



Rice From Heaven:
The Secret Mission to Feed North Koreans
By Tina Cho, Illustrated by Keum Jin Song
9781499806823, \$17.99

Discussion guide: grades 3-6

Essential Questions

1. Where is Korea? How is Korea divided? (refer to map at the end of book)
2. What do you already know about North and South Korea?
3. What is freedom?
4. How does power affect fairness and justice?
5. What are our essential liberties? What does society NEED to survive?
6. How have essential liberties changed over time?
7. What is oppression? (Prolonged cruel or unjust treatment or control)
8. What is social justice? (Justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society)
9. How do individuals develop values and beliefs?
10. What happens when belief systems of societies and individuals come into conflict?
11. What are the responsibilities of the individual in regard to issues of social justice?
12. Why do people flee or defect from their homeland?
13. How can literature serve as a vehicle for social change?
14. Why is it important to experience cultures and perspectives that are different from your own?

Look at the title and cover illustration and discuss.

- What does the title mean to you? What do you think the word “heaven” implies?
- What is a “mission”?
- Why would the people of North Korea need to be fed? Why would this be done in secret?
- Describe what is happening in the cover art. Predict what the story will be about.

*Preview the structure of the book. This is a story based on fact and informational back matter.

As you read the story think about:

- What is the setting?
- How does the illustrator, Keum Jin Song use pictures to develop the setting, characters and events?
- How do the illustrations contribute to the meaning and tone of the book?
- From what point of view is the story told? Is Yoori a believable character?
- Explain how words and phrases impact the meaning. Find examples of how Tina Cho uses figurative language and how it creates imagery.
- What strategies do you use to figure out unknown words and phrases in the book? Use context clues to figure out the meaning of “Appa”.
- Compare and contrast the girls in the illustration who are separated by a river. Use the words and pictures.
- What information did you learn about North Korea throughout the story? Take notes as you read.
- Why do people escape North Korea? Use examples from the story.
- What does Yoori mean when she tells her father that she is only a “grain of rice”?
- How does Yoori challenge the beliefs of others in her community?
- Where is the border of North and South Korea? Find it on your map and highlight it.
- Why do the people of this community come together for a common purpose?
- How do they send the rice to the hungry people of North Korea?
- Why is Yoori’s heart bubbling at the end of the story? How is she feeling?
- What are the major themes in the story? How are the themes reflected through the characters’ behaviors and major events in the story? (hope, bravery, freedom, and compassion)
- What is the hope and goal of the Rice Balloon Project?
- Do the participants in the mission ever truly know if the rice gets to the hungry children?
- How do you feel about this? Does it matter?

Who said it and why?

- *“We reach a place where mountains become a wall. So high, no one dares to climb.”*
- *“North Korea is a gigantic, enormous rice bowl with a government who does nothing to help its people.”*
- *“Don’t feed the enemy!”*
- *“I am sorry; I will share the rice from my father’s fields.”*
- *“You are my strong sunflower.”*
- *“I bow low, but the hope in my heart grows tall.”*
- *“In the morning, hungry children will find rice from heaven.”*

***Read the informational Back Matter**

Make text-to-self and text-to-world connections — What do you think?

- Why do you think Tina Cho wrote *Rice from heaven*?
- Do you think that the Rice Balloon Project should continue even though no one knows if the food is reaching the people?
- After reading about the “numbers” of the project, what was the most surprising thing that you learned?
- Why is it important to see issues such as freedom and human rights from others’ point of view?
- How does family play a role in shaping our values and beliefs? Explain how this relates to Yoori from the story.
- Discuss the themes of hope, bravery, freedom, and compassion.
- How has this book changed the way you think?
- What creates prejudice? Can an individual overcome it? How?
- How does Yoori change the way others in her community feel about the “enemy”?
- What are the causes and consequences of prejudice and injustice, and how does an individual’s response to them reveal his/her true character? Describe the characters in the story in what they think, say and do to reveal themselves.
- What factors do you think contribute to allow some people to take a stand against prejudice/oppression? Use examples from the story and the Author’s Notes.
- After reading Facts on North Korea, write a paragraph telling what would be the three most difficult things for you to live with.
- When should an individual take a stand against what he/she believes to be an injustice? What are the most effective ways to do this?
- How does an individual’s point of view affect the way they deal with conflict? Find real world examples of how different people deal with conflict differently.
- What personal qualities have helped you to deal with conflict and change? How might it feel to live through a conflict that disrupts your way of life?
- How are people transformed through their relationships with others? Describe a person who has influenced the way you see life and helped you see things in a new way.
- Does government ever have the right to restrict the freedoms of people?

Express yourself

- Create a poster, artwork, song, or poem representing who you are and reflecting the freedoms you enjoy and that most “define” you.
- Choose a quote and explain what it means to you.
 - **“Freedom makes a huge requirement of every human being. With freedom comes responsibility. For the person who is unwilling to grow up, the person who does not want to carry his own weight, this is a frightening prospect.” ~Eleanor Roosevelt**
 - **“Freedom has its life in the hearts, the actions, the spirit of men and so it must be daily earned and refreshed - else like a flower cut from its life-giving roots, it will wither and die.” ~Dwight D. Eisenhower**
 - **“Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves.” ~Abraham Lincoln**

Research History and Culture; Exploring the past, learning about the future

- Create a stack of cards containing interesting facts about the culture and the people of Korea. Draw (or print) a picture for the flip side. Arrange the cards picture side up. Choose any card and discuss the fact from the back.
- Why was the Korean conflict fought in the 1950s?
- How did Korea originally split into two conflicting nations?
- Why have North and South Korea developed along dramatically different paths politically and economically?
- Why is North Korea considered a “dangerous rogue nation” while South Korea a valued and important ally?
- Create a timeline showing the Politics of the Korean Peninsula.
- Find a current events article in the world news about Korea. Summarize and share.

Korea is a peninsula that lies mostly northeast of China and west of Japan.
The Korean Peninsula is about 85,000 square miles (137,000 km), and there are more than 3,000 islands off its coast.

