

Unit Project: Korean-American
Connie Massaro
Consulting Teacher (Gifted /Talented Program)
Subject: Language Arts / Social Studies
Grade Level: Designed for Advanced 6th. Graders
Time Allocated for Unit Study: Approximately 4-6 weeks

Purpose: According to the Ohio standards Sixth graders are to compare cultural practices (including class structure, gender roles, beliefs, and customs and traditions) and products of various cultural groups in the world. I believe this standard can best be met through the use of the First Person Fiction novel, Finding My Hat. So often in school children are exposed to readings which are dull and void of the character's voice. I wanted a book that would allow the reader to feel the passion and truth of the author's words. I chose the novel, Finding My Hat, by John Son, a Korean-American immigrant, who wrote about his life experiences through journal entries. Readers can't help but identify with the strong character and his quest to adjust to a new way of life while still holding firm to his old traditions.

While reading will students learn about Culture and Diversity? You bet! Will they relate to the character's struggle to fit in and be accepted by his/her peers? What young person wouldn't! Will misconceptions be corrected? Yes, I believe so....Reading is so powerful!

Goal: It is my sincere hope that as children read and learn about different countries and its cultures and peoples, they will celebrate their similarities while concurrently valuing everyone's unique history and cultural issues.

Rationale: I find that reading / discussion groups are as unique as the people who are in them. Discussions are driven by the group's dynamics as well as individual reactions to the assigned texts. In accordance, reading and writing assignments need to be customized to reflect the group's discussions and points of interest as well as accommodate for the unending interruptions to an already hectic schedule. For this reason I chose not to include day to day lesson plans but opted instead to provide the teacher with a selection of writing/ discussion prompts to use when deemed appropriate. This format will allow the teacher to pick and choose which prompts best reflect the group's interests and ability while also allowing for flexibility in making assignments.

Materials List: Class set of the featured book:
Finding My Hat by John Son
Composition notebook (Literature Response Journal)
World Map

Core Activity:

Literature Discussion Circles

Children will read and discuss selected novel and keep individual journal response logs to record their reactions to the assigned chapter readings. Writing assignments, based on the discussion prompts listed below, will be assigned by the teacher when appropriate.

Journal responses will be evaluated by use of a rubric scale (0 to 3) measuring an individual's participation and level of preparation. All students must use examples from the text and/or prior knowledge to support their opinions.

Summary of Book and Discussion Points *Courtesy of Scholastic.Com

FINDING MY HAT

by John Son

About the Book

The story of the Park family begins in America. Jin-Han and his parents live in Chicago, Illinois. Throughout the story, they move from town to town, state to state, trying to find their place in America. Eventually they settle in Texas, where Jin-Han's father becomes a salesman and they open a wig store. Jin-Han becomes more and more accustomed to American life while still struggling to remain true to his parents who are strong in their Korean heritage, especially his mother.

Discussion Points / Writing Prompts

Characters

- Jin-Han struggles to become more like a normal American kid. One of his big obstacles is moving around so often. In what ways does Jin-Han become more Americanized in each city? Have you ever tried to fit in to a new school or new town? What did you feel were the easiest and hardest parts about being in a new place?
- Jin-Han's parents try to adjust to American life as best they can. How does his father adjust to life in the different cities they move to? How does his mother seem to stay stronger in her Korean way of life as they move from city to city? How does this affect Jin-Han? How does this affect Jin-Soo?
- When Jin-Han's family's friends come over, the group splits up - kids in one room, adults in the other. In what ways do Jin-Han's friends seem to be adjusting to American life? How does Jin-Han react to them? How do the parents react to all of the children?
- Toward the end of the book, Jin-Han meets a girl who then becomes his girlfriend. However, he always seems nervous about the situation. Why do you think he feels nervous? Why doesn't he tell his family about her? When Sue broke up with him he began to cry. Do you think he was just crying over Sue? Why or why not?
- Jin-Han helps to take care of his sister Jin-Soo throughout the story. In what ways does Jin-Soo depend on her brother? In what ways are they close? Do you have a brother or sister? In what ways are you alike? In what ways are you different?

Setting and Themes

- Jin-Han's mother said "Life is always hard. We have to work to make it easy." In what ways was life hard for the Park family? In what ways did they work to make things easier?
- In the beginning of the story, Jin-Han loses his hat. His mother keeps buying him other hats to try on, but none of them fit quite right. In what ways does the Park family "try on different hats" or try different ways to adjust?
- Jin-Han's mother doesn't understand why he wants to quit piano lessons. Why do you think he wants to quit? Why does it make his mother upset? Do you think it hurts her more that he is quitting piano or that he is becoming more American and less Korean in his ways? Explain.
- Throughout the story, Jin-Han's family moves from Chicago to Memphis to Houston. Has your family ever moved? How did the new place affect you? If you haven't moved, how do you think a move would affect you?

List of Resources

Finding My Hat

John Son

Scholastic.Com

a summary of book / discussion points

Other Suggested Supplementary Materials

Discovering South Korea through *Journeys in Film*

Film Title: The Way Home

Film Description: *The Way Home* follows a seven-year-old South Korean boy from the big city, to a small and remote rural community, where he must live with his partially deaf and completely mute maternal grandmother while his mother looks for a job. Anger, resentment and frustration bring out the worst in this spoiled little boy who has absolutely no compassion for his grandmother when they first meet. Sang-Woo experiences culture shock, having to give up all that matters to him: his mother, his GameBoy, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Spam, batteries, and even flush toilets, so that he can survive his stay with his grandmother. With the stripping away of all these modern

Distractions the film explores the growing relationship between the boy and his grandmother, demonstrating the power of unconditional love to nurture and heal.

Film Title: 200 Pounds Beauty

Film Description: **200 Pounds Beauty** is a Korean version of “Bridget Jones’ Diary” (Rated PG 12).

Hanna is far from pretty. However, she has a God-given voice that is music to everybody’s ear and sings for a singer named Ammy who is sexy and beautiful, but who cannot sing a note. Hanna is sweet by nature. She finds it hard to say NO to people in need of her help and goes out of her way to do things that others would ignore, which often leaves her hurt. Nonetheless, she is optimistic, happy-go-lucky, and never loses her hope for life. Meanwhile, she has a huge crush on a music producer named Sang-jun. Sometimes love can help people do things that they would never dare do when they are not in love. One day, she gets herself in a situation where she could not be more humiliated before Sang-jun and decides to kill herself. However, as fate has it, her suicide attempt fails and leads her to Dr. Lee, a renowned plastic surgeon, who turns her into a dazzling beauty. Even after a successful surgery, she sticks to her old habits from her days of being a fat and ugly girl, which often puts her in a situation where people doubt her behavior.

2006 | South Korea | 2h | Korean, w/ English subtitles