

iDenti*EL*

A Curriculum for Korean American Christian Youth

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Christian Education Center

Praises for “iDentity”

Many Korean-American young people today are grappling with the profound tensions of an “in-between” generation. They are a step removed from the immigration experience of their elders, yet they are not yet fully assimilated to the culture of their thoroughly “American” peers. This much-needed curriculum can nurture a generation that is uniquely prepared to hear the call to that “in-between-ness” to which the Gospel calls all of us: to be “in,” but not “of,” the world. There is a marvelous potential here for equipping gifted young people to become the leaders that the church at large desperately needs!

–Dr. Richard J. Mouw, President, Fuller Theological Seminary

Thanks be to God: the resource that we’ve been waiting for has finally arrived! In this extraordinarily creative curriculum for Korean American youth, as well as their parents, pastors, and teachers, the authors put forth the lessons that must be explored, learned, and practiced. Users will find this curriculum to be a matchless resource for addressing the issues of identity as they relate to culture, Christ, competence, and community in the Korean American context, while also helping our young people develop a robust Christian faith. I enthusiastically commend this resource to the Korean American Christian community.

–Rev. Jeremiah Jungchan Park, Resident Bishop of New York Annual Conference, The United Methodist Church

A very creative, resourceful, well-conceived curriculum based on insightful contextual analysis and faithful biblical exegesis! It powerfully engages complex intercultural experiences of the youth with the message of the Scripture with clarity and openness. The curriculum is a rare accomplishment in the field of the Asian American Christian youth education and multicultural studies. I enthusiastically recommended this work for churches that minister to Korean American youth who struggle with various psycho-social and spiritual issues.

–Dr. Inn Sook Lee, Adjunct Professor of Christian Education, Princeton Theological Seminary

The “iDentity” curriculum is a remarkable gift for the nurture of Korean American youth in the Christian faith. Organized around the four intersecting themes of culture, Christ, competence, and community, the curriculum invites Korean American adolescents into deep dialogue with adults about what it means to embrace a bi-cultural Christian identity in which love of self, God, neighbor, and the earth can flourish. Using Korean American life stories, social science research, media resources, and Biblical stories, the “iDentity” curriculum honestly probes the realities that impede the development of a positive bi-cultural Christian identity, such as systemic racism, as well as the realities that support such identity, such as the discovery of God-given gifts and passions. The curriculum’s content and dialogical methodology are exactly what is needed to enable Korean American youth to candidly probe their own experiences in cultural context and in light of the Biblical witness. In the power of the Holy Spirit, “iDentity” provides a wonderful resource for God’s people to navigate the tension between the simple handing over of the Christian faith, and its renewal as younger generations of Korean American Christian receive, probe, and learn to live that faith with courage and commitment in their time and place.

–Dr. Renee House, the Dean of the Seminary, New Brunswick Theological Seminary.

This is a much needed and thoughtful curriculum for Korean-American youths today who are looking for guidance in their struggles regarding identity, self-esteem, personal faith, familial obligation, service for the community, and world issues. Each lesson in the curriculum demonstrates an in-depth understanding of the challenges that the youth living in a bicultural society face, and sheds light on how churches can help them in navigating an increasingly complicated and morally ambiguous world. In addressing the challenges, the curriculum draws upon ancient truths and wisdoms in the Bible and shares their meanings in a fresh way.

–Kwang S. Kim, President, Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc.

Despite the fact that Korean immigration history has surpassed the 100 year mark, no church youth curriculum that dealt extensively with the real life crisis caused by clashing identities, cultures, and languages was available for the Korean Americans in North America until now. With the news of the publication of “iDentity,” my prayers of petition turned into prayers of gratitude for this tool and the opportunity to impact our future generations. As a fellow Christian educator and Korean immigrant, I am blessedly assured that this curriculum will stir up our second generation Korean Americans because the footsteps of our Korean pioneers have been imprinted in “iDentity.” I truly hope and pray that this curriculum’s contagious influence on our upcoming generation will nurture the Korean Diaspora to lead as God’s vessels to the ends of the earth.

–Rev. Sang Kwon, Education Pastor of Young Nak Presbyterian Church, LA.

