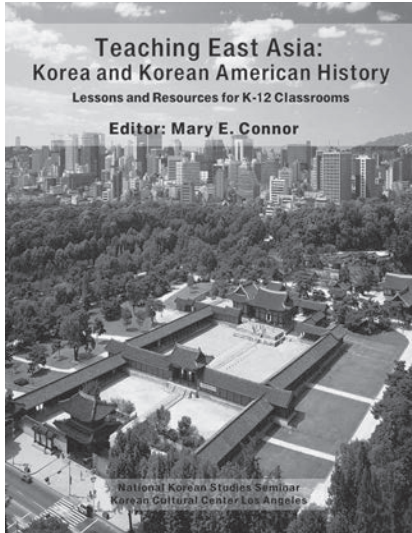


LESSONS FROM **Teaching East Asia Korea and Korean American History**

By Mary Connor



Teaching East Asia: Korea and Korean American History is a welcome resource for teachers wishing to include more breadth to their curriculum on East Asia by including Korea. Offering lessons and background material for all subjects, the resource is available not only in print, but also as a downloadable e-book at www.koreanseminar.org at no charge.

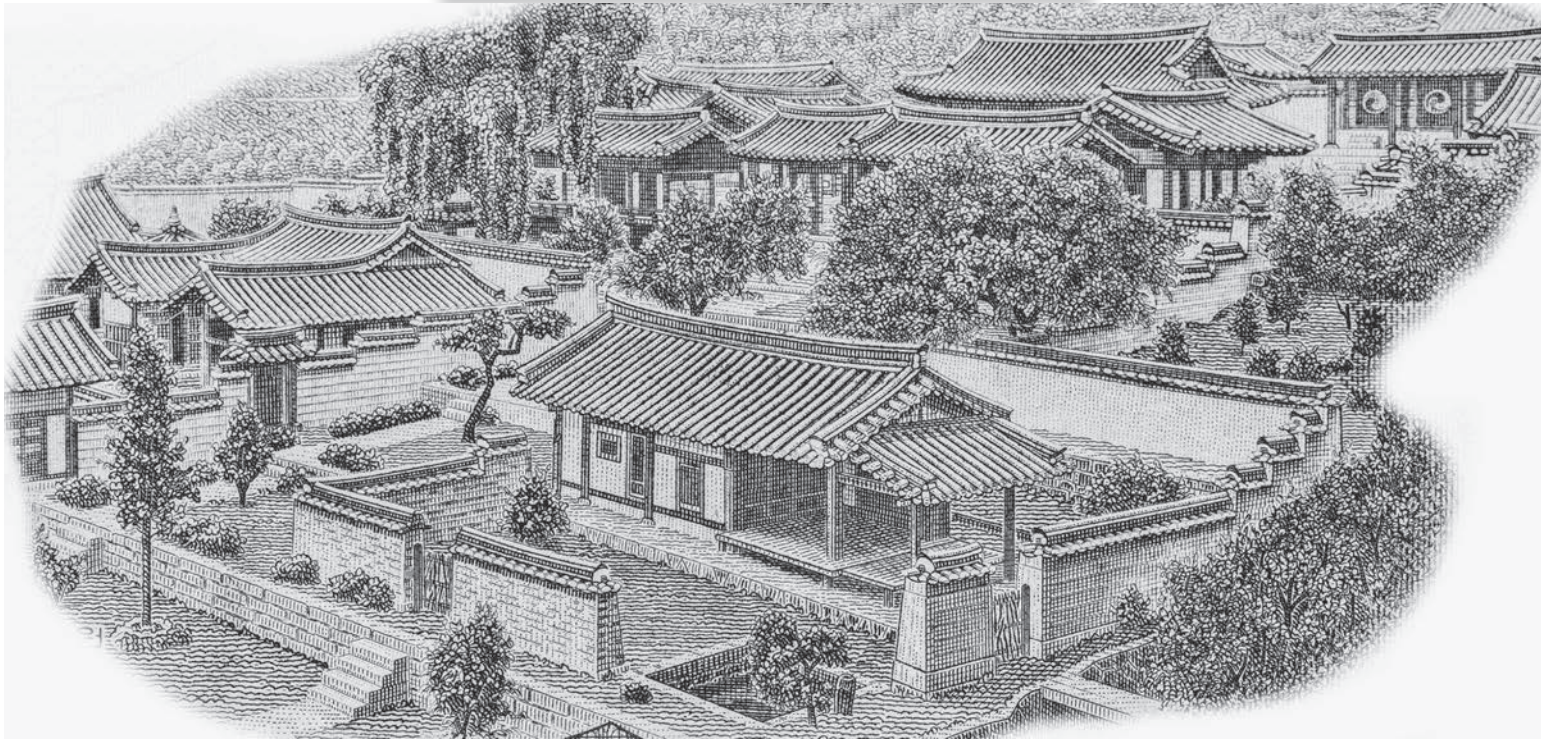
The following lessons on “Korea and Confucianism” and the “Four Famous Koreans” from the book as well as the excerpts from the review of the excellent young adult novel *Brother’s Keeper* are appropriate for middle school courses. We encourage teachers to look at the entire *Teaching East Asia: Korea and Korean American History* book for more resources appropriate or adaptable to middle school courses.

Mary Connor taught United States history and Asian Studies for 35 years. She was President and Program Director of the Korea Academy for Educators from 2004 to 2012. Since 2014, she has served as the advisor to the National Korean Studies Seminar. Connor has organized nearly 100 days of workshops on Korea from coast to coast and published two library reference books (The



Mary Connor. Source: Korean Seminar.org webpage at <https://tinyurl.com/22jfkckb>.

