



To Swim Across the World

K-12 Curriculum Component for Global Issues through Literature

To Swim Across the World

A NOVEL



Background of Novel

Based on the true story of Frances and Ginger Park's parents, Sei-Young and Heisook.

<https://www.amazon.com/Swim-Across-World-Frances-Park/dp/0786886315>

Frances Park and Ginger Park

"Exquisitely rendered...lovely novel." —USA Today

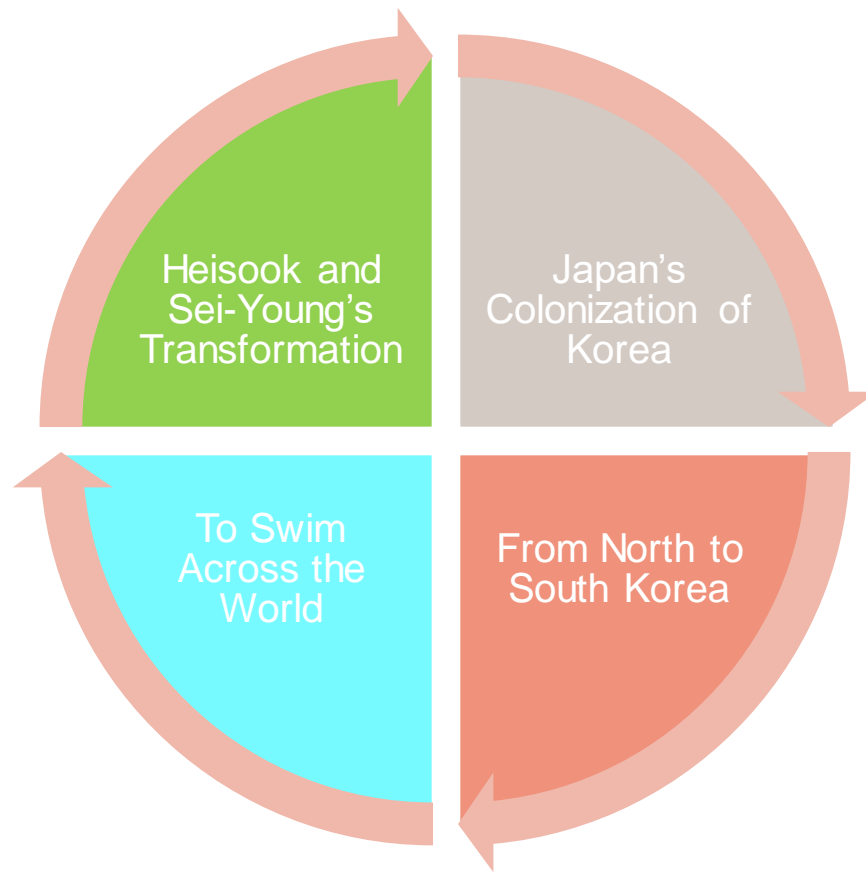
"A Story of Family History, Korean Style." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/liveonline/01/authors/authors_park082901.htm. 2001

Main Characters and Setting

- Sei-Young Shin (Shuzo Nabano)
- Heisook Pang
- Changi Pang
- Grandfather
- Mr. Suka
- Officer Akoto
- Aunt Sunja



Topics around the Theme of Migration



Heisook and Sei-Young's Transformations: Filial Piety

Hyo
孝, 豆

Heisook

Is initially shielded from the realities of WWII and the worst extremes of Japanese colonization due to her family's wealth and privilege; is a dutiful and obedient child.

As the war closes in on her family and her world, Heisook begins to change and to question her world and the relationships and events that transpire around her.

Sei-Young

Born to a poor family whose father struggles to live up to his obligations, Sei-Young looks to his grandfather for his guidance and education.

Sei-Young's maintains faith in a system that will reward him if he remains true; sees his hard work and motivation rewarded by making money working on Mr. Suka's farm and eventually gaining admission to high school and college.

Sample DBQ How do Heisook and Sei-Young undergo change throughout the novel regarding *hyo*, or filial piety?

