

TEACHING ASIA IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

THE CORE KNOWLEDGE CURRICULUM

By Connie Jones



Students parade with a Chinese dragon through the hallways of New Prospect Elementary School in Alpharetta, Georgia.

Courtesy of the Core Knowledge Foundation

Editor's Introduction

Our experience has been that it is still rare in the United States to find elementary schools in which specific content about Asia is systematically taught. E. D. Hirsch-inspired Core Knowledge Elementary Schools are one notable exception.

The Core Knowledge School movement is a fast-growing national elementary education reform. Core Knowledge elementary schools began in the 1990-91 school year, and at present there are over 900 Core

Knowledge schools nationally. In Core Knowledge schools, educators must spend at least 50 percent of classroom time teaching children the Core Knowledge Sequence, which exclusively focuses upon the liberal arts.

In what follows we have asked Connie Jones, President of the Core Knowledge Foundation, to briefly describe the Core Knowledge School movement and to address the issue of why the curriculum developers thought it important to include Asia. We have also excerpted the major Asia-related content directly from the Core Knowledge Sequence. If you have further questions about Core Knowledge Schools, contact:

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History and Geography: Grade 2

II. Early Civilizations: Asia

Focus: Great religion is a shaping force in the story of civilization; the Core Knowledge Sequence introduces children in the early grades to major world religions, beginning with a focus on geography and major symbols and figures. The purpose is not to explore matters of theology but to provide a basic vocabulary for understanding many events and ideas in history. The goal is to familiarize, not proselytize; to be descriptive, not prescriptive. The tone should be one of respect and balance; no religion should be disparaged by implying that it is a thing of the past. To the question, "Which one is true?" an appropriate response is: "People of different faiths believe different things to be true. The best people to guide you on this right now are your parents or someone at home."

A. GEOGRAPHY OF ASIA

- The largest continent, with the most populous countries in the world.
- China, India, Japan

B. INDIA

- Indus River and Ganges River
- Hinduism:
 - Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva
 - Many holy books, including the Rig Veda
- Buddhism:
 - Prince Siddhartha becomes Buddha, "the Enlightened One"
 - Buddhism becomes an outgrowth of Hinduism in India, and then spreads through many countries in Asia.
- King Asoka (also spelled Ashoka)

C. CHINA

Focus: Students will study China again in grade 4. Second grade teachers should examine the fourth-grade guidelines to see how these topics build to the later grade.

- Yellow (Huang He) and Yangtze (Yangtze) Rivers
- Teachings of Confucius (for example, how you should
- Great Wall of China
- Invention of paper
- Importance of silk
- Chinese New Year

III. Modern Civilization and Culture: Japan

A. GEOGRAPHY

- Isolate relative to continental Asia ("tail of the catag tail")
- A country made up of island (four major islands)
- Pacific Ocean; Sea of Japan
- Mt. Fuji
- Tokyo

B. CULTURE

- Japanese flag
- Big modern cities, centers of industry and business
- Traditional craft: origami
- Traditional costume: kimono

See also Language Arts 2, "The Great Wall of China" and "The Silk Road"; Math Arts 2, "The Great Wall of China"; Art History: The Great Wall and Art Masters: Huang Lantian

See also Language Arts 2, "The Japanese Empire"; Math Arts 2, "Japanese Math"; Art History: The Great Wall and Art Masters: Huang Lantian

The Core Knowledge Movement has grown out of ideas first expressed in *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1987) and developed in *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them* (1996), both by E. D. Hirsch, Jr., professor of education and humanities at the University of Virginia.

In *Cultural Literacy*, Professor Hirsch demonstrated that true literacy requires not only the ability to "decode" or sound out the words on a page, but also familiarity with a broad range of background knowledge taken for granted by writers and speakers in the United States. "To be truly literate," Professor Hirsch noted, "citizens must be able to grasp the meaning of any piece of writing addressed to the general reader." Those who possess this shared background knowledge can, for example, understand a reference in a newspaper to the Great Wall of China or the Pacific Rim. But those who lack the assumed knowledge are excluded from understanding many messages in various media, and are thus excluded from full participation in our national life.

