Korea: A Shrimp Between Two Whales?
A Multiple-tier Timeline of China, Korea, and Japan

**Grade Level:** Meets 6th grade state standards, but lesson can be adapted for use in grades 7-12.
**Course:** Social Studies, World History
**Time:** 1-2 weeks, 45-60 minute class periods.

**Objectives:** After this lesson, students will be able to
1. create a multiple-tier timeline of events for China, Japan, and Korea.
2. identify and explain examples of interaction or influence between two or three of the countries.
3. write an essay to answer the question, “Is Korea a shrimp between two whales?” with supporting details from the timeline.

**Ohio’s New Learning Standards in Social Studies Addressed:**
**Sixth Grade**
**Theme:** Regions and People of the Eastern Hemisphere
**Strand:** History
**Topic:** Historical Thinking and Skills. Historical thinking begins with a clear sense of time – past, present and future – and becomes more precise as students progress. Historical thinking includes skills such as locating, researching, analyzing and interpreting primary and secondary sources so that students can begin to understand the relationships among events and draw conclusions.

**Content Statement 1.** Events can be arranged in order of occurrence using the conventions of B.C. and A.D. or B.C.E. and C.E

**Topic:** Early Civilizations. The eight features of civilizations include cities, well-organized central governments, complex religions, job specialization, social classes, arts and architecture, public works and writing. Early peoples developed unique civilizations. Several civilizations established empires with legacies influencing later peoples.

**Content Statement 2.** Early civilizations (India, Egypt, China and Mesopotamia) with unique governments, economic systems, social structures, religions, technologies and agricultural practices and products flourished as a result of favorable geographic characteristics. The cultural practices and products of these early civilizations can be used to help understand the Eastern Hemisphere today.
**NOTE:** The addition of Japan and Korea to this topic are offered as enrichment in the sixth grade.
Strand: Geography

Topic: Human Systems. Human systems represent the settlement and structures created by people on Earth’s surface. The growth, distribution and movements of people are driving forces behind human and physical events. Geographers study patterns in cultures and the changes that result from human processes, migrations and the diffusion of new cultural traits.

Content Statement 7. Political, environmental, social and economic factors cause people, products and ideas to move from place to place in the Eastern Hemisphere in the past and today.

Content Statement 8. Modern cultural practices and products show the influence of tradition and diffusion, including the impact of major world religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism).

Background Knowledge Needed:
1. Students should know how to read a single-tier timeline containing BCE and CE events.
2. This lesson should follow the study of the four river civilizations of the Eastern Hemisphere (Mesopotamia, Egypt, Indus Valley, and China).
3. Students will also need an introduction to Japan and Korea, including geography, government, culture, and major events, including World War II and the Korean War.

Lesson Plan:
1. Introduce the Korean proverb, “a shrimp’s back breaks in a fight among whales,” with a cartoon image and a map of East Asia. (See the attachments at the end of these plans) Discuss the meaning of the Korean proverb: Korea saw itself as a weaker country preyed upon by the larger and stronger countries of China and Japan. Haps Korea Magazine describes the proverb this way:

   One of the more interesting Korean proverbs is the adage, Goh-rae-ssah-oom-ae-sae-oo deung-teo-jin-dah, or, A shrimp’s back breaks in a fight among whales. That is to say that, over the millennia, Koreans have been locked in an ongoing struggle with their larger and more powerful neighbors, Japan and China; struggles in the form of attacks and occupation, as a partner in unequal treaties or as staging ground for battles between the two (2012, para. 3).

2. Identify China, Korea, and Japan on the map and explain that they are three countries with long histories whose interactions over the years have had positive and negative consequences. Give an example such as the Japanese occupation of Korea from 1910-1945 or the use of Chinese characters in Korea and Japan.

3. Assign a timeline topic or theme to each student or group OR allow students to choose.

Possible Connection Topics:
Trade between China, Japan, and Korea. Find examples of goods that were traded.
Pottery: styles of pottery; the abduction of Korean potters in 1596.
**Occupation / Control:** Japan’s invasion of Korea 1592; Japanese colonialism of Korea 1910-1945; other invasions or attacks.

**The spread of Buddhism:** compare the introduction of Buddhism in each country.

**Confucianism:** Compare the influence of this philosophy in China and Korea.

**Architecture:** Plot dates of the construction (and/or destruction) of major landmarks or historical sites.

**Language:** Record dates of the use and/or modification of Chinese characters, development of Hangul in Korea, and kanji in Japan.

**Printing:** find dates for the first moveable type, first novel printed, etc.

4. **Explain your procedure** for researching important events or dates in the history of East Asia. **Teachers can provide as much support as needed for their group of students.** For example, provide materials, links, or even dates for younger students. Decide how many events or dates to require. Four to five events are plenty for 6th graders. Older students can be expected to do the research more independently. **Options:** students can work independently or in small groups. Each group can create one multiple-tier timeline, or teachers can divide the class into three groups and have each group research important events for one of the countries in order to create a single timeline. (In that case, the teacher should provide topics and guidelines for the timelines so that a multiple-tier timeline can be created. The time intervals must be the same and dates must line up when the timelines are arranged vertically.)

5. **Check timelines** for accuracy.

6. **Make connections** from the timelines as a class. Explain one way that Korea was influenced by China or Japan and show how the timelines show that connection.

**Assignment/Enrichment:** Students will choose one connection they see on the timelines and write an essay to explain it. The essay should also answer the question, “Is Korea a shrimp between two whales?” Students should explain whether Korea has been dominated or “squeezed” by its larger neighbors.

**Resources:**


NOTE: the last reference above includes the *cartoon* mentioned in step 1. Project the image for your class.