Document 1

1:2 Master You [You Ruo] said, "Among those who are filial toward their parents and fraternal toward their brothers, those who are inclined to offend against their superiors are few indeed. Among those who are disinclined to offend against their superiors, there have never been any who are yet inclined to create disorder. The noble person concerns himself with the root; when the root is established, the Way is born. Being filial and fraternal — is this not the root of humaneness?"

Source: http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/cup/confucius_analects.pdf

"Selections from the Confucian Analects"

Document 2



Source: National Palace Museum of Korea

<http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20110628000781&mod=skb>

Document 3

"On the morning of Chusok, Father brought us to the burying ground to say our prayers...I stood before Great-Great Grandmother's tombstone." (p.49-50)

Document 4

"No! Not prayers. You and Mother spend your whole lives praying, and what good do your prayers do when God won't protect Changi from the Imperial Army? Right then Father was no better than the enemy... 'Then I hate you, Father!'" (p. 83-84)

Document 5

First Son

From the earth I came,
Into the earth I will go.
But not until I watch
My First Son's spirit grow.
He is sturdy as a tree,
He is as bright as the sun.
He is rich as monsoon soil,
He is Sei-Young, my First Son. (p. 65)

Document 6

Even though learning the Korean alphabet was strictly forbidden in school, in the privacy of our home, Grandfather had secretly taught me Hangu'l." (p.26)

Document 7

"After months of study, I passed the entrance board exam and won entrance into the Christian Boys' Academy. It was the Fall of 1946; I would be entering my junior year. Grandfather's words were true: the course of my life had changed." (p.148)

Japan's Colonization of Korea: Adapting to Survive

What does Sei-Young mean when he says, "the Japanese lived on our land, but they did not live in our world?" Why do you think the Japanese wanted the Koreans to change their name to Japanese names after they colonized Korea? Consider the challenge that it would take to accept this.

"Once a traditional Korean village school called a **sodang**, the **Tanake** school was back in session. All traces of our colorful history were erased. Instead, we studied Japanese language and the characters of the Japanese alphabet called **Kana**." (p. 45)

"Their presence was as natural as the sound of faraway streams. Faraway streams because while the Grandfather would sit me down in a corner of our hut and say 'Always remember, you are not **Shuzo Nabano**.' Under Japanese rule, every Korean was forced to relinquish his or her Korean name and register under a Japanese name... Your name is **Sei-Young**, which means 'to swim across the world.' We studied Japanese language and Japanese history and Japanese art. I played lovely Japanese songs on my flute... Only **loyal** talk was permitted in the **Osawa School**." (p. 55)

Japanese Colonization of Korea: Changing Identities, Perceptions, and Relationships

Mr. Suka	Officer Akoto	Aunt Sunja
<p>“Suka’s farm was famous in this land, tucked away on the most fertile ground this side of the Han River...The man spoke in Japanese.” (p.42)</p>	<p>”Incensed, Officer Akoto whipped Grandfather’s bare back with his own belt, shouting, ‘Son of a street whore! Let me swat you like a filthy fly!’” (p. 68)</p>	<p>“Those Japanese demons beat a man to death!” (p. 22)</p>
<p>”What a pitiful sight you are. Your thin little body would not make it to one sundown in the fields. But I will give you a chance.” (p. 42)</p>	<p>”Kicking Grandfather in the ribs</p>	<p>”Her husband was beaten to death on his way home from work...in all likelihood he died at the hands of the Japanese...She has become a vengeful creature breathing tales of Japanese</p>
<p>“Mr. Suka farmhouse basket plums persimmons your family (p.47)</p>	<p>1. What is ironic about the roles that Mr. Suka and Officer Akoto ultimately play in Sei-Young’s life?</p> <p>2. Why might the authors—assuming the fiction element has been employed here—have chosen to construct the characters in this way? What might their intention have been?</p>	
<p>“Your family many favours would sus</p>	<p>Extended Activity: Consider reading other books or viewing films that present similar historical examples of evolving identities and changing perceptions and relationships between perceived adversaries.</p>	
<p>”Sei-Young money and And when you swim across the world I hope there are times when you will think of me with fond memory.” (p. 140)</p>		<p>Suka. the speaks to me. A kind Japanese man is risking his life for a Korean family.” (p. 122)</p>

From North to South Korea: Heisook's Journey

Have students consider Heisook's journey to freedom. What did it entail, and what aspects and experiences of her character up to this point have prepared her for this moment?

