to examine alternative views on Korean reunification. Each side should look over this handout for some basic arguments, but these arguments should be supplemented by more research. Have teams of students prepare position papers in which they argue their stand on unification. Hold a simulated open citizens' forum in which students could express reasons for or against unification and could respond to each other's points. Culminate by having citizens see if they could come to a consensus on a recommendation for a Peace Summit to be attended by North Korean and South Korean representatives.

Below are some, but not all, the issues involved in reunification:

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.

LESSON 10

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-il 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.

LESSON 10

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.

Sources

1. Thomas H. Henriksen and Kyangsoo Lho, eds. One Korea? Challenges and Prospects for Re-Unification. Stanford: Stanford, 1994.
2. Kim Young, Jeh, Towards a Unified Korea. Seoul: Research Center for Peace and Unification of Korea, 1989.
3. Park Jay-Kyo, Koh Byung-Chu, Kwak Tay - Hwan, eds. The Foreign Relations of North Korea: New Perspectives. Seoul: Kyungnam University Press, 1987.

LESSON 10

Handout 7

How Could Reunification be Achieved?

Research Assignment: Position Paper on Possible Reunification

For this assignment, ask students to write a position paper on the ways in which reunification might be achieved. As a starting point, several possible “scenarios” are described below. However, these do not exhaust the possibilities and students should develop their own ideas, not just supporting those mentioned here. Predicting the future is difficult, but in trying to understand the possibilities, students may come to see more about the delicate situation in Korea today.

Length: 1 to 2 pages

Organization:

A thesis paragraph putting forward the scenario and outlining reasons for it. Body paragraphs with supporting examples to prove the points. A closing paragraph summarizing the main points.

Sources: At least three reliable sources, from the Internet, or other media or from print materials.

POSSIBLE SCENARIOS FOR REUNIFICATION

Scenario A:

South Korea has generally favored a gradual approach to unification (“step by step”). First, cultural contacts and the free exchange of information would occur. Then there might be a “commonwealth” where the two Koreas worked together on economic and diplomatic issues but retained their own governments. Finally there would be a unified government, representing all of Korea.

The approach generally taken by North Korea has been a “once and for all” approach. North Korea claims that the division of the country has caused unbearable suffering for the entire Korean people and thus should end immediately.

Scenario B:

As economic conditions in North Korea have worsened, some observers wonder if there will be a sudden collapse, as in East Germany before the Berlin Wall fell. David Maxwell has written about this scenario. He suggests four possible “landings.”

LESSON 10

Soft landing 1:

The most ideal would be for Kim Jong-il to realize that North Korea is in real trouble and to work out a phased reunification program with South Korea.

Soft landing 2:

The North Korean military would overthrow Kim and install a government that would work for reform and reunification.

Hard landing 1:

A collapse of the North Korean government and economy could occur with the ruling elite leaving the country. The chaos left by the lack of leadership, mass migrations of people escaping south and the difficulty of controlling nuclear weapons could cause problems in North Korea and neighboring countries.

Hard landing 2:

An attempted coup against Kim Jong-il might lead to war in North Korea. The North Korean army could inflict huge casualties, particularly if it used nuclear weapons. The war might result in massive refugee problems for neighboring countries.

Scenario C:

Other scenarios include: a possible attack on South Korea by a desperate North Korea and South Korea launching probes against the North Korea.

(Source: David Maxwell. Catastrophic Collapse of North Korea. Fort Leavenworth: United States Army Command and General Staff College, 1996)