

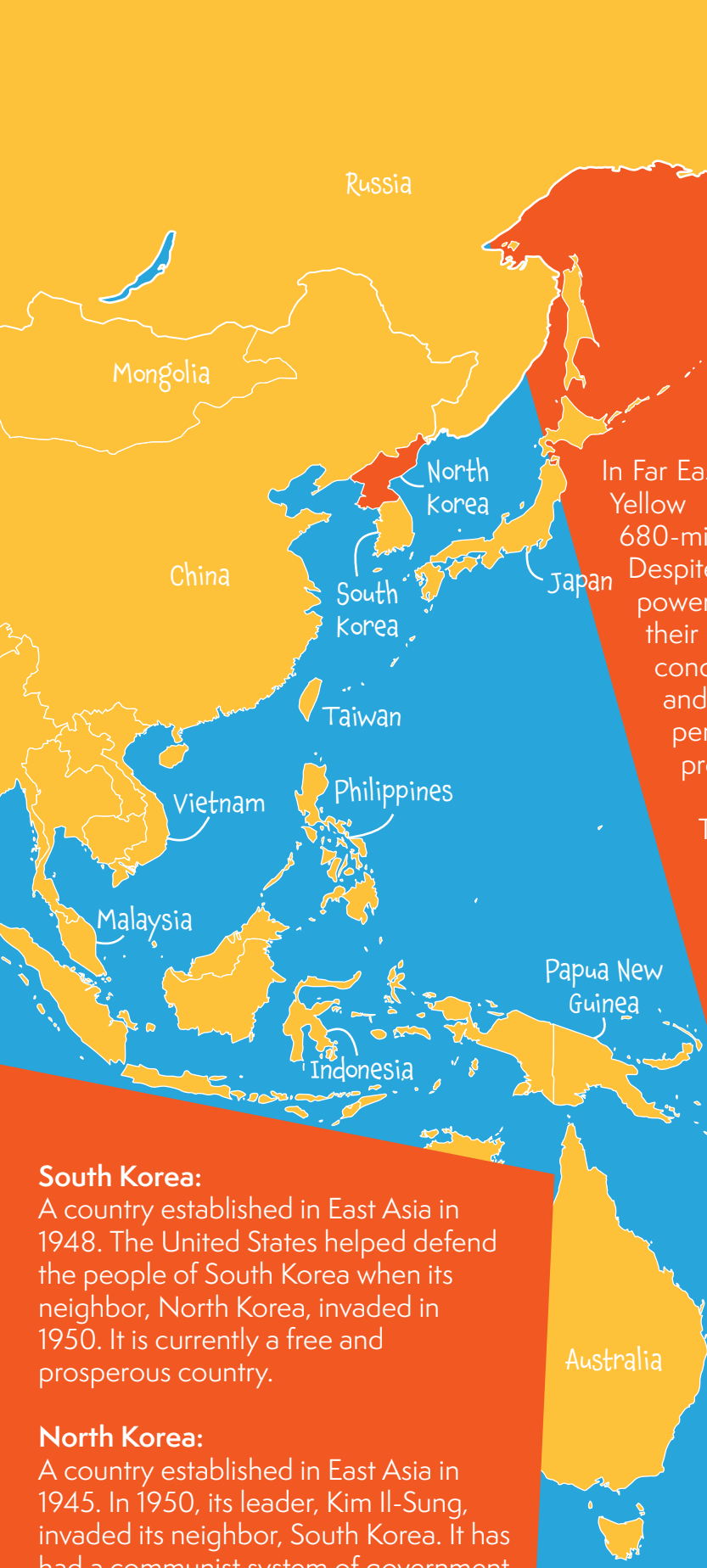
AROUND THE WORLD



LEARNING THE TRUTH



Welcome to North Korea



In Far East Asia, wedged between the Sea of Japan and the Yellow Sea, lies the Korean Peninsula. This slender 680-mile-long piece of land is home to a unique people. Despite a history of outside pressures from much more powerful neighbors, the Korean people have maintained their own remarkable culture. For centuries, rulers and conquerors from places like China, Russia, Mongolia, and Japan have tried to influence and control the peninsula, but the Korean people have always preserved their unique identity.