History and Geography: Grade 4

V. China: Dynasties and Conquerors

- Qin Shihuang, first emperor; largest construction of Great Wall
- Han dynasty: trade in silk and ceramics; the Silk Road; invention of paper
- Tang and Song dynasties: highly developed civilization; extensive trade; important imports: frankincense, camphor, saffron, (saffronines)
- Mongol invasion and rule:
Chinggis Khan and the "Golden Horde"; Kublai Khan: establishes control in what is now Beijing; Marco Polo
- Ming dynasty:
The "Porcelain City"; Explorations (Zheng He)

Unit: *Emperors and
Dynasties of China*
Skills: *Compare and Contrast
Visual and Cultural Art
Vocabulary: Dynasties*

Skills: *Visual and Cultural Art
of China, and Compare Art
to "Porcelain" Boxes*

History and Geography: Grade 5

VII. Feudal Japan

A. HISTORY AND CULTURE

- Emperor as nominal leader; but real power in the hands of shoguns
- Samurai, code of Bushido
- Right class system in feudal Japanese society
- Japan closed to outsiders
- Religion:
Hokkekyo: the four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path; Amida: Stanisian reverence for ancestors; reverence for nature; koto

B. GEOGRAPHY

- Pacific Ocean, Sea of Japan
- Four main Islands: Hokkaido (famous for salmon), Shikoku, Honshu
- Tokyo
- Typhoons, earthquakes
- The Hakuho River

Unit: *Emperors and
Dynasties of China*

Skills: *Visual and Cultural Art
and Compare Art
and Compare Art*

Visual Arts: Grade 5

III. Art of Japan

- Become familiar with:
The Great Buddha (also known as the Kannon) (located in Kamakura, Japan)

Skills: *Visual and Cultural Art
and Compare Art*



Students parade through the hallways of New Prospect Elementary School in Alpharetta, Georgia.

Courtesy of the Core Knowledge Foundation

grade. This sequential building of knowledge not only helps ensure that children enter each new grade ready to learn, but also helps prevent the many repetitions and gaps that characterize much current schooling. This structure carries through all content areas, so students deepen their understanding of important concepts from history, geography, science, mathematics, fine arts and music as they develop related skills.

Respect for the diversity in our population is fostered by the knowledge specified in the *Core Knowledge Sequence*, which has been reviewed by distinguished scholars in the field of multicultural studies. The *Core Knowledge Sequence* is designed to provide access to the best knowledge available, including significant knowledge of diverse peoples and cultures. As early as kindergarten and first grade, students are shown that people all around the world tell certain stories that, while they differ in details, have much in common, as they compare and contrast folk tales from different lands such as Lon Po Po (China) and Little Red Riding Hood; Issun boshi, or One-Inch Boy (Japan), Tom Thumb (England), and the Little Finger of the Watermelon Patch (Vietnam).

How can this be achieved? Core Knowledge starts with a clear and specific set of content guidelines that sets forth a plan for building a strong foundation of knowledge for every student grade by

History and Geography: Grade 7

V. World War II

C. WORLD WAR II IN THE PACIFIC AND THE END OF THE WAR

- Historical background: Japan's rise to power
Geography of Japan (review all topics from grade 6)
Sea of Japan and Korea Strait
High population density, very limited farmland, heavy reliance on imported materials and food
- End of Japanese isolation: Commodore Matthew Perry
Meiji Restoration and of feudal Japan; industrialization and modernization
Japanese imperialism: occupation of Korea; invasion of Manchuria, Fall of Nanking
Japanese-Soviet neutrality treaty
- Pearl Harbor, Dec. 7, 1941, "A day that will live in infamy"
- Internment of Japanese Americans
- Fall of the Philippines: Bataan Death March; General Douglas MacArthur, "I shall return."
- Battle of Midway
- Marine amphibious landings: Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima
- Surrender of Japan
Atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki; the Enola Gay
- U.S. dictates post-war constitution for Japan; Emperor Hirohito
- Nuremberg Conference; Nuremberg war crimes trials
- Creation of United Nations; Security Council; Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Second Grade: US History and Spanish Colonial History
"Decimation of You."