Koreas: A Global Studies Handbook and *Asia in Focus: The Koreas*). She received the Republic of Korea’s Prime Minister’s Award and was recognized by the Korean Consulate General Los Angeles for her efforts to educate Americans about Korea. She has accepted awards from the Council of Korean Studies at Michigan State University, the Peace Corps Association, and the Organization of American Historians. Since 2009, Connor has served as an editor of *Education About Asia*.



Dosan Seowon, Confucian Academy in Andong. Construction started in 1549 by Yi Hwang, and was established 1574. Portrait from South Korea 1000 Won 1975 Banknotes. Source: © Shutterstock.

Korea and Confucianism

Dosan Seowon Confucian Academy

Subjects

Asian studies, cultural studies, world history

Grade Levels

6, 7, and 10

Time Required

Two to three class periods are recommended.

Instructional Objectives

At the conclusion of this lesson students will be able to:

1. Understand the core beliefs associated with Confucianism and its impact on relationships, government, rituals, ethics, education and society.
2. Be aware of the impact of Confucianism on East Asia in general and Korea in particular.
3. Realize that Western culture emphasizes the individual, Korea the group.
4. Appreciate that Confucian views continue to influence Asians throughout the world and in your school.

Background for the Lesson

Confucius (also known as Kongfuzi) was born in 551 BC at a time when China was not a large empire, but a collection of small kingdoms that were in constant war with one another. Confucius believed that it was possible to end the chaos by establishing a system based on virtue and harmonious relations. As a result of his efforts, Confucius became the founder of a philosophical, moral, and ethical system that has lasted for 2,500 years. The Confucian philosophy particularly influenced China, Japan, Korea, and Việt Nam.

Confucius thought that people could be molded and elevated by education and examples of virtuous people, starting within the family and extending to the ruler who was to be honest and devoted to the welfare of the people. He believed he could create a harmonious society by developing ethical standards and principles for government, society, and family relationships.

Confucius decided that society would function properly only if virtues were taught and lived. He wanted to produce outstanding individuals who would serve in government. Those who aspired for positions in the government had to devote themselves to years of study to ensure they would have the knowledge, integrity, and right values to qualify for public service. For Confucius, this also meant more than knowledge; it involved the development of skills in poetry, music, artistic appreciation, manners, and religious ritual. Confucius valued education because it transmitted the lessons of

the past into the present. Convinced that the past provides good models for the present, Confucius thought that education could show the way to wise and happy living.

Confucius believed that social harmony could be established when people performed their social roles properly. The primary emphasis is laid on hierarchical norms, and social order should start in the home. The young are taught to respect their elders, children their parents, wives their husbands, daughters-in-law their mothers-in-law, and so on.

Students must respect their teachers, and when at work employees are to respect their employers. Friends are to respect their friends and to be loyal. Each family member must be committed to fulfilling his or her role. Confucianism made the role of the family and the roles of each person the foundation for morality and also harmony within the home.

The father is to be responsible for the education and moral foundation for the son, and the son must be respectful and obedient to the father. The son must care for his father when he is old. The role of the mother is to see that her children perform well in school, and she is judged by their performances. The eldest child (preferably a boy) is to be responsible for raising the younger members of the family, and his siblings must obey him. The father is responsible for the care of his wife, and she is responsible for caring for her husband. The husband has the authority in the marriage and is expected to be the protector of his wife. She is the homemaker and mother.

Children learn before the age of ten that their lives are not totally their own but belong to their family. The family makes the decisions; the children do not. When a child becomes successful (such as being accepted to a prestigious university), it is not just because of the efforts of the child, but the success of the entire family.

The Confucian tradition also influences one's choice of a marital partner because spouses may not have the same paternal ancestor. The decision of whom to marry is one that is ideally made on the advice of the parents. The grandparents of one's father have traditionally been considered the "real" grandparents. The Confucian system guides people in the names they use to address family members and relatives. Three traditional family rituals (marriage, ancestor worship, and funerals), though changed over time, continue to be celebrated.

In the Confucian culture, a friendship involves serious responsibilities and is expected to last throughout one's lifetime. In friendships, there is a certain hierarchy related to age, position in society, health, wealth, and knowledge. One is to acknowledge these factors with respect and loyalty.

The role of the ruler is to act as a father and assume responsibility and care for his subjects who are his children. While the Confucian social order begins within the home, it ultimately extends to a town, the province, and then the entire country.

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The world's tallest statue of Confucius was unveiled in September, 2018 at the ancient philosopher's birthplace of Nishan, in the city of Qufu, China's Shandong Province.
Source: © Shutterstock. Photo by Geermy.



The Confucian sense of sincerity means to do what is right, particularly in fulfilling one's duties at work and social obligations properly.

Confucianism also influences concerns for social rank. Everyone has a specific place in society. The young are subordinate to the elders, women to men, commoners to the upper class, and everyone to the ruler. Everyone has moral obligations related to their position in society. Everyone is to pay respect to their ancestors.

The Confucian Virtues

Some Confucian virtues, such as love of education and the arts, help individuals develop their unique talent; however, the virtues most prized by Confucianism are primarily social virtues. Individual uniqueness, although valued by Confucianism, is expected to be subdued, subtle, and relational. If one is particularly talented, they are to be humble.

1. *Ren*. The Ren virtues are sympathy, empathy, benevolence, kindness, and consideration. Everyone should be considerate of others through their actions and words.
2. *Li*. Li means "good manners." One should do what is appropriate for the situation. For each situation, there are appropriate words to say, proper ways to dress, and correct things to do. Self-control is a sign of strength.
3. *Shu*. This word relates to how one's actions affect another person. One is to consider the other person's viewpoint.
4. *Wen*. This word means "culture" and includes poetry, literature, calligraphy, painting, and music. The educated person is expected to not only have knowledge of these arts but also some skills.

