Country Study-South Korea

Information and folktales

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1. The workshop help add to my knowledge of and thinking about Korea in several ways. I initially was interested in this workshop due to an incident that happened with my 3rd grade students in May of 2021. I had finished reading the book Freedom Summer about two boys, one black and one white, in the 1960s America who are excited to go swimming together as the laws have recently changed to allow them to swim together in the local public pool. They discovered that pool is being filled in with tar so no one can use it. As I had predicted and hoped, most of my students were flabbergasted and upset that the town would take this drastic step to continue segregation. As we discussed the various thoughts and points of view presented by this text, I asked “do you think it’s ok to judge people by how they look?” One student replied, “well if they are of Asian background…” I was taken aback that a nine-year-old was so blatant with his racist thinking and I was trying to think of a professional response when another student, who is white, spoke up and said “Nope, not ok”. The student then shared his stepmom was Pakistani and her family owned several convenience stores in the area. He talked about some of the discrimination that occurred towards her and her family. Then another student, of Asian background, spoke up and shared an incident where her aunt and uncle were discriminated against at a restaurant.

This was a huge reflective moment for me as a teacher. I had naively hoped that my students would be more accepting of others by simply being exposed to the diversity within their classroom despite what they are being taught at home. This incident showed to me that I need to have these difficult conversations about race/culture with my students beginning in kindergarten and continuing through fourth grade. I appreciated when several of the workshop speakers spoke about the discrimination they have experienced, reinforcing that this discrimination is not new and we as teachers must continually advocate for respect for all. Dr. Kuchinke’s discussion better helped me understand my own biases towards cultural awareness and steps I can take to improve myself in my cultural agility. Lastly, it was encouraging to see so many educators, serving elementary ages to adult ages, seek to better understand how to help students embrace other cultures and activities, such as the pen pal exchange, that can help us connect students across the globe.

2. I plan to have conversations with my grade level teams about how they can incorporate learning about various Asian cultures into their lesson plans. I hope to share my notes from Dr. Kang’s discussion with my staff as I expect this would be new knowledge for many of my colleagues. I will also seek to purposely read aloud more books by Asian authors and illustrators during our library media time. I will advocate that our school field trips, school assemblies and presentations be more inclusive of diverse backgrounds. I want my students to see themselves represented in what we value in their school community. I hope my students will see the interconnectedness of us all and find respect, and perhaps inspire curiosity, for all cultures.

3. I hope to share the workshop content primarily with my second-grade students as part of their reading standard about learning about other cultures through folktales. I will also seek to purposely read aloud more books by Asian authors and illustrators. I will also advocate that our school field trips, school assemblies and presentations be more inclusive of diverse backgrounds. I want my students to see themselves represented in what we value in their school community. I hope my students will see the interconnectedness of us all and find respect, and perhaps curiosity, for all cultures.

4.

RL.2.2 Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral.

5. Each day is a 45 minute lesson.

Day 1: Introduce the country of South Korea. Find the Korean peninsula on a map. Briefly discuss that there was a war and now the country is divided into 2 parts and we will mainly focus on South Korea for our learning. Read aloud the nonfiction text South Korea. View the video clips, Basic Information about Korea and A day in the life of an elementary Korean student. What did you observe that was similar or different about life in the USA?

Day 2: Continue our study of South Korea and read aloud the fiction texts, The Korean Cinderella and Magic Spring. Discuss how family and children are valued in each text.  How did the Korean version of Cinderella compare to the Cinderella story you know? What were some different elements? What lesson/moral was shown in each story? How was hard work shown in each story?

Day 3: Read aloud the texts, The Rabbit and the Dragon King and Sim Chung and the River Dragon. Discuss the personality traits of the Dragon in each story. How did the rabbit trick the Dragon king? What was the rabbit’s reward? What do you think of Sim Chung’s willingness to go live with the River Dragon? With who in the Korean culture do you think this story would be most popular?

Day 4: Review the nonfiction books, videos and folktales we have learned to help us better understand Korean culture. In small groups, use a Venn diagram to compare the Korean and American culture. Why do you think it is important to learn about other people and their traditions? Do you think if you travel to another country or visit a friend with a different cultural background than your family it is important to learn about their culture? Why? How could you seek out this information?

6. Resources:

The Korean Cinderella-Shirley Climo

Magic Spring-Nami Rhee

The Rabbit and the Dragon King-Daniel San Souci

Sim Chung and the River Dragon-Ellen Shecter

South Korea-Joanne Mattern

Basic Information-Korea

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HMjnY31XPk>

A day in the life of an elementary Korean student

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_S6EchkKjrE>