

Curriculum Connections

The Turtle Ship

by Helena Ku Rhee

illustrated by Colleen Kong-Savage

Shen's Books, 2018

Fiction, set in Korea

2018 Honorable Mention, Freeman Book Award for Children's Literature

Overview

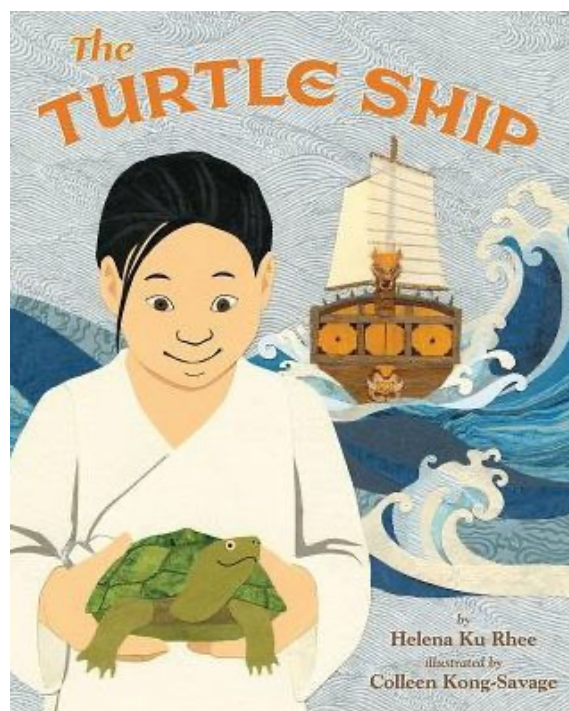
Yi Sun-sin is inspired by his pet turtle to create an ironclad battleship that is difficult to sink. Because Sun-sin is so young, no one believes in his ideas until a cat attacks his turtle and the turtle is unharmed. The King is impressed and orders Yi Sun-sin's ships to be built. These new ships help Korea defeat an invading enemy force.

Reading Levels

Independent Read: Ages 5–8

Read-aloud: Grades K–12

Length: 32 pages



Concepts

Characters

Admiral Yi Sun-sin (pronounced: ee SOON-shin): By most accounts, Sun-sin created the first armored ship, the *Gobukson* (pronounced: kaw-BOOK-suhn), and developed a new approach to naval warfare that helped defeat the invading Japanese in the 1592 Imjin War. For this, he was promoted to Supreme Admiral Commander. Although he didn't survive the war, his *Gobukson* was a great success.

Gobugi (pronounced: goh-BOO-gee): Yi Sun-sin's pet and inspiration. Turtles are an auspicious symbol in Korea and represent long life. In mythology, the turtle is a bearer of good news in water.

King: Though the King is never named in this book, King Seonjo reigned during the Imjin War and promoted Yi Sun-sin to Supreme Admiral Commander. He made the decision not to allow Japanese troops access to Korea on their way to invade China, which started the Imjin War (1592–1598).



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Vocabulary

Gobukson: These "turtle boats" of Korea are recognized as the first ironclad boats in history. Their exact schematics are not known.

Joseon dynasty (pronounced: choh-SUHN): This dynasty was the longest in Korean history. It began in 1392 and ended when Japan annexed Korea in 1910. Although not specifically named in the book, this dynasty was the unifying factor on the peninsula during this time.

Possible Curricular Unit Themes

- Perseverance (English)
- Animal Adaptations (Science)
- Animal Adaptations as Answers for Human Problems (Science)
- Physical Geography of Korean Peninsula (Social Studies)
- Collage (art)
- Location of Capitals (Social Studies)
- Interaction of Political Worlds (Social Studies)

Essential Questions

- What is resilience?
- What is strength?
- How does failure lead to success?
- What does it mean to follow your dreams?

Close Reading Questions

- Where is Yi Sun-sin from?
- Where does Yi Sun-sin get his inspiration from?
- What does Yi Sun-sin try before his final idea?
- Why does Yi Sun-sin's last idea work?
- Why does Yi Sun-sin go to the capital?
- Why does the king not take Yi Sun-sin seriously?
- What does the king see that makes him change his mind?
- How do Yi Sun-sin's dreams come true?



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Discussion Prompts

1. Talk about a time you failed and what made you persevere.
2. Discuss what strength is. Compare it to either Yi Sun-sin or Gobugi.
3. Discuss what resilience is. Compare it to Yi Sun-sin.
4. Write a story based on a personal experience when you failed yet tried again.
5. When were you inspired by something?
6. How do your dreams motivate you?
7. How does it feel to not be listened to?

Suggested Activities

Lower Grade Level:

Animal Adaptations. Before reading the book, have students choose an animal and identify the parts that help it to survive. You might also ask students to create an animal that has different characteristics such as "tough" or "sneaky." After reading the book, ask students to analyze what parts of the turtle help it to survive and how Yi Sun-Sin adapted these characteristics to solve a human problem. Then students can select another animal or plant, identify the parts that help it, and use these characteristics to design a solution to a human problem.

Inference: Before they read the book, ask students to draw and label what they think a "Turtle Ship" would look like. After they read the book, ask them to look at their drawings again, comparing their ships to the way historians think they may have looked and discussing how their ideas have changed after reading.

Analysis of Physical Features Maps: To understand Yi Sun-sin's journey and the location of the capital, students could use a physical features map of the Korean Peninsula to try to figure out the route he might have taken to visit the king. Or ask students to create their own maps of Sun-sin's journey to the capital. Students could then compare his journey with one they might take to their own capital or to school.

Analysis of Political Maps: To learn about East Asia, students could use a political map and physical features map to determine which modern-day countries he could have easily traveled to during his days with the Royal Navy.



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Collage: This book is full of beautiful collages created by Colleen Kong-Savage. Students could "jigsaw" a two-page spread to identify what different materials and paper they see on the pages. This could lead to the creation of a picture using many different materials, unified to convey an idea.

Storybook: Using the book as a model, students can write, edit, and illustrate their own personal stories about a time that they overcame an obstacle.

Secondary Grade Level:

*The detail in this book is not suitable for teaching **content** to students at the secondary level. But it can be used as inspiration for other activities and learning.*

Geopolitical Connections: This book can serve as a springboard into conversations about geopolitical relations in East Asia, in particular, the location of Korea between Japan and China. Some extra context will be needed for students to fully understand the complexities of this area (see suggested readings).

Storybook Creation: This book can be a model for students to create their own storybook about a historical event, person, or invention. After reading this book, students could research about the Imjin War and Yi Sun-Sin to identify differences between history and the story in the book. Then they could select a different event, person, or invention and create a storybook around that.

Suggested Readings/Bibliography

Gilbert, Marc Jason. "Admiral Yi Sun-Shin, The Turtle Ships, and Modern Asian History." *Education about Asia* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2007), <https://www.asianstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/admiral-yi-sun-shin-the-turtle-ships-and-modern-asian-history.pdf>

Philadelphia Museum of Art. "Treasures from Korea: Arts and Culture of the Joseon Dynasty 1392–1910," n.d. <https://museum.seoul.go.kr/eng/exhibition/permanent/permExhibit/permExhibit1.jsp>



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Author: Rachel Knowles, 9–12 history and film teacher, Southwick Regional School, Southwick, MA
2025