In the Confucian system, harmony is all-important, and personal excellence comes from the manifestation of these virtues. Confucianism stresses additional virtues, particularly loyalty, consensus, hard work, thrift, emotional control, and sincerity. The Confucian sense of sincerity means to do what is right, particularly in fulfilling one's duties at work and social obligations properly.

Although Confucianism originated in China, Korea became the most Confucian society in Asia. This philosophical system influenced the growth of Chinese examinations that became the path to serve in high government positions and achieve a high status in society. It also led to the creation of a stable society and a very rigid class structure for centuries. Ten percent of the people were the upper-class landowners. Their objective was to study hard, acquire mastery of Confucian classical literature, and serve in government and military service. It was very difficult for the commoner to move up in society; however, it helped create the belief that if and you studied hard, you could move up in society and have a better life.

Both the Goryeo (936–1392) and the Joseon (1392–1910) dynasties adopted Confucian principles for government. The system included concepts of loyalty, filial piety, respect for age and status, and reverence for learning. People were to be loyal to the government. The ruler and his officials had to be honest in order to serve in government. If a ruler was no longer virtuous, the people would have the right to revolt against the government.

Confucian philosophy also influenced economic development. Confucius believed that the most harmonious society would be based on agriculture. As a result, his convictions promoted contempt for the development of commerce in the belief that it would cause tensions within society. Road systems were developed, but trade within the country and with the outside world (except for China and Japan) remained limited.

Today, more than 200 shrines and academies exist in what is now South Korea.

Although large numbers of people claim to be Buddhists, Christians, or Shamanists, everyone is essentially still influenced in some way by the Confucianism beliefs that guide people in their social relations in the home, workplace, school, and government. Most Koreans still look to their leaders for major decisions. Leaders are to be moral. If they are not—as in the case in recent Korean history—leaders lose legitimacy.

Confucianism Today

The Confucian system of virtues and behaviors are still very much alive.

Although China, Japan, and Korea have adopted Western science into their curricula, their cultures maintain an ethic that is Confucian. They highly value the extended family, education, personal discipline, and public order. In South Korea, Confucian temples and ritual temples are maintained throughout the country.

The leaders of Confucian countries are horrified by what they have seen of the chaotic individualism and violence in some Western countries. They

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The younger generation in South Korea is not necessarily observant or appreciative of Confucian traditions. They did not experience the Korean War, economic hard times or authoritarian government.

see the Confucian ethic as a solution to social ills and therefore continue to view education as the building of good character. Confucian values continue to be approved in schools, companies, and government work throughout East Asia. Confucian instruction appears on television and behavior, expressing the values of harmony, loyalty, and filial piety in both historical dramas and stories of contemporary life.

It is now believed that Confucian values have contributed to rapid economic development in South

Korean and other Asian economies. The stress on harmonious relationships in the workplace, respect for those in authority, and loyalty to the company have contributed to successful business operations.

There are changes in South Korea as to how Confucianism is practiced. Families are smaller, and more people are living alone. Women are more educated and demand greater equality and opportunity. They are marrying later, want no more than two children, and are not opposed to being childless. Since many of them work, they want their husbands to help more with the raising of their children; however, men spend much of their time in the workplace, as their employers want them to work long hours. Women want to make their own decisions and to be emotionally closer to their husbands. Divorce is much more common. There is obviously more individualism and less emphasis on the group or society as whole. Korea has definitely become a more fluid society and more open to change.

The younger generation in South Korea is not necessarily observant or appreciative of Confucian traditions. They did not experience the Korean War, economic hard times, or authoritarian government. The young tend to think of their family as united by affection and are more individualistic and independent than in the past, in spite of being financially dependent on their families. Those who were born after 1990 are known as the “internet generation.”

The Korean War (1950–1953) led to the division of the Korean peninsula. The Democratic People's Republic (DPRK) was created in 1948 following the armistice in the Korean War. Kim Il Sung, the founder of the DPRK, created an authoritarian form of government that incorporates traditional Confucian beliefs, such as respect for authority, loyalty, obedience, and the importance of the group over the individual. The leader of North Korea has absolute power to make decisions for the country, speak for the people, impose strict controls over society, and demand absolute loyalty.

Confucianism is in a new stage of its long life. The core beliefs of Confucius are unassailable. It has been primarily ethical because it has focused on correct behavior; however, it has been more because it has rested on a vision of human unity and the harmony of the universe. In the case of North Korea, there is unity because of constant indoctrination. Traditional religion was replaced

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SOUTH KOREA

Belief Systems and Religions

It remains critical in understanding Korean history and contemporary culture for students to learn about Confucianism, but middle school teachers should make students aware that South Koreans, despite a high level of ethnic homogeneity, are unique compared to their Japanese and Chinese counterparts regarding their affiliation with one “Western” Religion.

Although there is marginal variation between several surveys, generally Koreans who are Christians (Catholic and Protestant combined) constitute approximately 28 percent of the South Korean population compared to Japanese (approximately 1 percent of the population), and Chinese (approximately 3–4 percent of the population.) Koreans who are Buddhists (22 percent) constitute the second most popular religion in the ROK. As is the case in many of the world’s most developed countries, many Koreans—especially those in their twenties and thirties—report having no religion, possibly as high as 50 percent of the population. One study of Koreans in their twenties indicated that 31 percent reported having no religion, a 14 percent drop from a decade earlier. Data from the same study indicated Koreans in their thirties who do not affiliate with a religion at 38 percent, an 11 percent drop from a decade ago.