The Empire of Japan invaded Korea in 1910 and brutally controlled the peninsula for 35 years. After the United States defeated the Japanese in World War II and forced them out of the peninsula, Koreans looked forward to a new era of peace and freedom. Instead, however, they faced a new invader: communism. Due to this new enemy, there is no country today named Korea. The peninsula is divided into two nations—**South Korea** and **North Korea**—and they are so different that there no longer is a united Korean culture.

South Korea:

A country established in East Asia in 1948. The United States helped defend the people of South Korea when its neighbor, North Korea, invaded in 1950. It is currently a free and prosperous country.

North Korea:

A country established in East Asia in 1945. In 1950, its leader, Kim Il-Sung, invaded its neighbor, South Korea. It has had a communist system of government since 1945 and is one of the most oppressive countries in the world.



North Korean Flag

South Korean Flag

The Korean War

Once the Japanese surrendered, the people of the Korean Peninsula were left without a government. The United States wanted the people of Korea to adopt a Western way of living. However, Korea's neighbors, China and the Soviet Union (USSR), wanted Korea to be like them—a communist nation. According to **communism**, the government should control all aspects of the people's lives. This means that those who make and enforce the country's laws control what everyone else can say, where they live, what religion they can practice, what they eat, and how they run their businesses.

The United States knew that if they did not get involved, the entire Korean Peninsula would soon be ruled by a communist government. From 1945 to 1948, the USA tried negotiating for Korea to be free from communist control, but the USSR refused. During these years, the USA and USSR split the peninsula in half along the 38th parallel, dividing the country into North and South Korea. The USA provided support for the Koreans who lived in the southern half. The USSR and China provided support for the northern half and selected a communist leader for them named Kim Il-sung.



Korean DMZ:

The border between North and South Korea, which is 160 miles long.

Communism:

A system where the government controls every aspect of the people's lives and where individuals cannot own anything by themselves.



Kim Il-sung believed strongly in communism, and wanted to unify North and South Korea into one country under the communist system. To do this, in the summer of 1950, he sent military troops over the 38th parallel in an act of war. Fighting erupted, and for the next three years, South Koreans (supported by the USA and the newly formed United Nations) battled communist North Koreans (supported by the USSR and China) across the peninsula for supremacy. The conflict turned into a stalemate where neither side could achieve victory. When the fighting stopped, an estimated 3-5 million soldiers and civilians had died, and a demilitarized zone, **Korean Demilitarized Zone (Korean DMZ)**, was built to serve as a border back at the original 38th parallel. The peninsula would now be home to two separate countries—South Korea and communist North Korea.

Meet Jong-sim

Tae-song and Jong-sim are brother and sister. Their lives are very different from everyone else's in the world. They are from a small village several hours away from North Korea's one large city, the capital Pyongyang, and it rarely has access to electricity. Jong-sim is in middle school and lives with her mother and father. Tae-song left the village a little over a year ago, and now has an impressive position in the **North Korean Ministry of Social Security**. Jong-sim misses her brother very much, but she is proud of his accomplishments, and his success might lead to opportunities for her when she's older.

Jong-sim does not have any toys or a bike, and in North Korea, pets are not allowed. The government gives her clothes to wear, but they are all dull brown, gray, and green. Jong-sim dreams of one day owning clothes with bright colors. In spring and summer, she spends her mornings collecting brilliant wildflowers that cover the hillsides overlooking the village.

Jong-sim uses the flowers with the prettiest petals for her art projects. She dries them out and spends hours arranging them into patterns. The best patterns are worthy of glue and paper, and Jong-sim's bedroom is covered with her finest masterpieces. Most of the flowers she picks, however, aren't gathered for art, but for food. Like most North Koreans, Jong-sim lives her life on the edge of starvation, and anything that can be eaten is eaten. Like many people in North Korea, Jong-sim doesn't know what it's like to not be hungry.



