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World History, Fall, 2015

Title: *Year of Impossible Goodbyes* by Sook Nyul Choi

Grade: 11, World History

Time Required: One week or 5 x 45 minute periods

Essential Questions: A. How have the Korean people dealt with the loss of their land and traditional family ties as a result of invasion, emigration and occupation?

Rationale: Every culture and every individual has experienced loss. For the individual, it might be loss of a family member or personal property. For a culture, community or family, such loss may include loss of traditional ways of life or lands via forced migration.

Standards: *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.10 By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 11-CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.*

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meanings of a key term over the course of a text.

Book Summary: The story takes place in what is now North Korea in 1945. Korea has been occupied by the Japanese for 30 years. Sookan is a Korean girl whose family subtly resists Japanese indoctrination, but at great risk. Sookan and her brother Inchun are secretly taught Korean culture and history by her grandfather. The family hopes for a Japanese surrender, but when the war actually ends, one occupation is replaced by another, as Soviet troops take over North Korea. Sookan and her family find that life under the Communists is no better than it was under the Japanese. Sookan and Inchun plan to escape to South Korea as soon as possible.

Lesson: After reading the story, students:

- A. Create a list of people in their lives they have lost.
- B. Then complete a journal entry about how each loss affected him or her personally. These entries can be shared in order to create a commonality among students' experiences. Journal entries should be at least a page in length and cite three examples of loss.
- C. Engage in a class discussion about the depth of emotion in the story that leads the students to realize and identify different types of loss in their lives. Some goodbyes are formal while others are informal. Some chosen and some forced by circumstances. Discuss these differences.
- D. Pose the question: "*What is meant by a year of 'impossible goodbyes'?*" Students will form groups of 2-3 and read the book outside of class as homework over the course of one week. There are ten chapters in this historical novel, but they are simple to read for the average 11th grader. Each student group will make a poster in a "jigsaw" matrix pattern, showing information gleaned from the book in the following areas: **1. Characters and their**

characteristics 2. cultural/traditional practices 3. Forced changes in behavior and life situation 4. Resulting losses stemming from those changes 5. Characters' response to those losses. After jigsaw posters are completed, each group will share-out or brief the class for a few minutes on Friday.

- E. Extension for gifted students or if time allows:** Students can use information from all the group posters to write poetry in open verse. Poems must be about events in the reading, the journal entries and/or the emotional responses to personal or community loss.
- F. Adaptation for special needs learners/less time available** the first 1-3 chapters can suffice along with simply making the list of people they have lost, along with the journal article(s) about those people and how their loss affected them.

Goal/Desired Endstate: Students will have a greater appreciation for the cross-cultural nature of tragedy, trauma and loss of identity created by seismic political and military events, especially the loss of cultural heritage and recognition. This loss of identity can be attributed to either forced assimilation or simply the desire to fit in with others. (We see this phenomenon with NK defectors who struggle to integrate with South Korean society). Some “goodbyes” are voluntary while others are not. Can be used in further study of immigration.

Resources:

Choi, Suk Nyul, *Year of Impossible Goodbyes* Dell, New York, 1991