It should be noted, though, that many Koreans, whether formally affiliating with organized religion or no religion, consult shamans, participate in Confucian-related practices such as offering incense and food to ancestors and believe in Confucian principles such as self-cultivation, the importance of education, and respect for hierarchy. South Korea is often described as the most Confucian of East Asian nations.

Sources: “More South Koreans, Particularly the Young, are Leaving their Religions,” *Hankyoreh*, February 13, 2015, <https://tinyurl.com/3rtsn9tw>; “Korea, South,” *The CIA World Factbook*, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/4bvs4rwt>; Franklin Rausch and Haeseong Park, “Christianity in Korea,” *Education About Asia* 25, no. 1 (2020): 12–18, <https://tinyurl.com/mwphe9b2>.

by the personality cult of the founder of the DPRK, Kim Il-sung. The people of North Korea suffer in poverty in an authoritarian state while the people of South Korea live in a democratic and capitalistic republic in one of the largest economies in the world.

For Discussion and Increased Understanding

1. Consider your own “home culture.” If Confucianism became an influence in your family, how would its principles or rules be expressed in everyday language, family dynamics, and activities? Would Confucian standards be helpful in any way to you and your family?
2. What Confucian values seem to be particularly important to you? If Confucianism exists in your home, how is it influencing your life and your family?
3. What Confucian virtues have contributed to South Korea’s economic growth?
4. At a time when there is great divisiveness in the United States, could Confucian be helpful to bring greater harmony? If so, how?
5. After reading about Confucianism, what understanding do you have about students of Asian heritage at your school?

Supplementary Lesson

Confucius is considered one of the most influential persons in the history of the world. He was a teacher and philosopher who lived 2,500 years ago, at a time of intense political turmoil and civil unrest. Based on his own research into the past and his thoughts on the tumultuous world of his time, he developed a philosophy that emphasized compassion and respect at all levels of society and promoted education as a way to develop the mind and shape good character. It was his hope that rulers would adopt his approach to social and political morality and interpersonal relations to spread harmony and peace.

The Analects, the most famous work associated with him, is a compilation of his teachings created by later generations of his followers. What quotations from *The Analects* seem to be relevant in today’s world and to you personally? Do you disagree in any way with his philosophy?

From *The Analects*

Above all, be loyal and stand by your words. Befriend only those who are kindred spirits. And when you are wrong, do not be afraid to change.

It’s honoring parents and elders that make people human. Then they rarely turn against authority. And if people don’t turn against authority, they never rise up and pitch the country into chaos. The noble-minded cultivate roots. When roots are secure, the Way is born. To honor parents and elders— isn’t that the root of Humanity?

To be born enlightened: that is highest. To study and so become enlightened: that is next. To feel trapped and so study: that is third. To feel trapped and never study; that is the level of the common people, the lowest level.

If you scold your sovereign too often, you will end up disgraced. If you scold your friend too often, you’ll end up alone.

Is there any one word that could guide a person throughout life? The Master replied: How about ‘shu.’ never impose on others what you would not choose for yourself?

How can you love people without encouraging them? And how can you be loyal to people without educating them?

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Author's note: An earlier version of this article was developed as a lesson plan for the Korea Society. We would like to thank the Korea Society for assistance in the development of this manuscript. (This article was originally published in *Education About Asia* 6, no. 2, fall 2001.)

Four Famous Koreans

Lesson Plan

The purpose of the lesson is to provide an opportunity for students to learn about famous Koreans through readings and/or dramatizations. It is primarily designed to introduce students to famous people who have helped shape Korean history. In the process of studying the four portraits, students will not only learn about influential Koreans, but they will also become familiar with some of the distinctive elements of Korean culture. It is hoped that the lesson will stimulate interest, provoke questions, and encourage further study. The lesson can be implemented in various ways depending on class size, student interest, and available time. It could begin a unit on Korean history and culture, or individual portraits could be interspersed chronologically in the study of world history. It would be of great interest to compare the achievements of King Sejong to well-known European monarchs.

Grades

Possibly Upper Elementary,
but highly recommended for Secondary

Subjects

Asian Studies, Cultural Studies, Ethnic Studies, and World History

Time Required

Two Class Periods

Objectives

1. Develop an appreciation of people who have helped shape the history and culture of Korea.
2. Become aware of some of important events in Korean history.
3. Examine various leadership styles and determine those the students might want to emulate.
4. Provide an opportunity to dramatize history by impersonating important figures.

Materials Required

While this lesson is complete in itself, it can be enriched by books on Korea and updated regularly by checking the Internet for current information.

Procedure

1. Introduce the lesson and make a brief introductory statement about each of the famous Koreans.
2. Ask students to volunteer in dramatizing one of the portraits. They are encouraged to practice the reading and, if inclined, dress the part. Ideally, there will be dramatizations of all of the characters. If not, ask or assign students to read the individual portraits.
3. Divide the class into groups before the dramatizations/readings begin. Each group is assigned a task.
 - Group #1 reports about what they learned about the times in which the person lived.
 - Group #2 explains what they learned about the culture and the values of the time.
 - Group #3 explains what they learned about leadership and/or the person's contribution to his/her country.

All students who have completed readings or dramatizations should then be asked to state their conclusions about the varied experiences of the Korean people in the different periods they have studied.



Queen Seondeok. Source: Wikimedia Commons at <https://tinyurl.com/5enh974m>.

Portrait 1: QUEEN SEONDEOK (Reigned 632–47 c.e.)

In Silla, we had no prejudice against women rulers. My people believed in Buddhism, Daoism and Shamanism.

