

Bringing Korea into the Classroom: Sijo Poetry

Sijo Poetry: Hidden Art Form

Purpose:

Students will be able to understand the history and culture of Sijo poetry. Students will then be able to write their own form of Sijo poetry

Grade level: 9-12

Duration: 1-2 class period

Standards:

Range of reading and level of text complexity RL.6.10

RL.6.10 By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 6–8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range. Build background knowledge and activate prior knowledge in order to make text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections that deepen understanding of the text.

Research and Build Knowledge W9-10.9

W.9-10.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

1. Apply grades 9–10 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Analyze how an author alludes to and transforms source material in a specific work [e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare]”).
2. Apply grades 9–10 Reading standards to literary nonfiction (e.g., “Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning”).

Materials: Handout over Sijo background and material

<http://www.indiana.edu/~easc/outreach/educators/literature/workshops/documents/TeachingAboutAsiaWorkshopLP-KoreanSijo.pdf>

Procedure:

1. Bell ringer: Students brainstorm their thoughts on poetry and their impression of poetry in Asia.
2. Distribute handouts for students to read over the background and history of Sijo
3. Have students alternate reading the background
4. Use PowerPoint to lecture on the story of ChonMong-ju

By the late 1300's the Koryŏ kings had ruled Korea for nearly five hundred years. But in the late fourteenth century, the Koryŏ royal court was slowly losing power because of the influence of powerful nobles and monasteries. On top of this, commoners could not provide for themselves because of the

burdensome taxes forced on them by the central government and landlords. This unfortunate turn of events caused some to believe that the Koryŏ rulers had lost the Mandate of Heaven, or the right to rule.

Around this same time, the Ming dynasty (1368 – 1644) had recently taken over in China. Previous to the Ming, the Mongols had ruled China (the Yuan dynasty 1271 – 1368). In the 1380's, the Ming were still forcing the Mongols out of China and back to Mongolia. Although this power struggle was located in China, the Koryŏ court became divided between pro-Ming and pro-Mongol forces. Eventually the pro-Mongol forces won out and decided to attack a contingent of Ming troops stationed on the Korean border.

The Koryŏ court sent General Yi Soŏngkye with a large number of Korean soldiers to drive out the Chinese Ming troops. On his way to challenge the Ming troops General Yi decided that attacking the Ming would be meaningless. He knew that the Ming were becoming the strongest force in Asia and that attacking them would only give the Ming an excuse to attack Korea. Instead, he turned his troops south toward the Koryŏ capital and marched his troops into the city and took over the government.

Before he declared himself king, he wanted to gain the support of the Confucian scholars. He hoped to use the knowledge and expertise of these scholars to establish a peaceful and orderly government. While most of the scholars supported General Yi and wanted to establish a government based on Confucian ideals, some scholars opposed General Yi. While they too hoped to build a model Confucian society, they believed that joining General Yi's coup d'état betrayed one of the cardinal Confucian virtues, loyalty. The most prominent of these opposing scholars was Chŏng Mong-ju. When General Yi and his supporters came to Chŏng asking him to join the coup, he refused their offer, knowing that his refusal ensured his death. While he waited for his impending execution he wrote the following Sijo:

Though I die, and die again;
though I die one hundred deaths;

Long after my bones are dust; whether my soul exists or not;

My one heart, forever loyal to
my dear lord, will never fade.

-Translated by Dr. Mark Peterson

Chŏng died a martyr and is still remembered today as one of the most loyal and faithful Confucian scholars. Soon after his death, in 1392 General Yi declared himself king, ushering in the Chosŏn Kingdom.

5. Show students an example of Sijo poem from the text, *Among the Flowering Reeds*
6. We read the poem as a class then break it down and analyze the poem
7. Distribute another poem to students to analyze on their own
8. After 10-15 minutes reconnect as a class and discuss their analysis

9. Students will then be instructed to create their own Sijo poem. Student will share their poems with their peers and then evaluate them based on the hand out and earlier lesson. Completed poems will be assembled in a class portfolio.