North Korean Ministry of Social Security:
The government agency in North Korea that runs prisons and investigates the peoples' lives to ensure loyalty to the government.



Meet Tae-song

During his childhood, Tae-song never had a full belly either, but that changed when he went off to his military training. After graduating from high school, all North Korean boys and girls are required to join the military, but Tae-song was sent to special training in the capital. The North Korean government thinks he is very talented, and he has a position that is usually reserved for people who grew up in the capital. He now eats three meals a day and is never hungry.

Jong-sim hopes to follow in her older brother's footsteps, but she knows it will be difficult. North Koreans are required to confess things they have done or thoughts they've had that go against the government's rules. Telling on yourself is mandatory and normal in North Korea, but telling on a friend or neighbor can get you special privileges. A few years ago, Tae-song was able to tell on an entire group of people, and he has been rewarded greatly. Not only is he no longer hungry, but as a member of the prestigious Ministry of Social Security, he may one day even see Dear Leader.





“Dear Leader”



Dear Leader:

The title North Koreans used to address Kim Jong-il.

Tyrant:

A ruler who oppresses his people, ignoring their rights and taking away their freedom.



Once the separation between North and South was complete, Kim Il-sung ruled over North Korea as a dictator until his death in 1994. During the near half century that he was in charge, Kim carefully created a world where he had complete control, and no one could challenge his authority. The government built monuments and statues of Kim Il-sung all over the country (there are believed to be over 40,000) and North Koreans are required to show these statues “proper” respect whenever they pass by them. Murals and paintings of Kim can be found in public places all over the country, and every North Korean household is required to have a portrait of Kim Il-sung and his son, Kim Jong-il (who ruled over North Korea from 1994-2011), hanging on a wall. The portraits must be hung high enough so that all family members look up at them, and they must be cleaned daily with special cloth. No other portraits are allowed on the same wall. Homes are regularly inspected, and if the portraits are dusty or dirty, the family is punished. The North Korean government ordered the people to refer to Kim Il-sung as the Great Leader and Kim Jong-un as Dear Leader. Religion is against the law in North Korea, but everyone must worship the **Dear Leader** because, they are told, he is the one who provides them with everything they have.

Once in power, Kim Il-sung carefully created a system of government where he controlled everything and there was no opposition within the communist leadership group. When he died, his son took over and ruled in the same way. Today, his grandson, Kim Jong-un, who is referred to as the Dear Respected Leader, maintains complete control of the country. In this way, North Korea resembles a monarchy with a **tyrant** king.

Throughout history, there are many examples of kings and dictators who have tried to have complete control over their people. It is a very risky way to lead. If they are able to provide stability and comfort, citizens will be happy, and the leader alone can take all credit. But if life for the people ever becomes uneasy and difficult, the leader is responsible for all the blame. This can lead to revolution and loss of power for the ruler. Kim knew this risk, and to guard against it, he created a world where he controls what North Koreans know. North Koreans like Jong-sim are completely closed off from the outside world—they are never allowed to leave the country, all information from outside the country is forbidden, and all information inside the country is controlled by the government. Kim knew that even if his government failed to meet the needs of the people, he, his son, and his grandson would stay in power if they kept their people ignorant.

Taught to Hate and Fear

One tactic the three Kim dictators have used to keep most North Koreans ignorant is teaching them that their country is under attack from outside enemies. Despite being a small country (ranked 99th in size), and having an average population size (about 26 million, or 54th in the world), North Korea has one of the globe's largest militaries. North Koreans believe that they need such a large military because they are taught South Korea and the USA are always threatening to invade them. This is a lie. No country is threatening North Korea, but the people do not know this. They grow up learning to hate both South Korea and America, and are warned that only the Dear Leader protects them from being defeated and turned into slaves.

North Koreans are taught to fear the outside world when in reality, they are under attack from inside the country.





Class-Based Social Structure:

A social system where people are divided into groups based on wealth or background and where the government treats some groups better than others. In this system, everyone is stuck in the group they are assigned.