I am the ruler of Silla, one of the three kingdoms on the peninsula. I am the first woman to become a queen in Korea. My father, King Jinpyeong, reigned for fifty years, but had no sons to inherit the throne. Since I am his eldest daughter, I became queen when he died. I also hold my position of authority because of a system that has existed for centuries. It is called the hereditary bone rank system—in other words, bloodline. I am a member of the Kim clan. If you have the name of Kim, I may be one of your ancestors.

For over 1,000 years, only two other queens achieved my authority and influence. Your United States of America, the world's leading democracy, has only lately espoused women's rights. Think about it: almost 1,500 years ago in Korea, a woman ruled her people well and held their confidence.

Why am I one of the few women to have authority in Korean history? During my reign, Confucianism still had minimal influence. Even though Confucius lived 500 years before the birth of Christ, his philosophy has greater influence on people of Asian descent in the United States now than it had in my time; however, the Confucian ideal of an ethical-moral system was working its way into my kingdom. In Silla, we have no prejudice against women rulers. My people believe in Buddhism, Daoism, and Shamanism.



Bunhwangsa Temple. Source: Wikimedia Commons at <https://tinyurl.com/4n327uj3>.

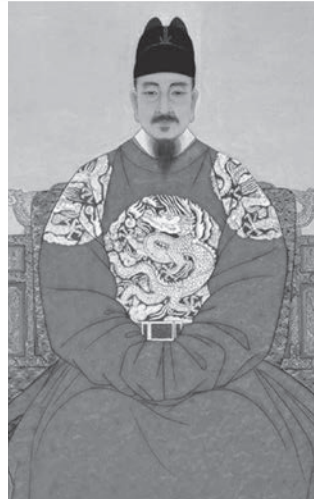


Cheomseongdae "star-gazing tower," astronomical observatory. Gyeongju, South Korea.
Source: © Shutterstock.

I am very kind, respectful, wise, and far-sighted. I am known for my powers to predict the future. The people of Silla are fortunate to have me for their leader. The Korean peninsula is a very violent place. We struggle with two other rival kingdoms: Goryeo and Baekje. Baekje, under King Mu, is intent on destroying Silla. The kingdom of Goryeo is so strong that it even defeats the forces of the emperor of Tang China. When Goryeo and Baekje ally against Silla, I seek help from the Tang dynasty. Thus, I initiate a pro-Tang policy that would help pave the way for the unification of the peninsula under Silla.

In spite of the fact that I have to worry about the defense and security of my kingdom and even a plot to usurp my throne, I dedicate myself to improving the lives of my people. Since I value the importance of education, I send students to China to receive the best education possible. Even though my reign is relatively short, there is much cultural and religious advancement.

Under my direction, the Buddhist temple of Punhwangsa—the nine-tiered pagoda of Hwangryongsa;—and one of the oldest astronomical observatories in the world—Cheomseongdae—are completed. In your time, this observatory is still considered one of the most important structures in Korea. I also order the construction of the famous pagoda of Hwangryongsa to protect us from foreign invasions. While it does protect us, it will be destroyed during the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century; however, enough of the foundation remains, so you can still get an idea of its former glory. If you travel to Korea, come to Gyeongju, the ancient capital of the Silla, and you can see the mounds covering the tombs where our leaders are buried. You will be impressed by the splendid gold crowns, necklaces, pendants, and earrings that have been discovered in our burial mounds. These are just a few of the jewels of my queendom. They exemplify a golden age in Korean history.



King Sejong. Source: New World Encyclopedia at <https://tinyurl.com/2s349kss>.

Portrait 2: KING SEJONG (1397–1450)

During my reign we chart constellations, refine rain gauges, various sundials and water clocks.

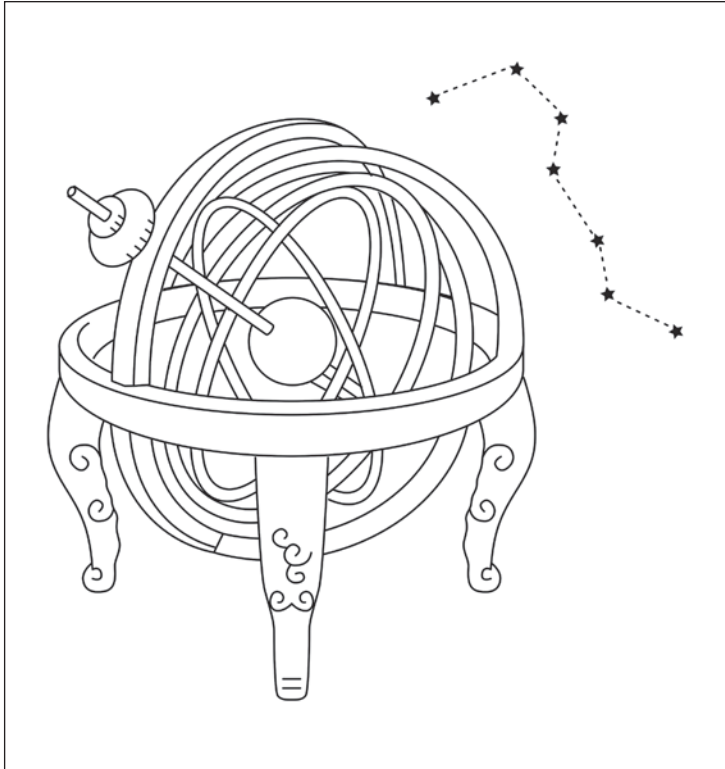
I was born on May 15, 1397, the grandson of Taejo, the founder of the Joseon dynasty, a dynasty that lasts even longer than the Goryeo dynasty. I am born near the Gyeongbok Palace, a palace that you can visit in Seoul today. My oldest brother is supposed to become king, but is passed over in my favor. I am highly motivated, interested in learning, and widely read. It may sound strange to you, but I am married at age twelve to a girl two years older than me. This is the custom in my day and prevailed through the early years of the twentieth century.