Heisook takes the train to Pyongyang, lying to the conductor about the reason for her travels and her destination.

Heisook's group is captured by the police.

Heisook lies to police and is released, joining up again with guide and group.

Heisook and group climb mountain, escapes police and dogs to swim across river to freedom in South Korea.

"I lived in Shanghai with my parents. Then I came to live with my sick grandmother and an elderly aunty in Sinuiju. After my grandmother died last winter, I tried to return home, but the guards would not let me leave the country. Word got back to me that my parents are now living in Seoul, and I wished to be reunited with them." (p. 184)

From North to South Korea: Sei-Young's "Journey"

COMMUNIST VIEW

*"There is a great man in the **North**. Under his government, there will be one class. A class of equality and freedom for all.*

***American capitalism** is just a fancy term for*

*"Why don't you get up there and speak the voice of truth?...Sei-Young, you are the **Korean thinker**...Tell everyone—tell me!—what you are thinking." (p. 175)*

*must shut down the school until every last **American** has left our soil!" (p. 174)*

ANTI-COMMUNIST VIEW

*"The words we have just heard are words spoken under the influence of **Communism**. Believe them for even one minute and we have already lost all hope for freedom. Do not forget the rhetoric we Koreans were forced to listen to under the **Japanese Occupation**. Do not forget that our culture was slain. We shed our skin and became loyal Japanese subjects, deprived of even the*

*of us...NOW, for the first time in our histories we are free to choose our own destiny. **Freedom is power**; the power to learn how to be who we were meant to be. **Educated Koreans!** To listen to **Communist propaganda** instead of freedom is an **act of suicide**. If our college is shut down, we are the ones who will suffer. The Communists want to shut us down, shut all of our doors to freedom. Their definition of equality is oppression." (p. 175-76)*

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Suggested Activities: After studying the aftermath of World War II, the partitioning of Korea at the 38th parallel in the context of the Cold War, and the impending Korean War, have students analyze and debate the two arguments above. Students should be encouraged to use examples from other historical periods and current events in their arguments to defend their positions.

To Swim Across the World: Diaspora

“Study abroad, Sei-Young. It is a good time to leave our country. When you and my daughter return, the ravages of war will not surround you. ‘But what about Heisook? What will she do?’ ‘I will see another part of the world... And maybe I will be able to complete my college degree where we are. Then I should like to become a music teacher.” (p. 272)

“I was accepted on scholarship to Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, beginning the winter semester of 1955. There I would study public administration and economics.” (p. 272)

“Over a small mountain village we fly; I look down. A portrait of a peasant family comes into view. I see father hobbling down the mountain with his rickety cart. I see mother washing clothes in the river... I see Grandfather speaking to the monsoon sky... No matter where I look out, one face remains clear—Grandfather’s... as the airplane thunderously breaks through clouds, his spirit takes up the whole sky. ‘Your name is Sei-Young, which means ‘to swim across the world.’ Someday you will do just that.” (p. 279-80)

Questions for Discussion:

1. The Korean diaspora figures prominently in Korea’s history. What were some of the historical *push-pull* factors that have led Koreans to immigrate to other parts of the world?
2. Sei-Young’s improbable rise and success and his meeting and marriage to Heisook was actually a true story (and a great love story!). What did you find most amazing about this story?
3. If you had written the ending to this story, would you have had Sei-Young and Heisook depart Korea for the United States? Why or why not?

Sources

- Asia for Educators | Columbia University <http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/>
- “A Story of Family History, Korean Style.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/liveonline/O1/authors/authors_park082901.htm.
- Hidden Korea | PBS <https://www.pbs.org/hiddenkorea/history.htm>
- <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20110628000781&mod=skb>