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Seminar on Teaching about East Asia, Spring, 2007

Title: Lessons in Loss, Year of Impossible Goodbyes

Grade: 6-8, Language Arts and Social Studies
Time Period: approximately three weeks of 45 minute classes

Essential Questions: How have the Korean people dealt with the loss of their land and traditional lifestyle in response to invasion and emigration?

Rationale: Everyone has a story of loss, whether it is of a favored pet, a treasured document or a family member. The story Sookan tells is of the losses, the goodbyes too numerous to believe possible, forced on her culture and her family under the brutal 1945 military rule of the Japanese, and later of the Russian Communists. Yet through the horrors shared by her in this story based on factual information, Sookan continues to hope and to fight for her family and her belief in her Korea. With her thoughts and actions, she teaches readers that it is important to risk in order to remain whole, a lesson worthy of replication.

Standards: Students use knowledge of perspectives, practices and products of cultural, ethnic and social groups to analyze the impact of their commonality and diversity within local, national, regional and global settings.

Lesson: Students create a list of items and people they have lost. From this each student will complete a journal entry about how this loss has affected him/her. These entries may be shared in order to create a common thread among the students.

A class discussion about the depth of these feelings leads the students to a realization of how there are different kinds of losses. These goodbyes can be formal and informal, chosen or forced.

Pose the question: How can there be a year of 'impossible goodbyes'?

Students groups read Year of Impossible Goodbyes, each creating a worksheet with the labels: characters and characteristics, cultural practices, forced changes in behavior, and situation/reaction and losses. Although there may be some overlap in the individual lists, students will see that circumstances can be viewed from different perspectives, and the important piece is to identify the enduring facets of Korean culture amid their fight for freedom.

There are ten chapters in this novel, and the goal is for each student group to complete the reading by the end of 2 ½ weeks of class time. Each day's class should contain a debriefing, including where the group is in the book and one overall statement about an

item in one of the categories. A daily log of personal reactions to the reading, or of thoughts generated by the reading, will be kept by each student.

Upon completion of the book and the worksheet notations, each student will receive a copy of all of the worksheets within the group. These lists will provide the material needed to create individual free-verse poems. The poems must be based on the incidents from the reading, the student journal entries and emotional responses to loss.

Reflection: Students will have a greater appreciation of the cross-cultural nature of loss, particularly the loss of cultural recognition. This loss of culture can be attributed to forced assimilation, or may be a desire to be like everyone else. Additional study of migration and immigration can be considered 'goodbyes'

Extension: Students will perform their poems in a poetry celebration, including readings, drama and samples of Korean food.

Resources:

Choi, Sook Nyul. *Year of Impossible Goodbyes*. Dell, New York, 1991.

Intrator, Sam M. and Megan Scribner. *Teaching with Fire*. Jossey-Bass, Washington, 2003.

Kock, Kenneth and Kate Farrell. *Talking to the Sun*. New York, Holt, 1985.