

# TEACHING ASIA IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

# THE CORE KNOWLEDGE CURRICULUM

By Connie Jones



Students parade with a Chinese dragon through the hallways of New Prospect Elementary School in Alpharetta, Georgia.

Courtesy of the Core Knowledge Foundation

## Editor's Introduction

*Our experience has been that it is still rare in the United States to find elementary schools in which specific content about Asia is systematically taught. E. D. Hirsch-inspired Core Knowledge Elementary Schools are one notable exception.*

*The Core Knowledge School movement is a fast-growing national elementary education reform. Core Knowledge elementary schools began in the 1990–91 school year, and at present there are over 900 Core Knowledge schools nationally. In Core Knowledge schools, educators must spend at least 50 percent of classroom time teaching children the Core Knowledge Sequence, which exclusively focuses upon the liberal arts.*

*In what follows we have asked Connie Jones, President of the Core Knowledge Foundation, to briefly describe the Core Knowledge School movement and to address the issue of why the curriculum developers thought it important to include Asia. We have also excerpted the major Asia-related content directly from the Core Knowledge Sequence. If you have further questions about Core Knowledge Schools, contact:*



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The Core Knowledge Foundation  
801 East High Street  
Charlottesville, VA 22902  
Phone: 804-977-7550  
Fax: 804-977-0021  
E-mail: [coreknow@coreknowledge.org](mailto:coreknow@coreknowledge.org)  
Home page: [www.coreknowledge.org](http://www.coreknowledge.org)



## History and Geography: Grade 4

### IV. China: Dynasties and Conquerors

- Qin Shi Huang, first emperor, begins construction of Great Wall
- Han dynasty: trade in silk and spices, the Silk Road, invention of paper
- Tang and Song dynasties: highly developed civilizations, extensive trade, impressive inventions (including compass, gunpowder, astrolabes)
- Mongol invasions and rule
  - Chinggis Khan and the "Golden Horde"
  - Kubilai Khan: establishment of what is now Beijing
  - Marco Polo
- Ming dynasty
  - The "Forbidden City"
  - Explorations of Zheng He

Learn about the Great Wall of China and the Silk Road.

See the beautiful art of China and discover the secrets of the Great Wall.

## History and Geography: Grade 5

### VII. Feudal Japan

#### A. HISTORY AND CULTURE

- Emperor as nominal leader, his real power in the hands of shoguns
- Samurai, code of Bushido
- Rigid class system in feudal Japanese society
- Japan closed to outsiders
- Highlights
  - Periods: the four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path; Buddhism
  - Shintō: indigenous belief system; reverence for nature; kami

Learn about the history of Japan.

Discover the secrets of the Great Wall of China.

#### B. GEOGRAPHY

- Pacific Ocean, Sea of Japan
- Four main islands: Hokkaido (northern island), Shikoku (island)
- Tokyo
- Tectonic earthquakes
- The Pacific Rim

## Visual Arts: Grade 5

### III. Art of Japan

- Become familiar with
  - The Great Buddha (also known as the Kamakura Buddha)
  - Landscape gardens

Learn about the history of Japan.



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How can this be achieved? Core Knowledge starts with a clear and specific set of content guidelines that sets forth a plan for building a strong foundation of knowledge for every student grade by

grade. This sequential building of knowledge not only helps ensure that children enter each new grade ready to learn, but also helps prevent the many repetitions and gaps that characterize much current schooling. This structure carries through all content areas, so students deepen their understanding of important concepts from history, geography, science, mathematics, fine arts and music as they develop related skills.

Respect for the diversity in our population is fostered by the knowledge specified in the *Core Knowledge Sequence*, which has been reviewed by distinguished scholars in the field of multicultural studies. The *Core Knowledge Sequence* is designed to provide access to the best knowledge available, including significant knowledge of diverse peoples and cultures. As early as kindergarten and first grade, students are shown that people all around the world tell certain stories that, while they differ in details, have much in common, as they compare and contrast folk tales from different lands such as Lon Po Po (China) and Little Red Riding Hood; Issun boshi, or One-Inch Boy (Japan), Tom Thumb (England), and the Little Finger of the Watermelon Patch (Vietnam).

