

# Culture Notes

## ***When Spring Comes to the DMZ***

by Uk-Bae Lee

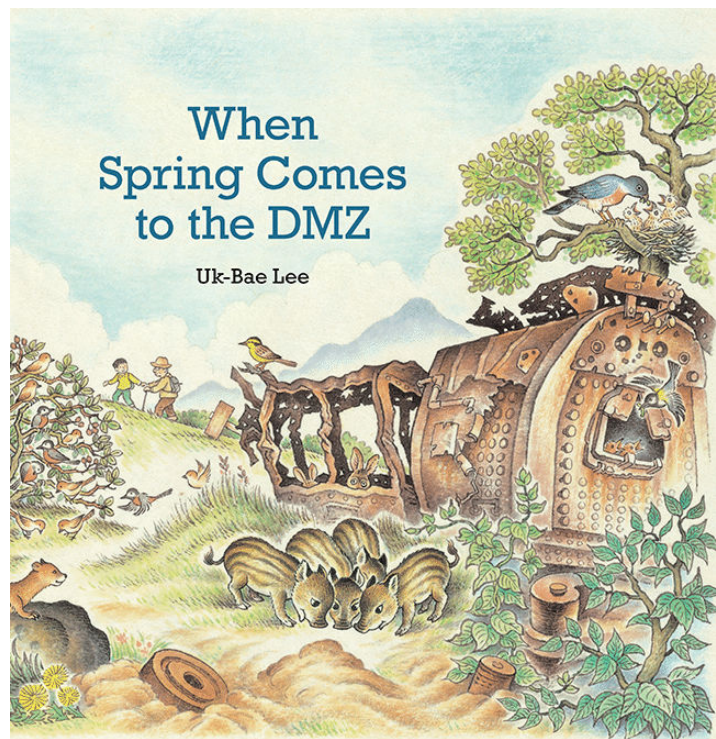
Translated by Chungyon Won and Aileen Won

Plough Publishing House, 2019

Non-Fiction, set in Korea

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

*When Spring Comes to the DMZ* tells the story of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) separating North and South Korea. The DMZ was created at the end of the Korean War (1950–1953). North Korea and South Korea agreed that this zone would be free of any military equipment or troop buildup. The DMZ was a symbol of the war that affected the two Korean nations and the entire world. Today, it is also a symbol of hope for lasting peace and unity. As we read in the book, the DMZ is a home to many species of plants and animals that were endangered by the development of their natural habitats.



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*The Armistice House, where the cease-fire agreement was signed in 1953, is now a peace museum, Source: Wikimedia Commons. "File: Building where the Korean Armistice Agreement was signed."*

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Building\\_where\\_the\\_Korean\\_Armistice\\_Agreement\\_was\\_signed.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Building_where_the_Korean_Armistice_Agreement_was_signed.jpg).

*The peace monument at Imjingak. Source: Saranghae Korea. "DMZ Tour Part 1: The Remnants of War and the Symbol of Peace at IMJINGAK."*  
<https://www.saranghaekorea.com/2015/05/dmz-tour-part-1-remnants-of-war-and.html>.



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## **The DMZ: 1953 to Today**

The DMZ is 160 miles wide and runs the entire width of the Korean peninsula following the 38th parallel. For a long period, there was no human activity in the DMZ, but today there are many visitor sites, including museums and even a small community called the Peace Village.

Even with these hopeful developments, the DMZ remains a place of tension and danger, with occasional border skirmishes. An estimated one million pieces of unexploded ordnance remain from the Korean War.

The map below shows the locations of tunnels that were dug by the North Korean Army. For many years, people feared another invasion from the North through these tunnels. Today, they are visitor sites and monuments to a peaceful future for the two Koreas.



*A map of North and South Korea and the demarcation line. Source: One Man, One Map. "One Day... In the Demilitarized Zone Between North and South Korea."*

<https://www.oneman-onemap.com/en/2017/12/1/one-day-in-the-demilitarized-zone-between-north-and-south-korea/>.