When I am twenty-two, the king, who is very impressed with me, decides that I should become the crown prince. In 1419, I assume the throne, and my reign is considered the high point of the Joseon dynasty. Indeed, the whole of the fifteenth century is marked by noticeable cultural and political achievements.

I am praised for my commitment to my country. I care deeply about my people, devote my life to establishing good government, and develop ways



Water clock at Yeongneung, Royal Tomb of King Sejong. Yeosu-si, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea.
Source: © Shutterstock.



Jang Yeong-sil, a Korean inventor, was ordered by King Sejong to build an armillary sphere. The sphere, built in 1433 was named Honcheonui. Source: © Shutterstock.

to improve the quality of life for everyone. I am admired for my mastery of the Confucian classics, but I am in my later years a devout Buddhist, especially after the death of my wife. I am fascinated by the world of science, especially astronomy. During my reign we chart constellations, and refine rain gauges, various sundials, and water clocks. Since our economy is based on agriculture, it is important that we find ways to improve agricultural production. Handbooks to improve agricultural production and medical books are completed in my time. To protect our homeland from invaders, our technicians develop new forms of cannon and artillery.

I believe my responsibility is to seek out talented people and to train them in the art of good government according to the Confucian classics. Once they are trained, it is important to give them tasks that will fully utilize their talents. I establish an excellent library and select very able scholars to devote all their time to improve the quality of education. I also seek out talented people in the countryside and make sure that these people get appropriate recognition from their provincial governor. These people also work in government or in posts that are appropriate for their abilities.

My main goal is to find ways for my people to become more literate. We use the Chinese system of writing, which involves memorizing thousands of characters that are very complicated and difficult to learn. I decide to develop a simple and effective system of writing. What is created is *hangul*, a phonetic writing system that is very scientific and easy to learn. Koreans now have their own system of writing. This is my greatest accomplishment.

I have many other interests. I desire to have a book written to help the common people become more successful farmers. This leads to a farmer's handbook that improves farming techniques and increases production. I am also very concerned about the health of my people. Under my direction, a medical dictionary and an encyclopedia are written. The encyclopedia, in eighty-five volumes, consists of medical treatments to cure nearly 1,000 diseases. Some of the treatments include herbal prescriptions and acupuncture. I also promote art, music, astronomy, science, and practical inventions. I am credited with developing a rain gauge 200 years before a similar instrument is developed in Europe. I also advance the use of movable type.

You might not know that Koreans invented movable type nearly 200 years before Gutenberg.

I also have some impressive political achievements. I am able to defeat the Japanese pirates who are menacing our coasts and also extend the territory of Joseon up to the Yalu River, the border of North Korea today. I also try to raise the moral standards of my country.

In my later years, I become paralyzed. I have great difficulty speaking. If this is not bad enough, I develop cancer and die at the age of fifty-two. A street named after me is near Gyeongbok Palace, near to where I was born nearly 600 years ago. People continue to be amazed by the social, political, academic, and scientific achievements of my reign. It is a golden age for Korea.]



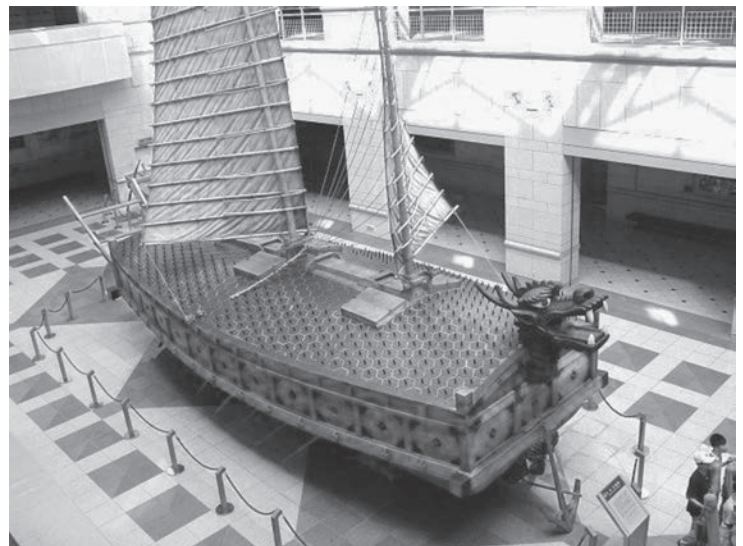
Admiral Yi Sun-sin. Source: Yi Sun-Sin World Institute at <https://tinyurl.com/ye24s54v>.

Portrait 3: ADMIRAL YI SUN-SIN (1545–98)

I create the world's first ironclad (the Turtle ship) long before your Monitor of Civil War fame.

Im Admiral Yi Sun-sin, one of the most famous military heroes in Korean history. I am well-known as the inventor of the turtle ship, an ironclad warship that looks like a turtle. I use this ship to defeat the Japanese at a time when their ships and armies are causing death and destruction throughout our country. I am a brilliant military strategist, a great patriot, and a defender of Korea.

I am born into an impoverished *yangban* (aristocrat) family, but through hard work and determination, I become a very respected man. At twenty-one, I begin to learn about military arts through self-study and work hard as an apprentice to manufacturers of weapons. When I am twenty-eight, I take the government examinations to become a military officer. During the practical part of the exams, I fall off my horse and fail the exam. I am devastated. I disappoint my family and know that I now will have to wait four long



A turtle ship replica at the War Memorial in Seoul.
Source: Alchetron website at <https://alchetron.com/Turtle-ship>.