History and Geography: Grade 8

I. The Decline of European Colonialism

A. BREAKUP OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

- Context of British Commonwealth; independence for colonial territories
- Irish Republic; The Easter Rising; Irish Free State
- India: partition and independence
Sepoy Rebellion
Mahatma Gandhi; The Salt March
Partition of India into Hindu and Muslim sections
- Geography of India and South Asia
Overview
Legacy of British colonial rule; English language, rail system
Himalayas; Mt. Everest, K2
Very high population densities and growth rates; Indus River system
Monsoon
Rivers: Ganges, Indus, Brahmaputra
Arabian Sea; Bay of Bengal
Pakistan; India
Bangladesh
Sri Lanka
- India
Second most populous country after China
Semi-tropical agriculture
Caste system, "untouchables"
Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras
Longstanding tension between Hindus and Muslims

B. CREATION OF PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

- China under European domination
Opium Wars; Taiping Rebellion
Sun Yat-Sen
- Communist take-over
Mao Zedong; The Long March
Uprising of nationalists led by Chiang Kai-Shek
Seven-Pointed Charter; 30-Year Friendship Treaty

C. Geography of China

- Overview
One-fifth of world population
1000+ years old culture
Third largest national territory; regional climate
Physical features
Huang He (Yellow) River; Chang Jiang (Yangtze) River
Tibetan Plateau; Gobi Desert
Yellow Sea; East China Sea; South China Sea
Great Wall; Grand Canal
- Social and economic characteristics
Major cities: Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou (formerly Canton), Shenzhen
World's largest producer of coal and agricultural products; major industrial center
Oil-shale oil reserves
Multi-dialectal, including Mandarin, Cantonese
Hong Kong; special economic zones
Taiwan; Tibet

Students are introduced to major world religions starting in first grade, beginning with a focus on geography and major symbols and figures, for the purposes of laying the groundwork to understand the role religion has played as a shaping force in the story of civilization and for instilling a sense of understanding and respect for one another beginning in the early years of schooling.

Asian studies play an important role in the *Core Knowledge Sequence* and are integrated throughout the grades in the

IV. The Vietnam War and the Rise of Social Activism

A. THE VIETNAM WAR

- Imperialistic War: Dien Bien Phu, Ho Chi Minh, Viet Cong
- Divide and Conquer
- U.S. takes charge of the "Special Forces" in Gulf of Tonkin
- Tet Offensive; My Lai Massacre
- Antiwar protests: Kent State; The Pentagon Papers; "Bubble" and "Doves"
- American disengagement: Nixon's "Vietnamization" policy; Kissinger; War Powers Act
- Watergate scandal; resignation of Nixon
- Vietnam: Ban on Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon)

Source: Ward, A. & R. (2017).
History in Context: Vietnam
Western Hemisphere

*We would like to thank the
Core Knowledge Foundation for
permission to reprint portions
of the Sequence.*

language arts, world history, geography, music, fine arts, math, and science. Students in second grade are introduced to Asia through an extensive study of geography, stories, architecture, and other important cultural contributions. Students in fourth grade study in greater depth the dynasties and conquerors of China as well as examples of Chinese art. Fifth graders study Feudal Japan, its history and culture, along with an in-depth study of Japan's geography.

We respect and appreciate that which we understand. True understanding results from a careful building of knowledge over time. Schools play such an important role in building the background knowledge and understanding that will lead their students to lasting respect, cooperation, and solidarity as a society. ■

CONSTANCE JONES is the President of the Core Knowledge Foundation, an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization founded in 1986 by E. D. Hirsch, Jr. Connie earned her Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of South Florida and served as the Principal of the first Core Knowledge school in Fort Myers, Florida before joining the Foundation to develop a training program for schools interested in implementing the Core Knowledge Sequence.