



The Booklist Project



Focus: Culture-Specific Booklist

Korean

Developed by: Joseph DeMello

Fall, 2010

Culture-Specific Book List for Korean English Language Learners

Grades 4-8

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1. Kline, S. (1999). *Song Lee in room 2B*. New York: Puffin Books. [ISBN 0-1413-0408-1]

Suzy Kline wrote a series of books about a primary-grade class. Song Lee is an eight-year-old little girl in that class. She's shy but with a silly streak. She's afraid of standing in front of the class. In one episode, she dresses up like a cherry blossom tree. This accomplishes two things – she can hide behind the costume, and she provides the other children with a great image of her home country, Korea. What elementary school student of Korean ancestry wouldn't want to read a book about one of their own, and in a familiar setting? However, the book is probably too juvenile for middle school students. The book is ideal for the WIDA Developing proficiency level.

The book is available in print format as well as audio cassette format.

2. Climo, S. (1993). *The Korean Cinderella*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers. [ISBN 0-06-020432-X]

This Cinderella story is set in ancient Korea. Pear Blossom is the young girl who loses her mother, and when her father remarries, she is mistreated by her stepmother. But in this story, the protagonist has the help of magical creatures. It is they who help Pear Blossom complete all the tasks demanded of her stepmother. Pear Blossom eventually marries a nobleman. The book is beautifully illustrated in very vivid detail and bright colors. The text includes some Korean words. The book is intended for the Bridging proficiency level.

The book is available only in print format.

3. Jaffe, N. (1995). *Older brother, younger brother*. New York: Viking, a Division of Penguin USA. [ISBN 0-670-85645-2]

This Korean folktale is about two brothers who are very different. It's a story of honor and greed. It's also a story of family loyalty, respect for elders, and sensibility to the natural world. One brother mistreats the other. But in the end we know who wins. The good brother is rewarded and the bad brother is punished. The book is beautifully illustrated in vivid watercolors. Although the book is intended for ages 4-8, I think it's suitable for older Korean ELL children as well, in that it's an easy read and the subject matter is interesting. The book is suited for the Developing proficiency level.

The book is available only in print format.

4. Landau, K. (1999). *Korea*. New York: Children's Press, a Division of Grolier Publishing. [ISBN 0-516-20984-1]

This book is one of a series of *True Books*, which also includes books on Argentina, China, Ireland, and others. It's a factual book, more like a school text, with color photographs. The print is large and the reading is fairly easy. There is a glossary of important words and an index. The book recommends various websites on Korean culture. One of the websites is for the Young Hoon Elementary School in Korea (www.younghoon.es.kr). The website is in English and Korean. The school is famous for its English Immersion program. Because it's a content book with a lot of new vocabulary, it's best suited for the Developing and Expanding proficiency levels.

The book is available only in print format.

5. McMahon, P. (1993). *Chi-hoon: A Korean girl*. Honesdale, Pennsylvania: Boyds Mills Press, Inc. [ISBN 1-56397-026-0]

What's life like for a real-life contemporary eight-year-old girl in Seoul, Korea? The book follows one week in the life of Chi-hoon. It covers all aspects of her life: family, religion, school, shopping, etc. And all is supported by beautiful color photographs. The text is challenging and is interspersed with Korean words for items of food, clothing, etc. Older leaders will find the book interesting too – for there's a lot to learn about Korean culture. The proficiency level is Expanding or even Bridging.

The book is available only in print format.

6. Czech, J. (2002). *The coffee can kid*. Washington, DC: Child & Family Press [ISBN 0-87868-821-8]

This is a picture book intended for young children who are just beginning to read. However, the story will appeal to all children – I would venture to say even middle-schoolers. It's about Annie, a six-year-old from Korea adopted by an American family. Born Dong Hee, Annie is given up for adoption by her unwed Korean mother. Annie treasures the contents of the coffee can. It contains a picture of her as a newborn and a letter from her birth mother. Annie is happy to have a connection to her past. The story is told in very honest terms. The proficiency level for the ELL reader is Developing.

The book is available only in print format.

7. So-un, K. (2004). *Korean children's favorite stories*. Boston: Tuttle Publishing [ISBN 0-8048-3591-8]

This book is text-heavy. The stories are longer. In fact, it's intended for older children. The book contains thirteen Korean fairytales translated into English. The stories contain elements shared by many cultures – good versus bad, living happily ever after, lots of talking animals, etc. The book is beautifully illustrated in watercolors. Its original publication from 1955, entitled *The Story Bag*, did not contain the illustrations. The proficiency level is Expanding.

The book is available only in print format.

8. Park, L. (1999). *The seesaw girl*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company. [ISBN-10: 0440418518]

The book is Korean fiction intended for older children. It's about a 17-th century 12-year-old Korean girl who lives within the confined walls of a palace. Jade Blossom is the daughter of a wealthy advisor to the king. Her destiny is to live at home performing household duties until she marries. She must behave like a proper young lady, according to the strict rules of conduct. But she is endlessly curious about the outside world. She tries to venture out – only to be punished. The book is illustrated with black and white drawings. The book is somewhat text-heavy and is probably at the ELL proficiency level of Expanding/Bridging.

The book is available in print and Kindle (digital download) editions.

9. San Souci, D. (1999). *In the moonlight mist*. Honesdale, Pennsylvania: Boyds Mills Press, Inc. [ISBN 1-56397-754-0]

This is another picture book. However, it contains more text than others on this list. It's a Korean folktale retold by the author. The story begins when a woodcutter rescues a deer from hunters. The deer then grants him a wish. He wants to find a wife. He gets his wish. He meets a heavenly maiden, they marry, and she bears him a child. But not everything is perfect. The wife becomes homesick and wants to return to her homeland. But of course it has a happy ending. As with the other picture books on the list, it might seem that older ELL children will not enjoy the book. I think they will. This is because they are reading about their culture while at the same time learning easy English. The proficiency level is Developing.

The book is available only in print format.

10. Park, L. (2004). *The firekeeper's son*. New York: Clarion Books. [ISBN 0-618-13337-2]

Set in early 19th century Korea, the book is a historical fiction picture book that will appeal to boys. Sang-hee is the son of the village's firekeeper. A firekeeper's job is to light a fire at the top of the hill to report to the other firekeepers (and the king) that everything is tranquil in the land. This bonfire signal system is well documented in history. One day, when Sang-hee's father breaks his ankle, it is Sang-hee who must climb the hill to light the fire. Will he do it? He has a selfish reason not to do it. The book is for the proficiency level of Developing.

The book is available in print, audio cassette, and video formats.

Here are some helpful links to articles about Korean culture. The first and fourth links provide information on modern Korean culture. The second provides statistics on Korean populations in the U.S. And the third provides insights into Korean-American life. The last link is Korean-American author Linda Sue Park's official website.

<http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/cultural/oldworld/asia/koreanculture.html>

http://www.calstatela.edu/centers/ckaks/census/top_100_cities.pdf

<http://www.koreanbeacon.com>

<http://www.pbs.org/hiddenkorea/culture.htm>

<http://www.lindasuepark.com>

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