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Members of both North and South Korean militaries stand facing each other at the Joint Security Area (Panmunjeom). Source: Viator. "Full day Korean DMZ & JSA (Panmunjeom) tour without shopping stop." <https://www.viator.com/tours/Seoul/Full-day-Korean-DMZ-and-JSA-Panmunjeom-tour-without-shopping-stop/d973-30023P19>.



### Theme: Family Separation and Reunification

Lee's book tells the story of one Korean family that has been separated by the DMZ border. In the chaos of the Korean War, many families were divided. In the book, Grandfather, who lives in South Korea, visits the DMZ each season with his family. At the end of the story, Grandfather imagines crossing the DMZ and finding his family in North Korea. As the DMZ becomes a space where animal families can peacefully exist, there is also hope that human families can be peacefully reunited. Since 1988, over 125,000 families have applied for state-sponsored family reunion visits. Only a small fraction of those who apply are allowed to participate.

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*An older lady and her son reunited for the first time in more than sixty years in 2018. Source: The New York Times. "Korean Families, Separated for 6 Decades, Are Briefly Reunited."*

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/20/world/asia/north-south-korea-family-reunions.html>.

*North Koreans wearing the traditional hanbok, on their way to meet their families. Source: BBC News. "Korea family reunions: The stories of separated loved ones."*  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-45255321>.



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## **Theme: Perspective**

Perspective, or point of view, is an important theme in the book. Each illustration in *When Spring Comes to the DMZ* provides a unique perspective, framed differently. Examples of frames include a tower viewer (coin-operated telescope), binoculars, and the DMZ gates. Along the DMZ, tower viewers are available for visitors at lookout sites.



*A woman using the tower viewer and observing the North Korea side at Dora DMZ Observatory in South Korea.*

*Source: CNN. "How to visit the Korean Demilitarized Zone." <https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/visit-korean-dmz/index.html>.*

These framing tools are metaphors for the different viewpoints on the DMZ and the Korean War. People remember the war from different perspectives. They "see" the DMZ with different frames and points of view—from North Korea or South Korea, through their own memories of the war, or from the recollections of their parents and elders.



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### Theme: The DMZ as a Time Capsule

The book illustrations show how the DMZ is also a time capsule for the Korean War. The landscape is littered with fragments of the conflict. Dangerous "live" mines are still found within the DMZ. These remnants are a reminder of the danger around the DMZ. At the same time, some of these elements are being reclaimed by nature. In the rusted-out shell of a train engine, birds and rabbits make a home. An unexploded bomb is half planted in the ground next to a pond, while ducks bathe and water deer drink nearby.



*An illustration of the nature and animals in the DMZ. Source: When Spring Comes to the DMZ. Uk-Bae Lee.*



*The original steam locomotive smokestack, destroyed by a bomb during the war, stands as a witness to the tragic history that caused the division of North and South Korea, Source: Saranghae Korea. "DMZ Tour Part 1: The Remnants of War and the Symbol of Peace at IMJINGAK."*

<https://www.saranghaekorea.com/2015/05/dmz-tour-part-1-remnants-of-war-and.html>

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### Theme: The DMZ as a Symbol of Hope

This book gives a hopeful note about the continuity of life and the possibility for a better future, despite complex international politics and the terrible destructiveness of war. In the same way that the natural world of the DMZ is thriving and peaceful, so too can peace be restored to the human world. The Peace Road is a walking path set up in three areas bordering the DMZ on the south side of the border. Parts of the DMZ are open for visitors, and there is even a village located within the DMZ.

<https://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/FoodTravel/view?articleId=219666>



*South Korean flags and Korean Unification flags tied on the south side of the DMZ border. Source: Gyeonggi Korea. "DMZ: Symbol of peace in Korean Peninsula."*

<https://www.gyeonggi-do-korea.com/2020/02/DMZ-tour-in-gyeonggi-do.html>



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### The Peace Train

The Peace Train has been operating tours from Seoul to the DMZ since 2014. The train is decorated with images of Koreans and flowers or with animals that now thrive in the DMZ habitat (for example, water deer and cranes).