North Korea is a country with a strict **class-based social structure** where people are kept in categories based upon their family tradition. Families favored by the government usually live in the capital and during military service, their members receive leadership positions or manage internal law enforcement in the Ministry of Social Security. Families not favored by the communist government are stuck in the low class, and they live mostly in the countryside and small villages. There is very little chance for low-class North Koreans to move up, but those in the high class live permanently in fear of having their favored status taken from them. If one member of a family in the upper-class falls out of favor with the leadership, the entire family has their privileges removed. If one member of a low-class family breaks the law, then the entire family will be punished.

The North Korean communist government is able to monitor the upper and lower classes very closely because the people have been trained to not only tell on themselves during their weekly confessionals, but also to tell on their friends and neighbors if they see or hear anything that is against the law. In many cultures, telling on a friend is looked down upon, but in North Korea it's honored and rewarded.

Tae-song the Hero

For years, a small group of people from Tae-song and Jong-sim's village held secret church worship services. This was an illegal activity, but the churchgoers had been able to hide their meetings from the government authorities who monitor the village. They did this by changing the meeting times and locations, making sure to never hold a church service in the same house twice in a row. One day after school, one of Tae-song's longtime friends invited him to attend one of these church worship services. He told Tae-song that he was invited because he was an honest and honorable young man, and that the God the secret group worshiped loved those qualities.

Tae-song was stunned by the invitation. He had been taught that only the Kim dictators should be honored and that worshiping anyone or anything else was against the law. Tae-song politely declined the offer, but inside his mind raced with confusion. Why was his friend breaking the law and disobeying orders of Dear Leader? Tae-song thought his friend was a good person, but maybe he had been wrong about that. His friend saw confusion and worry in Tae-song's eyes, and he ran away in fear.





North Korea Trivia:

- North Korea is home to the biggest stadium in the world!
- North Korea is commonly called the “Hermit Kingdom” because it is so secretive.
- North Korea has one of the largest militaries in the world.
- Rollerblading is very popular in Pyongyang.

Because he is honest and honorable, Tae-song went to the village’s local authorities and reported information about the secret church meetings. He thought that being loyal to the rules was the right thing to do. Soon after, members of the Ministry of Social Security swarmed the village, investigated the situation, and punished the church members. Most of them, including Tae-song’s friend, were handcuffed and sent away on a train. Two church leaders were publicly killed in the main village square, and the government publicly honored Tae-song for his bravery and loyalty to the rules of North Korea. He was now considered a local hero and Jong-sim was very proud of her older brother. The government even rewarded Tae-song with a position in the elite Ministry of Social Security. After graduating high school, all his classmates were sent to standard military training, but Tae-song was sent to the capital. He was now considered special and would receive special training.



The Capital

Moving to the capital for training was a shock to Tae-song's senses. He had grown up eating one small meal per day—usually a mixture of rice, roots, and flowers. There was so little protein available to eat that he has eaten mice and rats. In the capital, however, Tae-song ate three meals a day, each featuring meat or eggs. For the first time in his life, he wasn't hungry, and he had energy he had never felt before. For a while, the smells and tastes were overwhelming, but the biggest adjustments for him were the sights and sounds of the city. Tae-song was used to life in the village where there were no cars, paved roads, or reliable electricity. In Pyongyang, however, there are many modern skyscraper buildings, traffic-filled avenues, and electricity that can be used 24 hours per day. It took Tae-song several weeks to get used to having light at night.

Many people who live in the capital hold important positions in the government and military. Most live in apartments with televisions, and some have cars and cell phones, but none of them owns any of these things. The communist government provides everything that people have, and can take anything or everything away at any time. At first, after arriving in the capital, Tae-song felt jealous of the other young men training alongside him. Most of them had been raised in the capital and had grown up in homes with electric heating and television. Some even had access to the internet. But Tae-song soon learned that despite all the privileges, those who lived in the capital lived in constant fear of the government taking everything away — or even being sent away in handcuffs on a train. Life in the city was much more comfortable than the village, but it was also very stressful.