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Screen captures: Top, Park Hae-il as Admiral Yi Sun-sin and the Turtle Ship in action from the recently released film, *Hansan: Rising Dragon* (2022). Written and directed by Han-min Kim. This is the second film in a trilogy about Admiral Yi Sun-sin and Korea's early naval battles with Japan. The first, *The Admiral: Roaring Currents* (2013), became the most-watched and highest-grossing film of all time in South Korea. The third film, *Noryang: The Sea of Death* will depict the historical Battle of Noryang, the last major battle of the Japanese invasions of Korea (1592–1598).

Source: The full film is available online at *Bilibili*.tv, <https://tinyurl.com/5xvv34jw>.

years before the next exam. Finally, at age thirty-two, I pass the exam. I am commissioned as a junior officer and go on assignment in a faraway place along the Tumen River on the northern border of Korea. I hold various posts in different locations, but then I am promoted to commander of a naval station in Jeolla Province. It is in this capacity that I achieve fame by defeating the Japanese in their invasion in 1592 under the direction of their great conqueror, Toyotomi Hideyoshi.

Before Hideyoshi's anticipated invasion, I build my famous turtle ship. I create the world's first ironclad long before your monitor of Civil War fame. My first ship is nearly sixty-five feet long, fifteen feet wide amidships, with sides nearly eight feet high. On the sides are portholes through which cannons are fired to blow the Japanese out of the water. Thick iron plates with iron spikes on the deck prevent the enemy from boarding. There is a fearsome dragon's head on the bow of the ship. By burning a combination of sulfur and saltpeter, clouds of smoke are emitted through the dragon's head and create a protective smokescreen.

In 1592, when my turtle ships engage the Japanese, we manage to cut off their source of supplies. We easily destroy twenty-six of their thirty ships. On land, guerrilla armies are formed; aristocrats, peasant farmers, Buddhist monks, women, and slaves fight together with Ming troops and force the Japanese to retreat. Five years later, Hideyoshi tries again and launches a second invasion. This time, we are even better prepared. I only have twelve ships, but I lure the Japanese into a narrow strait. We wait patiently for them to enter the channel, and when they do, we destroy their ships, a fleet of over 300 strong! As the enemy retreats, a stray bullet hits me, and I die. The great Hideyoshi also dies soon after. The war is now over. Korea has been saved. Japan's forces retreat to their home islands and will now pursue a policy of isolation for over 250 years. Only in 1853, with the force of one-quarter of the United States Navy, will Japan open her ports to the world.

Though my victory is many years old, it pleases me that I remain one of Korea's great heroes. When you visit Seoul, you will see a statute of my ship and me in downtown Seoul. And if you visit the Korean War Memorial Museum, you will find a magnificent replica of my famed Turtle.



Yu Gwan-sun. Source: Wikimedia Commons at <https://tinyurl.com/2rjvtsmk>.

Portrait 4: YU GWAN-SUN (1904–1920)

I am often called the Korean Joan of Arc. I give hope to my people when they need it the most.

I am one of Korea's most famous independence fighters. I am very young, just sixteen years old, but people believe that I contribute significantly to the independence movement against Japan. I am enraged by what has happened to our country during the occupation, and organize and provoke people to resist Japanese colonialism. I help plan the March 1, 1919, demonstration, a nonviolent peaceful protest similar to your Martin Luther King Jr.'s civil rights march on Washington in 1963. While most people followed King's march on Washington, we plan our protest secretly. We catch the Japanese completely by surprise, a tribute to our careful organization, as well as to the overly confident police. The peaceful demonstration sparks a nationwide movement in the following months and involves over one million people. Massive demonstrations on this scale are unprecedented, and it is clear that the Japanese do not think we are capable of such a concentrated effort.

We suffer greatly under Japanese rule. The idealism of Woodrow Wilson and his Fourteen Points raises our hopes at the end of WWI. We believe, perhaps naively, that Wilson's proclamation of self-determination for subjugated peoples will somehow lead to Korean independence. Our hopes are very high.

The leaders of the movement write a declaration of independence, expressing our desire to be free and independent. Thirty-three Korean nationalists sign this document.

Three years before the demonstrations begin, I start attending the Ewha Girls' School in Seoul, one of Korea's earliest schools for women. I study very hard and become known as someone with firm convictions and commitment. When I return home during the summers to my small village, I teach people to read and expose them to Western science and geography, which is very different from the traditional Chinese classical education they are receiving.

In 1919, the determination to be independent from Japan reaches a climax when King Gojong, who abdicates his throne in 1907, dies in Seoul



Yu Gwan-sun statue at Yu Gwan-sun Memorial Hall, Cheonan, Korea.
Source: Wikimedia Commons at <https://tinyurl.com/2sbck5k9>.

amid rumors he has been poisoned by the Japanese. My classmates and I join the nation in our sorrow for the king. Leaders of the independence movement decide to capitalize on the mood of the country and agree to massive demonstrations on March 1, two days before the king's funeral.

When my friends and I get copies of the declaration of independence, we pledge that we will participate in a mass demonstration in Pagoda (now Tapgol) Park in downtown Seoul. Our principal strongly advises the students not to participate. However, on March 1, seven of us cut class and join the crowd at Pagoda Park. A few days later, I join the protests, but this time I am arrested, though only for a short time.

When the governor-general closes all the schools in Seoul because of the unrest, I return to my hometown, where I convince my brother and several friends to hold a rally similar to the one in Pagoda Park. With the help of members of a local church, I begin to organize a demonstration. I travel from village to village to get additional support. I announce that the signal for the demonstration to begin will be a lighted torch on the mountaintop. I personally light the torch and carry it to the mountaintop.