*The DMZ Peace Train in South Korea from Seoul to the DMZ, runs three routes: the Dorasan Security Tour, Yeoncheon Dreaming Tour, and Cheorwon Security Tour. Source: Korea Tourism Organization—VisitKorea. "DMZ Peace Train."*

[https://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/ATR/SI\\_ENG\\_2\\_2\\_1.jsp](https://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/ATR/SI_ENG_2_2_1.jsp) and

Image Source:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DMZ\\_Train#/media/File:Korea\\_DMZ\\_Train\\_01\\_\(14061927467\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DMZ_Train#/media/File:Korea_DMZ_Train_01_(14061927467).jpg).

*A ticket for the DMZ Peace Train Music Festival in 2019. Source: Avo Magazine. "Lucie, Too to perform at DMZ Train Music Festival 2019." Credit (link no longer exists): <https://avo-magazine.nl/en/2019/03/lucietoo-to-perform-at-dmz-train-music-festival-2019/>.*

For more on the Music Festival:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DMZ\\_Peace\\_Train\\_Music\\_Festival](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DMZ_Peace_Train_Music_Festival)



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### Third Tunnel Monument

One of the stops on the Peace Train line is the Third Tunnel Monument, built to commemorate one of the tunnels dug from North to South Korea through the DMZ. The monument is another symbol of hope for peace between the two countries.



*The Third Tunnel Monument. Source: Unification and Security Tourist Korea National Companies. "North vs South: Visiting the So-Called Korean Demilitarized Zone."*

[http://www.koreadmztour.com/cust/?p\\_url=cust\\_5&B\\_Name=center&b\\_dir=talkclub&category=cust\\_5\\_en&b\\_url=contents&list\\_no=2634](http://www.koreadmztour.com/cust/?p_url=cust_5&B_Name=center&b_dir=talkclub&category=cust_5_en&b_url=contents&list_no=2634).



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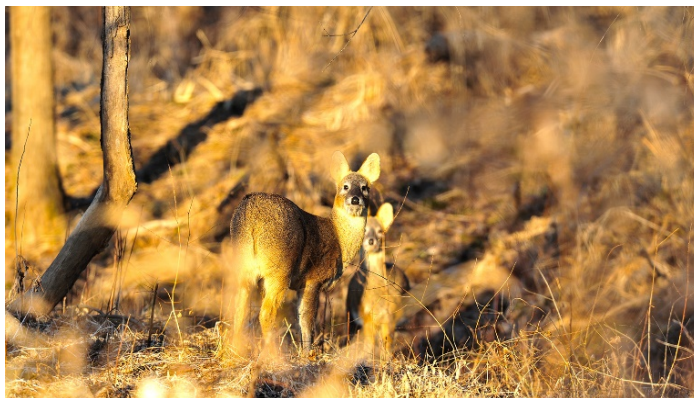
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### Theme: Ecosystems and the Future for the DMZ

The new biodiversity of the DMZ is a fascinating subject for people around the world. The illustrations in Lee's book also show the border standing in contrast to the flourishing of animal and plant life. The space is the scene both of trauma and of the continuity of life in many forms.



Korean cranes, an endangered species, are thriving in the DMZ. Source: NBC News. "How peace between the Koreas could threaten these endangered cranes." <https://www.nbcnews.com/nightly-news/how-peace-between-koreas-could-threaten-these-endangered-cranes-n978261>.



Water deer (left) and an otter (right), two species that thrive in the DMZ. Source (deer): CNN. "Wildlife is flourishing in these demilitarized zones." <https://www.cnn.com/2019/11/25/world/wildlife-demilitarized-zones-intl-c2e/index.html>. Source (otter): Korea Bizwire. "DMZ a Sanctuary for Endangered Species." <http://koreabizwire.com/dmz-a-sanctuary-for-endangered-species/1204>.





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*2021*