Tae-song soon made friends, and he learned as much from them as he did from his Ministry of Social Security training. His new friends had grown up in the capital, and even though their television shows and the internet from their phones had been completely censored by the government, they knew far more than he did about the world outside of North Korea. None of them had ever left the country, but most had experiences of buying forbidden materials from illegal markets in the city. These included magazines and DVDs smuggled in from South Korea and China. The first time a friend showed Tae-song a South Korean movie, he almost fainted and became afraid. All his life, he had been told that South Korea was a terrible place filled with evil Koreans and ruled by horrible America. In the movie he watched, South Korea didn't look like a terrible place, but it did look very different from North Korea.



South Korea vs. North Korea

Following the Korean War, the United States decided to keep a military presence in South Korea and help build the new nation into an ally with shared values. The results have been incredible. It took decades of growing pains for South Korea to adopt some Western ways into their culture, but by the 1980's, they had transitioned to a free, democratic, and modern nation. In 1988, South Korea hosted the Summer Olympic games and showed the world they were thriving. Meanwhile, North Korea was entering a crisis.

The Korean Peninsula is rich in natural resources like iron ore and coal, and North Korea sells these materials to other countries (mostly China). But instead of using the money for food, energy, or to make North Korea a nicer place to live, Kim Il-sung chose to use almost all of the money for his military and security forces. To provide food for the North Korean people, Kim relied on assistance from his Korean War ally, the Soviet Union (USSR), but what would happen if the Soviet Union could no longer help?

While South Korea was demonstrating the benefits of freedom, the communist world was in chaos. From the mid-1980s to 1991, the most powerful communist country in the world, the Soviet Union (USSR), completely collapsed and ceased to exist. This had a huge impact on North Korea because they relied heavily on USSR support to feed their people. After the fall of the USSR, North Korea needed food fast, but their communist system did not make it possible to increase food production, and the result was a massive food shortage. People began to starve.

This photo was taken from space. It shows the difference between North Korea and South Korea at night. Notice how dark North Korea is. Imagine what it would be like to live in a world without electricity.



Kim Il-sun, and later his son, Kim Jong-il, blamed the food shortages on natural disasters, but they were really the result of terrible leadership decisions. The Kim dictators refused to stop focusing on military and security, leaving little to help the suffering people. Over the last 30 years, millions of North Koreans have starved to death. Those who are alive have so little food that their bodies cannot grow and develop in a healthy way. Communism promises people that in return for giving up their freedom, the government will provide for all needs, including food. For decades, there has been so little food in the country that the average North Korean is four inches shorter than the average South Korean.

During these same years, South Korea has grown into one of the most successful countries in the world. It is one of the most technologically advanced nations and its citizens are among the best educated. South Korea is home to international business giants like Samsung, Hyundai, and Kia. They have one of the top professional baseball leagues in the world, and their best soccer players compete at the finest clubs in Europe. North Korea has none of this, nor do they have any of South Korea's growing cultural influence. Known popularly as K-Dramas and K-Pop, movies and music from South Korea have become wildly popular around the world—even secretly reaching parts of North Korea.



Seoul is the capital of South Korea.



Learning the Truth

When training ended for Tae-song, he was sent to his first assignment as a member of the Ministry of Security. He is a guard at a prison camp a few hours by train from his home village. He was told that if he performs well as a prison guard, it will be possible for him to be back in the capital in just a few years as a detective, investigating suspected enemies of the government. The prison camp has an iron ore mine. Prisoners are forced to work and their lives are terrible. During his second week guarding the camp, a new group of prisoners arrived. They had been caught secretly practicing religion. When Tae-song learned this, memories of his own experience rushed through his mind, and he began feeling uneasy. Should he be proud of his life? He had a new respected position that no one from his village had ever had before. Should he feel shame and guilt? The only reason he had his new position was because he provided information that resulted in people, including his old friend, being sent to a prison camp like the one where he now works.

