

## U.S.–South Korean Relations

PRODUCED BY THE STANFORD PROGRAM ON INTERNATIONAL  
AND CROSS-CULTURAL EDUCATION (SPICE), 2007  
FREEMAN SPOGLI INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Reviewed by Karl R. Neumann



**U**.S.–South Korean Relations is a valuable resource for any teacher at the secondary or college level seeking to introduce their students to the complex interdependent relationship of the two countries over the last sixty years. Even though the unit, developed by Rylan Sekiguchi, Joon Seok Hong, and Rennie Moon at the Stanford Program on International and Cross-cultural Education (SPICE), is designed as a self-contained exploration of historical and current US-South Korean interactions, its

various components can be readily adapted to suit any educator's unique teaching requirements. The unit is centered on the authors' premise that despite the importance and vitality of the US-South Korea alliance, many American students will not be familiar with the details of the nations' shared experiences. With this view in mind, each unit lesson includes an overview activity in which students create a timeline documenting the various interactions between the two countries. The resultant visual reminder of the contacts between Koreans and Americans can be easily referenced when teaching the other related lesson components.

*U.S.–South Korean Relations is truly an important contribution to the library of any teacher wishing to enhance his or her East Asian Studies, International Relations, or other relevant social studies course.*

The unit's introductory lesson encourages students to reflect on their knowledge of the US-South Korean relationship and to examine the historical and modern realities that have bound the two countries together. The next four lessons then direct students towards the democratic, economic, security, and socio-cultural "pillars" the authors argue are the basis of the US-ROK alliance's longevity. After creating and discussing a topic-specific contribution to the aforementioned classroom timeline, each lesson continues with a follow-up activity designed to reinforce what students just learned. For example, after exploring South Korea's experiences with democratization, students are asked to analyze Kim Dae-jung's contributions and his beliefs regarding democracy's compatibility with traditional East Asian philosophies such as Confucianism. The unit then directs the learners to use their mathematical skills to analyze statistics related to South Korea's explosive economic development in the last five decades and the connections of that growth to trade with the US. The third lesson focuses on the US and South Korea's shared security concerns. This section's highlights are a close documentary analysis of the 1953 Mutual Defense Treaty security obligations, and a peace treaty negotiations simulation where the presence of US military forces on the Korean Peninsula is the central point of debate. Finally, the unit concludes with the students independently researching one of four topics—sports, media, education, or the arts—that have influenced the bilateral relationship on the personal level. Positioning this activity at the end of the unit should help students realize that the abstract ideas discussed in the previous lessons do have concrete expression in how South Koreans and Americans influence each other in their daily lives. The individual creativity that these tasks should also engender in pupils makes this one of the strongest portions of the overall unit.

High school educators seeking to use this unit should note that the historical background information provided with each lesson is substantial and therefore may require some editing in order to make the reading load more manageable for their students. Additionally, some activities assume that the students already bring substantial prior knowledge into the activities. For example, while the peace treaty simulation is a well-organized activity, the points of view of North Korea and China are not fully represented in the supporting materials. The absence of such important information could result in an inaccurate portrayal of those delegations' views without either substantial independent student research or the provision of additional content by the teacher.

Even with such flaws, *U.S.–South Korean Relations* is truly an important contribution to the library of any teacher wishing to enhance his or her East Asian Studies, International Relations, or other relevant social studies course. ■

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