

Teaching East Asia: Korea *Lessons and Resources for K–12 Classrooms*

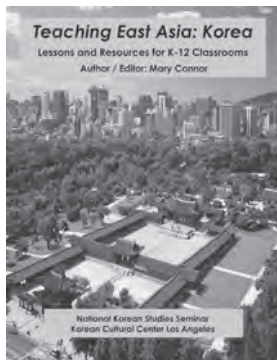
BY MARY CONNOR

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E-BOOK VERSION AVAILABLE AT [HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/YCV4FHPR](https://tinyurl.com/yCV4FHPR)

Reviewed by Franklin Rausch



In my experience as a university professor, teaching Korean history, while enjoyable, has its challenges. While most students are curious and eager to learn, much of the material is foreign to their own experiences, and they even find themselves struggling with something so seemingly simple as names (how can anyone unfamiliar with the Korean language be expected to pronounce the names of Sin Saimdang, Seondeok, or Yi Sunshin correctly based purely on the romanization?).

However, dedicated K–12 teachers who recognize the importance of Korea and wish to integrate it into their lessons face even greater challenges. The vast majority do not speak Korean, are not Koreanists, and do not have much time on account of the demands of their profession. Moreover, they do not have the luxury of having an entire class in which they have almost-unfettered creative control in terms of what they can teach. Instead, with limited time and resources, they must determine how to integrate Korea into their classes while adhering to government-mandated standards. Fortunately, thanks to the excellent *Teaching East Asia: Korea, Lessons and Resources for K–12 Classrooms*, such instructors will find that with a minimal investment of time and energy, they can teach Korea-related units that are factually accurate, of interest to students, and relevant to the world in which we live.

Teaching East Asia: Korea is divided into ten chapters of varying length on the following subjects: history–social sciences (the longest, amounting to nearly half the book), language, literature, art, music, religion and philosophy, science and technology, Korean–American history, and tourism. The final chapter, titled “Resources,” includes such items as lists of recommended books, films, and websites, as well as some articles that might be of interest to teachers that did not fit neatly into any of the previous chapters. Each chapter is in turn divided into various sections aimed at different grade levels. For instance, chapter 1 includes a chronology that provides Korean events within a world history context, a timeline, informative articles on various topics with advice on how to integrate them into a lesson (some of these are original articles, most of which are by the editor, Mary Connor, with others being reprints from various sources, including *Education About Asia*), document-based questions (DBQs) complete with readings on topics such as the Korean War, and suggestions for movies and advice on how they can be integrated into a classroom. A significant portion of these sections are complete lesson plans that identify which classes they can be best included in and what educational standards they fulfill, with detailed explanations for how they fulfill them. Moreover, this work is very good at identifying what grade level a particular section is best suited for, and true to its title, it does indeed include sections for K–12 classrooms.

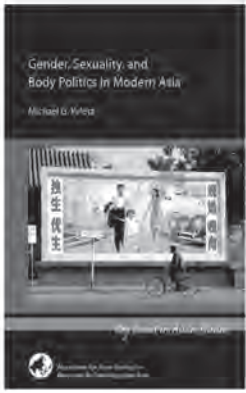
In general, this text is well-organized, and the various articles, DBQs, and lesson plans are clear, concise, and therefore ideal to the harried teacher seeking to make the best use of limited prep time for maximum pedagogical payoff. The information provided is, on the whole, accurate, relevant, and able in a short amount of space to help readers make sense of complex issues. For instance, sections on North Korea are very well-done, as they rise above the common “North Korea is weird” and “They are all crazy” perceptions that drive much popular discourse on the country, doing an important service by helping students and teachers actually come to some understanding of the situation there and North Korea’s influence on the rest of the world. Moreover, a lot of these lessons are very creative and promise to combine learning and fun. For instance, lesson plans include a talk show based on Korean history, a dramatization of the lives of important Koreans from the past, making *bojagi* (useful items made out of scrap cloth), and a lesson combining writing *sijo* (a kind of traditional Korean poetry) with K-pop. I was particularly impressed by a lesson that combines a discussion of Korean money with the mathematics of currency conversion.

While this review is based primarily off a hard copy version of *Teaching East Asia: Korea*, an e-book version can be found on <https://nationalkoreanstudies.com/>. The e-book is freely available and includes links to many of the PowerPoints and images referred to in the text, making it easier for educators to incorporate those materials into their own classes. There are even videos of lectures from the free seminar made available for educators by the National Korean Studies Center, the organization that produced *Teaching East Asia: Korea*.

Developing such an excellent resource as *Teaching East Asia: Korea* was most likely no easy task, as special consideration had to be made so as to make sure that everything could be seamlessly integrated into a classroom

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while following the necessary standards, something that this work does very well. Moreover, because of the close connection of the seminar and *Teaching East Asia: Korea*, it would seem that this work is very much a living document, and on that assumption, this reviewer will make a few comments regarding coverage and organization aimed at making this otherwise-excellent text even better. First, while the coverage is generally good, there is comparatively little on eighteenth-century Korea, which is considered a sort of golden age for art, literature, and philosophy. It might be helpful if relevant sections on that period were included. Similarly, while some material is included on Korea in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, much of it is focused on what people in other countries were saying about Korea and the justification of imperialism. More on internal attempts to maintain Korean independence and to “modernize” might be interesting and would help challenge the rhetoric of imperialism. And while the sections on the Japanese colonial period (1910–1945) are good, if possible, some excerpts from the excellent oral history *Under the Black Umbrella*, edited by Hildi Kang, would do much to show just how complex the relationship between individual Japanese and Koreans could be during that time.

Religion is a subject that brings its own unique challenges, and though again, generally done well, it would be helpful if the chapter on that subject contained an additional section on religious practice, as many Koreans who do not belong to a religion will do such things as conduct ancestor rites or seek the services of a shaman. Similarly, the section on Buddhism is more of a general lesson on the morality of the religion (and one that seems to encourage that morality instead of simply examining it) rather than discussing how it is practiced in Korea. It should be noted that this work does mention in other sections the role Buddhism has played in Korean culture, history, and technology. Likewise, while the language chapter is interesting, it lacks clear guidelines for how it can be utilized in a classroom setting. In terms of organization, movie reviews on *Chunhyang*, *J.S.A.*, and *A State of Mind* are in the final chapter on resources, when they might be better placed in an earlier relevant chapter. It also might be helpful if the DBQs and other lessons with handouts were available as separate PDF documents to make it easier to use them in class.

Such issues are relatively minor and do not detract in any material way from this work. *Teaching East Asia: Korea* is a highly useful resource for educators that clearly and concisely delivers accurate and relevant information with practical explanations on how to apply its lessons in a classroom setting in accordance with government-issued standards, often in creative and interesting ways. And considering that the e-book version of this text is freely available, any educator teaching K–12 who is interested in integrating Korea into their classes would find it well worth their time to have a look at this work. ■

FRANKLIN RAUSCH is an Assistant Professor in the Department of History and Philosophy at Lander University (Greenwood, South Carolina). He has written extensively on Korea, including a contribution, “Nationalists Movements before 1945,” to *The Routledge Handbook of Modern Korean History*.