

Korean War Stories

Purpose: The purpose of this lesson is to introduce an authentic human voice, a Korean voice, into the historical account of the Korean War and to give students an opportunity to see the war from different points of view. The lesson is intended for use in a 9th grade humanities class.

Materials/ Resources:

“Cranes” and “Masks,” a pair of very short stories by Hwang Sunwon which can be found in Contemporary Literature of Asia. Arthur Biddle, ed. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1996. A brief intro and bio of Mr. Hwang precedes the stories on p. 451 of the book.

Various brief accounts of the Korean War, including those found in...

Murphey, Rhoads. East Asia: a New History, 3rd ed. New York: Pearson Longman, 2004. p. 432- 439

Nahm, Andrew. A Panorama of 5000 Years, 2nd ed. Seoul: Hollym, 1989. p. 100-110

Oberdorfer, Don. The Two Koreas: a Contemporary History. U.S.A.: Basic Books, 2001. Preface and p. 1-11

...and the texts for American History and A.P. American History, respectively, that are in current use in our building...

Danzer, Gerald A., et al. The Americans. Evanston: McDougall Littell, 1999. p. 615-618

Goldfield, David R., et al. The American Journey: a History of the United States. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 2001. p. 868-870.

Activities: Working under the assumption that this is the first of a short series of lessons on Korea, the lesson could be opened by soliciting from the class bits of previous knowledge about the Korean War. A look at a map which shows the two Koreas and their location in East Asia would also help with context.

After then briefly introducing Hwang Sunwon, class members should be given copies of the two stories to read silently with a mind to noticing

1. the cultural voice in the stories,
2. similarities and differences in various elements of the two stories, and
3. the tone and message of each of the stories as it relates to the effect of the war on Korea and Koreans.

Contemporary Literature of Asia includes the following summary of the two stories:

“Cranes” (1953) tells the story of two young men from the same village near the border between North Korea and South Korea who now find themselves on different sides of the Korean War. “Masks,”...tells the story of a soldier killed in the same war and follows him through a cycle of reincarnation. The stories are “masks” in that each shows a visage of broader human experience.

After reading, class members could discuss the stories in pairs, then squares, then whole group.

Students should then be asked to read historical accounts of the Korean War from the four sources above, or from at least two—one from Murphey, Nahm, or Oberdorfer and one of the American History texts---and respond in writing, or in class discussion, to the following questions, or ones similar:

1. What essential differences to you notice in the various historical accounts of the war?
2. Compare the impact on you the reader of the different accounts of the war, including the short stories about the war experience.

Assessment: The impact of the lesson could be assessed through individual student writing responses or through whole group discussion.

Grade Adaptation: The lesson should be suitable for high school students at any level who are studying Korea, American History, the nature of historical writing, or the impact of fiction vs. nonfiction.