

# Curriculum Connections

## *Brother's Keeper*

by Julie Lee

**Holiday House, 2020**

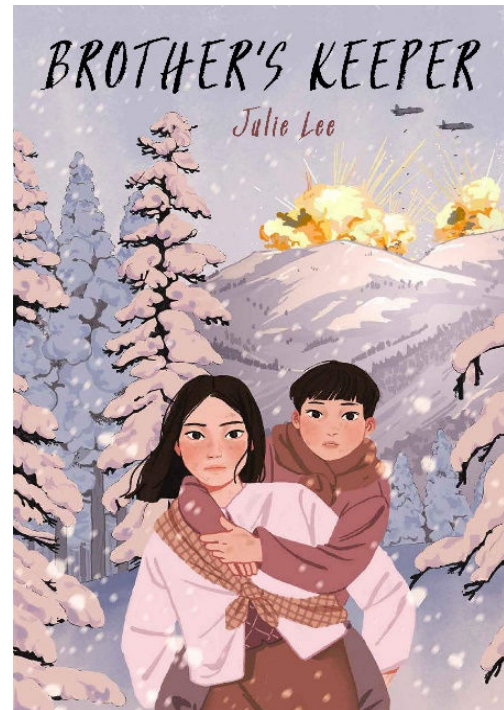
**Fiction, set in Korea**

**2020 Honorable Mention, Freeman Book Award for Young Adult / Middle School Literature**

**Age Level:** 10-15    **Dewey:** Fiction

**Accelerated Reader:** 4.7

**Summary:** *Brother's Keeper* is a 295-page book that takes place in the 1950s in North Korea. The story is told through the eyes of twelve-year-old Sora Pak (pronounced: SOH-rah PAHK) who lives with her parents, younger brother Youngsoo (pronounced: YUHNG-soo), and baby brother. Their parents are determined to escape to South Korea, where they have family and can live in freedom. Sora and her brother get separated from their parents, and this story follows their tumultuous journey along the way.



### Vocabulary

**Noona** (pronounced: NOO-nah): Older sister

**Omahni** (pronounced: aw-MAW-nee): Mother

**Abahji** (pronounced: ah-BAW-jee): Father

**kimchi** (pronounced: KIM-chee): A spicy pickle made of fermented cabbage or radish

**Regime:** A government, especially an authoritarian one

**Meegook** (pronounced: MEE-gook): United States

**doljabi** (pronounced: TOHL-JAH-bee): The first birthday celebration

### Universal Themes

The universal themes of this book are family love, courage, and the desire to be free.

### Literary Themes

- Perseverance
- Survival
- Will to survive
- Courage
- Desire to escape



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- Overcoming odds
- Darkness and light
- Displacement
- Family love
- Family blessing
- Desire to be free

### Higher Level Questioning

#### **REMEMBER (Level 1): Recognizing and Recalling**

1. Why was the family willing to undergo such hardship to escape North Korea?
2. Who were the main characters in the story?
3. What did the map that Sora kept in her pocket represent?
4. What do you consider the bravest action Sora took in her effort to keep her brother safe?

#### **UNDERSTAND (Level 2): Interpreting, Exemplifying, Classifying, Summarizing, Inferring, Comparing, Explaining**

1. Compare and contrast the relationships Sora had with her mother and with her father.
2. What is the significance of Sora finally being able to go to school at the end of the story?
3. How would you differentiate between the education the family gives Sora and the education given to her brother?
4. How would you describe the responsibility that Sora felt for her brother?

#### **APPLY (Level 3): Executing and Implementing**

1. What examples can you find to show the family's determination to survive?
2. How would you develop a plan for your family if you had to evacuate your home and community?



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3. How did the story demonstrate the love that Sora had for her brother?
4. What if Sora and Youngsoo had not been separated from their parents on the journey?

### **ANALYZE (Level 4): Differentiating, Organizing, Attributing**

1. In traditional Korean culture, why was a son regarded as more valuable than a daughter?
2. How do you think the choice made by the child during the *doljabi* affects the family's expectations for the child's life?
3. How can you compare life in North Korea to life in South Korea?
4. Why did Sora steal food? Was it the right thing to do given the circumstances?

### **EVALUATE (Level 5): Checking and Critiquing**

1. What would happen if Sora had let her brother stay with the couple who wanted to adopt him?
2. Can you think of another way they could have hidden their father?
3. What if Youngsoo had survived? How would Sora's life be different?
4. What are some of the reasons the family decided to risk their lives to seek freedom?

### **CREATE (Level 6): Generating, Planning, Producing**

1. What choice would you have made about letting extra people in the train car? Explain your reasoning.
2. What is your opinion of the Kim family, who wanted Sora's family to leave with them? Why did they risk their lives? Do you think Sora's family should have left with the Kims?
3. What would you suggest Sora could have done differently on her journey with Youngsoo?
4. What is the most important lesson in this story? Why?



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### Activities:

1. Similes are used throughout the book. A simile is a figure of speech involving the comparison of one thing with another thing of a different kind, used to make a description more emphatic or vivid (for example, *as brave as a lion*, *crazy like a fox*).

As students read, they can look for similes. They could also create a simile of their own using the details of the story.

The crew scattered ... "hopping around like hot oil in a pan." (pg. 207)

"His voice was strained, like thin glass on the verge of breaking." (pg. 209)

"My head started drooping like ripe millet in Abahji's field." (pg. 192)

"I moved my jaws up and down like a piston." (pg. 249)

2. Have students research the power struggles between North and South Korea in the 1950s vs. today.
3. Have students calculate the distance between Busan, South Korea, and Pyongyang, North Korea.
4. Find a recipe for kimchi.
5. Create diary entries through the eyes of Sora or Youngsoo.
6. Create a video of a public service announcement acting out a scene in the book.

### Thoughts to Ponder:

1. Which of the restrictions on their lives in North Korea would you find most difficult to live with?
2. What would cause you to want to escape to a different country?



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### Resources

<https://www.state.gov/countries-areas/north-korea/>

<https://www.exploratorium.edu/cooking/pickles/recipe-kimchi.html>

<https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/83182/the-koreas-at-night>

<https://www.britannica.com/place/South-Korea>

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