Most of his fellow guards have family who live in the capital. When they return to the prison after visits home, many smuggle in news, songs, and movies from South Korea. Tae-song still doesn't know much about the world outside of North Korea, but he is beginning to understand that he has been lied to his entire life. South Korea looks and sounds like a nice place, and even though he knows very little about America, he doubts that it is evil like he has always been taught. He knows life in North Korea is not as great as the government says.





Tae-song tried to talk to some of his fellow guards about his uneasy feeling, but they told him to be quiet. They reminded him that as a member of the Ministry of Social Security, he is well-fed and has a warm bed. If he is caught questioning the government, he will quickly go from guard to prisoner. They also remind him that if he continues to work hard and keeps his thoughts and questions to himself, in a few years he could be living in the capital, eating in restaurants, and attending parades.

Tae-song is on track to have a life full of comforts that very few North Koreans get to have, but it doesn't make him happy. He often wonders what his life would be like if he hadn't turned in his friend and become the village hero. He is beginning to understand his participation in the system that keeps a very small number of North Koreans happy and healthy, while all others work, starve, and live in fear. Sometimes Tae-song wishes he could go back to when he didn't know what he knows now. He was always hungry, but he wasn't part of a terrible government that hurts so many people.



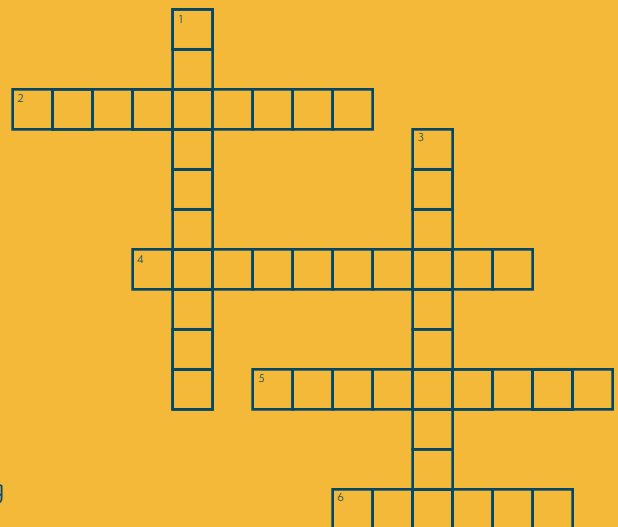
Think About It



Tae-song now knows the truth about North Korea, but he also knows that he is powerless to change anything. He will have opportunities to tell Jong-sim all that he has learned, but is unsure if he should. Write a letter to Tae-song, and give him advice about what he should do. Should he tell his sister the truth about their country or should he keep what he knows to himself? Make sure you give an explanation with your decision.

Crossword

1. A country established in East Asia in 1948. The United States helped defend this country when its neighbor invaded in 1950.
2. A system where the government controls every aspect of the people's lives and where individuals cannot own anything by themselves.
3. The title North Koreans used to address Kim Jong-il.
4. A country established in East Asia in 1945. In 1950, its leader invaded its neighbor. It has had a communist system of government since 1945.
5. The border between North and South Korea.
6. A ruler who oppresses his people, ignoring their rights and taking away their freedom.





Dried Flower Crafts

Jong-sim doesn't have toys or pets, so she likes to spend her free time picking wildflowers and creating dried flower art. You can make your own dried flower art by following the instructions below.



How to Dry Flowers:

1. Pick colorful flowers. Thinner flowers will dry faster.
2. Place each flower on a paper towel and arrange so that it lays flat. Place another paper towel on top of the flowers. Put the paper towels with flowers inside of a heavy book and close.
3. Wait for 24 hours.
4. Check the flowers. If they are not yet dry, close the book and wait another 24 hours.

Pressed Flower Art



1. Decide what you'd like to decorate with your pressed flowers. You can use plain paper, colored construction paper, a blank greeting card, a paper notebook, or other paper goods.
2. Using white glue, arrange and glue your flowers, petals, and leaves onto the paper. Be creative!

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Answer key:

