

When My Name Was Keoko Teacher Guide



TEACHER GUIDE
GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

When My Name Was Keoko

Linda Sue Park



When My Name Was Keoko is a poignant and insightful novel written by Ellen Oh, set during the turbulent times of World War II in Korea under Japanese occupation. This guide aims to provide teachers with comprehensive information about the book, its themes, characters, and suggested classroom activities to facilitate an engaging learning experience.

Overview of the Novel

"When My Name Was Keoko" tells the story of a young Korean girl, a twelve-year-old named Keoko, and her family as they navigate the challenges of living under Japanese rule. The novel is narrated from two perspectives: Keoko and her older brother, TaeYul. Through their eyes, readers experience the struggles of identity, family loyalty, and the impact of war.

Key Themes

The novel is rich with themes that can spark in-depth discussions and analyses among students. Here are some of the dominant themes:

- **Identity and Cultural Heritage:** The struggle between maintaining one's cultural identity and the pressure to conform to another culture is a central theme. Keoko's journey reflects the difficulties faced by many during this time.
- **Family and Loyalty:** The bonds of family are tested throughout the story. Keoko and TaeYul's relationship exemplifies the strength of familial love and loyalty amidst adversity.
- **Resistance and Resilience:** The characters' responses to oppression illustrate the resilience of the human spirit and the importance of resistance, both subtle and overt.
- **The Impact of War:** The novel depicts the emotional and physical toll of war on individuals and families, showcasing the broader implications of conflict on society.

Character Analysis

Understanding the characters is crucial for grasping the novel's deeper meanings. Below are key characters that students should focus on:

1. **Keoko:** The protagonist whose journey reflects the struggle of maintaining her identity and cultural pride. Her internal conflicts and growth throughout the story are central to the narrative.
2. **TaeYul:** Keoko's older brother who is deeply protective of his sister and family. His experiences and choices illustrate the complexities of masculinity and bravery in times of war.
3. **Umma (Mother):** A strong female figure who embodies the resilience of Korean women during occupation. Her character provides insight into the role of women in familial and societal structures during war.
4. **Appa (Father):** A figure of authority and tradition, representing the struggle to uphold cultural values amidst oppressive forces.

Teaching Strategies

To effectively teach "When My Name Was Keoko," educators can employ a variety of strategies that encourage critical thinking, discussion, and creativity among students.

Pre-Reading Activities

Before diving into the text, consider the following activities to set the stage:

- **Historical Context:** Provide students with background information about the Japanese occupation of Korea. Discuss the significance of this period in shaping Korean identity.
- **Vocabulary Building:** Introduce key terms and concepts from the novel, such as "colonialism," "identity," and "resistance." This will enhance comprehension as students read.
- **Personal Reflection:** Ask students to reflect on their own cultural identities and what it means to them. This can help them connect personally with Keoko's journey.

During Reading Activities

While reading the novel, engage students with the following activities:

1. **Character Journals:** Have students keep a journal from the perspective of either Keoko or TaeYul. This will encourage them to delve deeper into the characters' thoughts and feelings.
2. **Discussion Circles:** Organize small group discussions to explore specific chapters or themes. Encourage students to share their interpretations and insights.
3. **Theme Tracking:** Create a chart to track the development of key themes throughout the novel. Students can add quotes and examples as they progress.

Post-Reading Activities

After completing the novel, it's important to consolidate learning and encourage reflection:

- **Creative Projects:** Allow students to express their understanding through creative means, such as art, poetry, or short stories inspired by Keoko's experiences.
- **Debate:** Host a debate on the effectiveness of different forms of resistance (passive vs. active) as depicted in the novel. This can foster critical thinking and analytical skills.
- **Research Assignments:** Encourage students to research related historical topics, such as the impact of World War II on various cultures, and

present their findings to the class.

Assessment Ideas

Assessing students' understanding of "When My Name Was Keoko" can be done through various methods:

Written Assignments

Consider the following types of written assessments:

1. **Character Analysis Essay:** Have students write an essay analyzing a specific character's development and role in the story.
2. **Thematic Essay:** Students can explore one of the central themes of the novel and how it is represented through characters and events.

Oral Presentations

Students can also demonstrate their understanding through presentations:

- **Group Presentations:** Assign groups to present on different themes, characters, or historical contexts related to the novel.
- **Individual Presentations:** Students can choose a specific scene and analyze its significance within the story.

Conclusion

"When My Name Was Keoko" is a powerful narrative that not only tells the story of a young girl growing up in a time of conflict but also serves as a window into the broader themes of identity, resilience, and the impact of war. By incorporating a variety of teaching strategies and assessment methods, educators can create a rich learning environment that encourages students to engage deeply with the text. Through this guide, teachers can inspire their students to reflect on their own identities while understanding the historical significance of the story, making it a meaningful addition to any literature curriculum.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main theme of 'When My Name Was Keoko'?

The main theme of 'When My Name Was Keoko' is the struggle for identity and the impact of war on families and culture, as it tells the story of a Korean family during the Japanese occupation.

How does the author use perspective in 'When My Name Was Keoko'?

The author, Linda Sue Park, uses dual perspectives by narrating the story through the eyes of two siblings, Sun-hee and her brother, which provides a multifaceted view of their experiences during a turbulent time.

What historical events are depicted in 'When My Name Was Keoko'?

The story is set during the Japanese occupation of Korea from 1910 to 1945, illustrating the cultural suppression and the resistance of the Korean people during World War II.

What role does family play in the narrative of 'When My Name Was Keoko'?

Family plays a crucial role as it depicts the bonds and sacrifices that members make to protect each other and their cultural heritage amidst external pressures and challenges.

How does the title 'When My Name Was Keoko' reflect the protagonist's journey?

The title reflects the protagonist's struggle with identity, as 'Keoko' is a name given during the Japanese occupation, symbolizing loss of heritage and the desire to reclaim one's true identity.

What teaching strategies can be used to discuss 'When My Name Was Keoko' in the classroom?

Teaching strategies can include group discussions, historical context exploration, character analysis, and creative projects that allow students to connect personally with the themes and experiences in the book.

What age group is 'When My Name Was Keoko' appropriate for?

The book is generally appropriate for middle school students, typically ages 10-14, as it addresses complex themes in an accessible manner.

How can 'When My Name Was Keoko' be used to discuss cultural identity in the classroom?

The book can serve as a springboard for discussions about cultural identity, exploring how names, traditions, and family history shape one's sense of self.

and the impact of external forces on cultural expression.

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