

The Guest by Hwang Sok-Yong

Korean Lesson Plan
NCTA East Asian Seminar
Winter 2008 Akron
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Purpose:

The atrocities of war, in this case a gruesome massacre in North Korea, questionably attributed to American involvement, leave a haunting memory on the minds of those who endured these painful moments in history. The untold stories, personal first-hand accounts of suffering, recounted through a literary device, should be incorporated into curriculum.

Target Class:

This project is intended for an AP French class, AP English class, Humanities class, AP World History class or may also be selected as a supplemental reading for a book club. It emphasizes standards in reading and writing applications from a literary text, interpersonal communication, and 20th century conflict.

Essential Questions:

1. What are the complexities of war?
2. Who is to be blamed? The heads of State, the collaborators, the sympathizers, the warring religious and political factors (Christianity and Communism)? Why?
3. Who are the victims of war? At what cost? Who pays the price of war?
4. What physical and emotion scars remain with the survivors and how do they cope with the aftermath and for years to come?
5. What is globalization and America's involvement in foreign wars?
6. How do developing countries change after the devastation of war and how do they establish a national identity or a sense of self?
7. What is "the human condition"?
8. What are shamanic rituals in traditional Korean culture? What is the process for transformation?
9. What is cultural imperialism?
10. What role should foreign countries have in determining the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to foreign territories and societies?
11. Are reconciliation and redemption possible after having witnessed or experienced horrific events?
12. What capacity does the human heart have to endure?
13. When is peace attained?

Rationale:

Students often learn world history solely from the viewpoint of their own culture and their country's role in a war. Foreign literature, written from another perspective lends itself to instill critical thinking and more in-depth discussion. This novel is a must read

by an AP World History, AP English class, Humanities class or an AP French class in an original version in French (*L'Invite*) as a supplemental material in teaching via interdisciplinary studies of the Korean War.

Materials:

1. *The Guest*, by Hwang Sok-Yong
2. www.wikipedia.org to search Korean War, Hwang Sok-Yong, the Hwang Province
3. The American Pageant: A History of the Republic (David M. Kennedy, Lizabeth Cohen, Thomas A. Bailey) AP American History textbook
4. The American Nation in the Modern Era (Paul Boyer, Sterling Stuckey) American History textbook
5. A New History of Korea (Ki-baik Lee)
6. Korea's Place in the Sun (Bruce Cumings)
7. www.thenation.com
8. www.opendemocracy.com
9. www.countrystudies.us/south-korea (The Korean War, 1950-53 and The Syngman Rhee Era, 1946-60)
10. www.frenchpubagency.com
11. www.ieas.berkeley.edu/events
12. www.signonsandeiego.com
13. www.zulma.fr/auteur-sok-yong-hwang
14. www.selvesandothers.org/view
15. www.isj.org/uk
16. www.politicalaffairs.net/article
17. www.sevenstories.com/book
18. www.time.com
19. www.complete-review.com
20. www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article

Activities:

Reading the novel will be assigned as a supplemental reading for an advanced placement class of American History, World History, French, Humanities, or English, depending on the availability of the two-week time line and adaptability to the partnered class.

Day 1: Stimulate a verbal discussion of students' knowledge and background information of the Korean War. Brainstorm and ask what triggered the division of Korea, America's involvement, and how a civil war erupted into a bloody, hostile, and bitter war resulting in devastating physical and emotional losses.

Students should discuss the tragic reality of a divided nation whose conscious of an ethnic unity had been destroyed and yet who continued to hold a broken hope of reunification.

Using a BKWLQ graphic chart* will help students organize their thoughts and provide open-ended questions in order to encourage more research via resources on the Internet.

*B = Building background

K = What do I know?
W= What do I want to know?
L = What did I learn?
Q = What new questions do I have?

Days 1-12: Have students read the twelve chapters and take notes of reoccurring themes of past and present, transcending memories of family stories, differing accounts or reflections from witnesses to the massacre, and varying reports or perspectives of the survivors' ghosts.

Each of the twelve chapters should be titled on a graphic organizer chronologically with room for noting observations or discussion questions as follows:

Chapter 1 The Exorcism *What Remains after Death*

Chapter 2 Possession *Today is Tomorrow for Those Who Died Yesterday*

Chapter 3 Keeper of the Netherworld *Switching Roles with the Dead*

Chapter 4 From One Generation to Another *The Survivors*

Chapter 5 Clarification before Reconciliation *A Pure Spirit*

Chapter 6 God, Too, Has Sinned *Parting the Cloth*

(continue to the final Chapter 12)

Students will also note and be able to explain the historic significance of the following:

Rural Village Committee Chairman

The Land Reform Order

Chinogwi exorcism of Hwanghae Province (12 separate rounds)

The American Imperial Massacre Remembrance Museum.

