



Curriculum Connections

When Spring Comes to the DMZ

by Uk-Bae Lee

Translated by Chungyon Won and Aileen Won

Plough Publishing House, 2019

Non-Fiction, set in Korea

2020 Honorable Mention, Freeman Book Award for Children's Literature

Appropriate Grade/Age Level

When Spring Comes to the DMZ is most appropriate for upper elementary-school students but could be used with middle-school or even high-school students.

Context

According to the author's bio, Uk-Bae Lee wrote *When Spring Comes to the DMZ* in 2010 as part of the [Peace Picture Book project](#), which involved illustrators from Korea, China, and Japan. This project is described on the [School Library Journal website](#):



During 2005 and 2006, amidst a sharp deterioration of Japan's relations with her Asian neighbors... [the] intent was to 'document the past honestly, share today's sorrow, and create a peaceful tomorrow together.' The result was...11 titles—4 from Japan, 3 from China, and 4 from Korea—to be translated and published in all three countries.¹

While the backdrop for his book is political, the tone of the book focuses solemnly on a negative space. The story is not about the space that is North Korea, nor is it about the space that is South Korea; it is intentionally about the space that is neither. For this reason, *When Spring Comes to the DMZ* can focus on what Korea might be without the separation, if it could find true peace. A number of cross-curricular ties can be unfurled here, from an elementary introduction to the Korean War to geopolitics today. Most significantly, perhaps, is the environmental boon to the DMZ after bombing ceased in 1953.

¹ David Jacobsen, Minjie Chen, Reiko Nakaigawa Lee, and Jongsun Wee, "The Japan–China–Korea Peace Picture Book Project" in Betsy Bird, "Guest Post: What We're Missing: Gems of World Kid Lit #2," *School Library Journal*, March 12, 2020, <https://afuse8production.slj.com/2020/03/12/guest-post-what-were-missing-gems-of-world-kid-lit-2/>.

To learn more about the Freeman Book Awards, please visit:

www.nctasia.org/freeman-book-awards/



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Note: The last page of the book has a section called "What is the DMZ?" that says, "The truce that ended the Korean War established the border..."; however, while active conflict of the Korean War ceased in 1953 along the 38th parallel due to an Armistice Agreement between the Soviet-backed North and the UN-backed South, the Korean War never officially ended. To this day, the armistice continues to hold, but the war is only (officially) on pause. The Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) is 160 miles long at the 38th parallel and 2.5 miles wide, with the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) running along the center.

Literary Themes

Many literary themes could be explored using *When Spring Comes to the DMZ*, including family connections, the natural state of diversity and balance, preservation of nature, the role of human activities in the destruction of nature, and war. These could be approached in different ways depending on the grade level of students studying the book.

UPPER ELEMENTARY (4–5)

Themes: family connections, preservation of nature, and war

Standards

From [Common Core](#)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.2: Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.8: Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.2: Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.8: Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point(s).



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CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RF.4.4 and 5.4: Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.

Next Generation Science

ESS3.C: Human Impacts on Earth Systems: Human activities in agriculture, industry, and everyday life have had major effects on the land, vegetation, streams, ocean, air, and even outer space. But individuals and communities are doing things to help protect Earth's resources and environments. (5-ESS3-1)

National Visual Arts Standards

VA:Re8.1.4a: Interpret art by referring to contextual information and analyzing relevant subject matter, characteristics of form, and use of media.

VA:Re8.1.5a: Interpret art by analyzing characteristics of form and structure, contextual information, subject matter, visual elements, and use of media to identify ideas and mood conveyed.

Themes: family connections, war, preservation of nature, art as communication of historic events and human emotion

Guiding Questions:

1. What events bring families together? What events might cause families to live far apart?
2. What was the Korean War? When did it happen and why? Why did the Korean War lead to the separation of families?
3. What is the DMZ? Why is so much nature preserved in the DMZ? Do we have nature preservation where we live? Is it on purpose or by accident?



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4. How does the Uk-Bae Lee, the book's author and illustrator, communicate feelings about historical events in Korea? How do his images communicate the way Grandfather and his family feel about these events?

Suggested Learning Activity

- Set up stations with grade-level appropriate reading about North and South Korean families, background on the Korean War, and nature preservation in the DMZ, supplemented by artwork from the book itself.
- Students could make a poster (individual) or brochure (pairs or small group) about newfound biodiversity in the DMZ and explain how their images convey their emotions about the future.

Possible Resources

- "Korean War," Britannica for Kids
<https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/Korean-War/353347>
- Time for Kids: Life on the Line
<https://www.timeforkids.com/g34/life-line/?rl=en-690>
- Channel 4: Korean Families Unite after 70 years (or segments)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FiYmzCrIio>
- National Geographic: Pictures of Wildlife in Korea's Demilitarized Zone
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/130820-wildlife-korea-dmz-war-culture-biology-science>
- Korean War Legacy Foundation Curriculum
<https://koreanwarlegacy.org/teaching-tools/>



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MIDDLE SCHOOL (6–8)

Themes: family connections, natural state of diversity and balance, preservation of nature, the role of human activities in the destruction of nature, and war

Standards

Common Core

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.6-8.2: Determine the central ideas or conclusions of a text; provide an accurate summary of the text distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

Next Generation Science

LS2.C: Ecosystem Dynamics, Functioning, and Resilience: Ecosystems are dynamic in nature; their characteristics can vary over time. Disruptions to any physical or biological component of an ecosystem can lead to shifts in all its populations. (MS-LS2-4)

National Visual Arts Standards

VA:Re8.1.8a: Interpret art by analyzing how the interaction of subject matter, characteristics of form and structure, use of media, artmaking approaches, and relevant contextual information contributes to understanding messages or ideas and mood conveyed.

Themes: family connections, natural state of diversity and balance, preservation of nature, the role of human activities in the destruction of nature, and war

Guiding Questions:

1. When did the Korean War happen and why?
2. How did the Korean War lead to the separation of families, and what effect does that have on families today?



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3. What is the DMZ? Why is so much nature preserved in the DMZ? How does this impact our world?
4. How does the Uk-Bae Lee, the book's author and illustrator, communicate feelings about historical events in Korea? How do his images communicate the way Grandfather and his family feel about these events?

Suggested Learning Activity

1a. Introduce students to the guiding questions and read the book to or with them.

1b. Allowing students to work in pairs or small groups, ask them to select a question of interest.

1c. As students focus on their guiding question, provide the possible resources that can help them to identify possible answers.

2. Have students discuss and/or debate the value of the DMZ being designated a UN World Heritage Site (<https://www.dmzforum.org/about/background-of-the-dmz>) .

Possible Resources

- National Geographic: Dangerous Border and Sanctuary
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/130820-wildlife-korea-dmz-war-culture-biology-science>
- Korean Reunions: Families Divided by War Meet in the North
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-45243108>
- Beyond the Barbed Wire: The Accidental Oasis of the DMZ
<https://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/10/25/eco.dmz.korea/>
- Channel 4: Korean Families Unite after 70 years (or segments)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FiYmzCrIio>



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- National Geographic: Pictures of Wildlife in Korea's Demilitarized Zone
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/130820-wildlife-korea-dmz-war-culture-biology-science>
- Korea and the 38th Parallel
<https://www.neh.gov/article/korea-and-thirty-eighth-parallel>
- Korean War Legacy Foundation Curriculum
<https://koreanwarlegacy.org/teaching-tools/>

HIGH SCHOOL (9–12)

Themes: family connections, natural state of diversity and balance, preservation of nature, the role of human activities in the destruction of nature, and war

Standards

[Common Core](#)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2: Determine the central ideas or conclusions of a text; trace the text's explanation or depiction of a complex process, phenomenon, or concept; provide an accurate summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2: Determine the central ideas or conclusions of a text; summarize complex concepts, processes, or information presented in a text by paraphrasing them in simpler but still accurate terms.



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CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Next Generation Science

LS2.C: Ecosystem Dynamics, Functioning, and Resilience:

- A complex set of interactions within an ecosystem can keep its numbers and types of organisms relatively constant over long periods of time under stable conditions. If a modest biological or physical disturbance to an ecosystem occurs, it may return to its more or less original status (in which case, the ecosystem is considered resilient), as opposed to becoming a very different ecosystem. Extreme fluctuations in conditions or the size of any population, however, can challenge the functioning of ecosystems in terms of resources and habitat availability. (HS-LS2-2) (HS-LS2-6)
- Moreover, anthropogenic changes (induced by human activities) in the environment—including habitat destruction, pollution, introduction of invasive species, overexploitation, and climate change—can disrupt an ecosystem and threaten the survival of some species. (HS-LS2-7)

National Visual Arts Standards

VA:Re8.1.Ia: Interpret an artwork or collection of works, supported by relevant and sufficient evidence found in the work and its various contexts.



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Guiding Questions:

1. How do traumatic events such as the Korean War impact families and their perception of history?
2. What existed in the DMZ prior to the Korean War? How has the region changed?
3. What lessons might people take from the biodiversity of the DMZ today?

Suggested Learning Activities

1. Older students can read to elementary students and lead them in learning activities.
2. Students can select different guiding questions and research possible responses, then present their findings to the class for discussion.
3. Students can discuss and/or debate the value of the DMZ being designated a UN World Heritage Site (<https://www.dmzforum.org/about/background-of-the-dmz>).

Possible Resources

- Seoul International School Explores Korean Demilitarized Zone and Its Natural BioDiversity
<https://www.tieonline.com/article/2168/seoul-international-school-explores-korean-demilitarized-zone-and-its-biodiversity>
- Korean Reunions: Families Divided by War Meet in the North
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-45243108>



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- The Exquisite Corpses of Nature and History: The Case of the Korean DMZ
<https://apjjf.org/-Julia-Adeney-Thomas/3242/article.html>
- Channel 4: Korean Families Unite after 70 years (or segments)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FiYmzCrIio>
- Korea and the 38th Parallel
<https://www.neh.gov/article/korea-and-thirty-eighth-parallel>
- Korean War Legacy Foundation Curriculum
<https://koreanwarlegacy.org/teaching-tools/>

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