## History and Geography: Grade 7

### V. World War II

#### C. WORLD WAR II IN THE PACIFIC, AND THE END OF THE WAR

- Historical background: Japan's rise to power
  - Geography of Japan (review all topics from grade 6)
  - Sea of Japan and Korea Strait
  - High population density, very limited armland, heavy reliance on imported raw materials and food
  - End of Japanese isolation: Commodore Matthew Perry
  - Meiji Restoration and of feudal Japan, industrialization and modernization
  - Japanese imperialism: occupation of Korea, invasion of Manchuria, Rape of Nanking
  - Japanese-Soviet neutrality treaty
- Pearl Harbor, Dec. 7, 1941. "A day that will live in infamy"
- Intervention of Japanese-Americans
- Fall of the Philippines: Bataan Death March; General Douglas MacArthur: "I shall return."
- Battle of Midway
- Island amphibious landings: Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima
- Surrender of Japan
  - Atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the End of War
  - U.S. Japanes (allied) constitution for Japan, Emperor Hirohito
  - Potsdam Conference; Nuremberg war crimes trials
  - Creation of United Nations; Security Council Universal Declaration of Human Rights

General Robert I. Casey and Stephen Remick's "Decisive Moment"

## History and Geography: Grade 8

### I. The Decline of European Colonialism

#### A. BREAKUP OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

- Collapse of British Commonwealth, independence for colonial territories
- United Ireland, The Easter Rising, Irish Free state
- Indian nationalism and independence:
  - Gopal Krishna Gokhale
  - Mahatma Gandhi, The Salt March
  - Partition of India into Hindu and Muslim states
- Geography of India and South Asia
  - Overview
    - Legacy of British colonial rule: English language, rail system
    - Himalayas, Mt. Everest, K2
    - Very high population densities and growth rates, low literacy rates
    - Monsoons
    - Rivers: Ganges, Indus, Brahmaputra
    - Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal
    - Pakistan, Kerala
    - Bangladesh
    - Sri Lanka
  - India
    - Second most populous country after China
    - Subsistence agriculture
    - Caste system, "untouchables"
    - Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras
    - Longstanding tension between Hindus and Muslims

#### B. CREATION OF PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

- China under European domination
  - Opium Wars, Boxer Rebellion
  - Sun Yat-Sen
- Communists take power
  - Mao Zedong, The Long March
  - United Front coalition led by Chiang Kai-Shek
  - Seven-Pointed Clause, 30-Year Friendship Treaty
- Geography of China
  - Overview
    - One-fifth of world population
    - 4,000-year-old culture
    - Third largest national territory, regional climates
  - Physical features
    - Huang He (Yellow) River; Chang Jiang (Yangtze) River
    - Tibetan Plateau, Gobi Desert
    - Yellow Sea; East China Sea; South China Sea
    - Great Wall, Great Canal
  - Societal/economic characteristics
    - Major cities: Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou (formerly Canton), Shenzhen
    - World's largest producer of coal and agricultural products, major industrial power
    - Offshore oil reserves
    - Multi-dialectal, including Mandarin, Cantonese
    - Hong Kong: special coastal economic zones
    - Taiwan, Tibet

Students are introduced to major world religions starting in first grade, beginning with a focus on geography and major symbols and figures, for the purposes of laying the groundwork to understand the role religion has played as a shaping force in the story of civilization and for instilling a sense of understanding and respect for one another beginning in the early years of schooling.

Asian studies play an important role in the *Core Knowledge Sequence* and are integrated throughout the grades in the



#### IV. The Vietnam War and the Rise of Social Activism

##### A. THE VIETNAM WAR

- French Indochina War: Dien Bien Phu, Ho Chi Minh, Viet Cong
- Domino Theory
- U.S. takes charge of the war: Special Forces, Tonkin Gulf Incidents
- The Ho Chi Minh Trail
- Antiwar protests: Kent State, The Pentagon Protests, "hawks" and "doves"
- American demoralization: Nixon's "Vietnamization" policy, Kissinger, "Vic Powers Act"
- Watergate scandal, resignation of Nixon
- Vietnam: Bao Dai, Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon)

Seventh Grade Asia E. 307  
Linda Ly (author) / William  
Votaw (illustrator)

*We would like to thank the  
Core Knowledge Foundation for  
permission to reprint portions  
of the Sequence.*

language arts, world history, geography, music, fine arts, math, and science. Students in second grade are introduced to Asia through an extensive study of geography, stories, architecture, and other important cultural contributions. Students in fourth grade study in greater depth the dynasties and conquerors of China as well as examples of Chinese art. Fifth graders study Feudal Japan, its history and culture, along with an in-depth study of Japan's geography.

We respect and appreciate that which we understand. True understanding results from a careful building of knowledge over time. Schools play such an important role in building the background knowledge and understanding that will lead their students to lasting respect, cooperation, and solidarity as a society. ■

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**CONSTANCE JONES** is the President of the Core Knowledge Foundation, an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization founded in 1986 by E. D. Hirsch, Jr. Connie earned her Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of South Florida and served as the Principal of the first Core Knowledge school in Fort Myers, Florida before joining the Foundation to develop a training program for schools interested in implementing the Core Knowledge Sequence.