The next day, I address a crowd assembled in the marketplace. We wave the national flag, which is outlawed by the Japanese government. We shout for independence. The police appear and shoot down many people. My parents are among the first to be killed. They arrest many people, including me.

I am tortured for many days. Then, I am transferred to a prison in Gongju. I am later tried, found guilty, and sentenced to three years in prison in Seoul. Prison life is very difficult for me. After a period of torture and

suffering, I die. My last words are, "Japan shall fall." I die along with an estimated 7,500 others in demonstrations that sweep the country in a period of ten months. There are approximately 45,000 arrests.

The movement fails terribly. Our country will not be Independent until the Japanese are defeated in 1945. The twentieth century is a time of terrible sorrow for my people: occupation, war, and political division. Yet we never give up hope to be a unified nation.

I am glad that I am remembered for my role in our history. I am often called the Korean Joan of Arc. I give hope to my people when they need it the most. There is a shrine in my memory in Cheonan, the village of my birth. I am buried on the mountain where I carried the torch for freedom many years before. In Seoul, there is a statue in my famous pose, arm outstretched, torch in hand. ♦

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Brother's Keeper

Synopsis from the Freeman Book Awards website

North Korea. December, 1950.

Twelve-year-old Sora and her family live under an iron set of rules: No travel without a permit. No criticism of the government. No absences from Communist meetings. Wear red. Hang pictures of the Great Leader. Don't trust your neighbors. Don't speak your mind. You are being watched.

But war is coming, war between North and South Korea, between the Soviets and the Americans. War causes chaos—and war is the perfect time to escape. The plan is simple: Sora and her family will walk hundreds of miles to the South Korean city of Busan from their tiny mountain village. They just need to avoid napalm, frostbite, border guards, and enemy soldiers.

But they can't. And when an incendiary bombing changes everything, Sora and her little brother, Young, will have to get to Busan on their own. Can a twelve-year-old girl and her eight-year-old brother survive 300 miles of warzone in winter?

Haunting, timely, and beautiful, this harrowing novel from a searing new talent offers readers a glimpse into a vanished time and a closed nation.

"*Brother's Keeper* is more than a Korean War story. It's about an ordinary family facing great hardship. It's about the complicated relationships between mothers and daughters, brothers and sisters, fathers and sons. It is in part, my mother's story, my story, and perhaps your story as well, connecting all of us, across different times and places." —Julie Lee



Brother's Keeper

BY JULIE LEE

NEW YORK: HOLIDAY HOUSE, 2020

320 PAGES, ISBN: 978-0823444946, HARDCOVER

READING AGE: 8–12 YEARS, GRADE LEVEL: 3–7

WINNER 2020 FREEMAN BOOK AWARDS YOUNG ADULT/MIDDLE SCHOOL LITERATURE



Every page of *Brother's Keeper* is carefully crafted. I could visualize virtually every part of the story and even found myself dreaming about it. I became totally absorbed in their harrowing journey. I felt the cold, their hunger, fear, and sadness. I visualized Korean mountains and valleys in black and white. I became a witness to death and the tragedy of war. *Brother's Keeper* is described as a middle school book, but it is definitely a suitable and valuable book for both middle and high school students. As someone who taught on the secondary level for a period of forty years, I envision many opportunities for both middle and high school educators to teach *Brother's Keeper* collaboratively or independently in English and history classes.

I retired from classroom teaching fifteen years ago; however, for the first time, I regretted that I was no longer a classroom teacher. I would love to teach *Brother's Keeper*, as it has so much

potential for meaningful classroom discussions and writing experiences.

We would examine Julie Lee's ability to get the reader emotionally involved in the story. Students would study the beauty of the author's writing by examining passages that describe the family's home, the landscape as they travel south, the dangers they experience, their grief and moments of joy. Everyone would be required to reread the first and last chapter to study how effective beginnings and endings can add to the sheer power and meaning of a story.

We would explore Sora's difficult relationship with her mother. What were the cultural and generational reasons for their difficulties? Since secondary students have studied Confucianism, they could become engaged in a lesson where they would explore their own "home culture." If they adopted Confucian principles in their everyday language, family dynamics, and activities in their home, what might family life be like? This lesson was enlightening for my students. It would also deepen their understanding of their reading and their contemporaries who are Asian. Some students will express interest in discussing issues that they are experiencing with family members.

After completing our study of *Brother's Keeper*, I would provide students with a copy of the Bill of Rights. I would ask two questions: Do North Koreans have any of these rights? Why are they still living under authoritarian rule? The discussion should lead to a deeper understanding of the words on the Korean War Memorial in Washington, D.C. ("Freedom is never free").

In terms of writing assignments, there are many options that will be interesting to middle and high school students. They could use Lee's narrative model to write a creative story that includes factual information. Since students will be studying history, they will have an opportunity to build on what they have studied or are currently studying in their classes. Teachers will need to provide suggestions on topics students might explore and how to locate accurate historical information that will enhance their stories. To encourage intergenerational communication, ask students if they have access to grandparents or others of that generation. If so, generate together interview questions they might ask of these people, and share highlights and surprises during class about what was learned. *Sijo*, a Korean poetic form, could be introduced and used as a medium for students to express their personal ways of relating to Sora's story and possibly to something in their own lives.

The author writes that "There is a great need to share the stories of refugee survivors as they have been largely untold." Right now, there are more refugees in the world than at any time since World War II. Some students may wish to interview refugees and tell their stories. Others may wish to research refugees from different parts of the world. They should find out what drove them into becoming refugees, what their situations are now, and what organizations and governments are doing to help them or hurt them. This effort could lead to an article in the school newspaper and ideally become the basis for a school service project. ♦

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