Students will write their thoughts within a limited space after carefully reflecting on the chapter just read which will help clarify the differing recollections, experiences, and perspectives of the survivors' haunting ghosts (what they say and how they interpret or remember their accounts).

Students will also use this graphic organizer while reading to help establish themes, psychological thoughts and diffuse conflicting or recurring ideas between characters. Students will also follow a discussion guide for reading in order to encourage and help stimulate critical thinking and further class discussion. Their thoughts will become their own personal account of understanding literature based on a historic event.

Students will work together in randomly assigned groups of three or four, as an objective jury selection, to discuss their thoughts and then share selected ones in a class discussion the last 10 to 15 minutes of each class period. What are the themes in the novel? What are the ambiguities in the way survivors remember their experiences from the War so many years later? How does time alter memory?

The teacher will ask students the following open-ended questions at the completion of reading the novel, to be answered as a personal reflective summary in a journal entry: What did you realize about the Korean War that you did not learn from a History class? What strong reactions did you have after having read the novel? What incidences invoked you to change your thoughts or perceptions? What questions are still unanswered in your mind?

Assessment:

Students are to write a personal reflective summary as a journal entry for a credit/no credit grade. This should be carefully thought out, arising from their own reactions and perceptions of the suffering and mental anguish endured by the survivors of war.

State Standards:

English Language Arts Standard:

Reading Applications Literary Text.

Analyze the historical, social and cultural context of setting.

Explain how voice and narrator affect the characterization, plot and credibility.

Evaluate the author's use of point of view.

Analyze variations of universal themes.

Explain ways characters confront similar situations and conflict.

Standard: Writing Applications. Write responses to literature that provide an interpretative, analytical, evaluative or reflective response.

Recognize ambiguities, nuances and complexities in literature

Foreign Language Standard: Communication: Interpersonal.

Express a wide range of feelings and emotions, and discuss and support opinions

American History Standard: 20th Century Conflict:

Analyze the impact of U.S. participation in World War II, with emphasis on international involvement in Korea

Discussion Guide for Reading:

1. From a historical perspective, what did the Koreans call the “guest”, a virulent and homicidal pathogen that left many dead or scarred? (Smallpox is also called “mama” or “sonnim”).
2. What does the “guest” refer to in the novel? How does the political ideology of a modern Korea intercept or infiltrate freedom of expression or religious

thought? To Koreans the effects of Christianity and Marxism brought much conflict. Explain how this came about.

3. Why does the mere word “guest” have a duality of meaning? What does it mean to you? What was your first interpretation?
4. How does a government coerce, brainwash, or manipulate a freethinking society or individual?
5. What sensory impressions are evoked in coming home after a long silence and physical absence and what transition do they take? (“the scent of mountain berry turning into the stench of rotting fish”)
6. What would shatter the dreamy feelings and make them change from positive to negative thoughts? How does religion interfere with personal freedoms?
7. What are the coping mechanisms of people who have suffered from a war? How does Yohan anesthetize his painful memories? Why does Yosop see it differently?
8. How do anger and guilt consume a person?
9. What are the new “guests” that haunt the protagonist on his journey?
10. How do shamanic rituals or “guest exorcisms” purge the heinous invaders or guests?
11. What are the elements of “magic realism” or supernatural events that are based on the natural order of things in Korea?
12. How do the themes of exile, guilt, and acceptance affect the human spirit? When is the turning point from despair to hope?
13. How do separated years alter the truth of historical events give conflicting and contradictory first-person accounts of suffering from the perspectives of families and communities?
14. How are living and dead similar? What blurs the vision when there appears to be no delineation between the two as their paths intertwine?
15. How does suppressed guilt and suffering (“han”) kill the soul?
16. When does the incomprehensible atrocities of war completely obliterate any rational thinking?
17. Who are the perpetrators and who accepts culpability in the destruction of a society, a nation, a people?
18. What can relieve the agony of survivors and tranquil the ghosts and spirits of those who were sacrificed?
19. When and how can common people rise up to believe in a strong sense of self and a power greater than an ideology?
20. What is the redeeming power that can affect a positive change in humanity for future generations to live without hatred and to hold promise for the dream of a better tomorrow?