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LESSON

Banana?!

How Banana Are You?

(15 minutes)

Here is a quick questionnaire to see how Korean or American you are. Circle the answer for each question below. Remember that this questionnaire is not scientifically proven and is never meant to be right/better or wrong/worse. Feel free to discuss your answers with each other.

Your church senior pastor walks in the door. What do you do?

Bow and say,
"An yung ha se yo?"

Say, "Hi, pastor"

You sprained your ankle in a soccer game. You would prefer to see

An Acupuncturist

Medical Doctor

Your friend is taking you out to eat. If given a choice, you would prefer to go to a...

Korean Restaurant

American Restaurant

It is important to obey your parents even if you disagree with them (i.e. choosing college or going to church).

Agree

Disagree

You won a vacation package to Hawaii and you are allowed to take one friend with you. You would take...

A Korean Friend

A Non-Korean Friend

It is important to give a Korean name in addition to an American name to our children (given that you are married to another Korean American)

Agree

Disagree

When parents are not present, young siblings should listen to older siblings

Agree

Disagree

Academic excellence is prerequisite for a successful life

Agree

Disagree

I watch Korean drama or listen to Korean music at least once a week

Agree

Disagree

Parental approval is important when it comes to deciding my marriage

Agree

Disagree

Evaluation: If the student answered 7 or more times from the "Response 1" column, the student is most likely more Korean than American. Likewise, if the student answered 7 or more times from the "Response 2" column, the student is most likely more American than Korean. Please bear in mind that this evaluation is meant to be a fun way of encouraging the discussion on the topic and is not meant to be used as a basis of making judgment about each other's cultural orientation.

Text: Genesis 41:45-52, Daniel 1:3-9

Theme: Understanding What It Means To Be Bicultural

Materials Needed: None

Additional Resource Section: None

We are Korean Americans. But what does it mean to be Korean American? Ironically, for many Korean American youths (and even for adults), trying to understand the meaning of one's identity as Korean American has been a struggle as reflected in the poem by Ted Cho in the beginning of this chapter. The difficulty of this struggle lies in the fact that one is trying to reconcile two very different cultural identities, Korean and American, within one's self. This chapter seeks to provide an opportunity for our youths to think about their Korean American identity as bicultural identity.

The questionnaire "How Banana Are You?" has been provided for the students in the student booklet. After the class has settled and is ready to begin, ask the students to complete the questionnaire and share their answers. (Time limit 5 min.) After sharing the answers, continue with the rest of the study by reading the poem "Who Doesn't Love Bananas."

NOTES:



News Feed

20 minutes

Born in the US

A Korean mother's son

Not white but yellow

A questioned identity

Needless angst and doubt

Against myself I struggle

Two separate worlds

Why must there be a conflict?

Is a choice required?

Not if I know my own heart

Korean or not

You know, I am a... Banana. ⁻¹

Grace came to America with her family when she was nine years old. She grew up in a Korean American church in Chicago with her Korean American friends. She loved everything Korean. By the time she was a High School junior she was really into “Hallyu,” the Korean wave. She kept up her Korean language, reading Korean novels and manga. She really wanted to visit Korea and, after high school, she had an opportunity to go there with a few of her friends in a cultural exchange program. In Korea she felt at home. Grace had an “Ah ha!” experience there. She connected with Korea. She felt that she belonged there in a strong way. These were “her people.” She felt that she was more Korean than American. She wanted to be “fully Korean” like her brothers and sisters in Korea. But during her trip she began to feel that the Korean people treated her with kindness but as a foreigner, a *gyopo*. She began to realize that Korea was a great place to visit as her home away from home but she could not live there as her true home. She began to understand that she was more Americanized than she realized. She began to question her identity more seriously. After she came back from the trip she had an opportunity to debrief her experience with some of her friends. Grace and her friends realized more clearly what it meant to be neither Korean nor American but Korean American.

¹ Ted Cho, “Who Doesn’t Love Bananas” in *Who Doesn’t Love Bananas: Collection of Immigrant Stories*.



Chat

- 1 What does the poem mean by “banana”? Can you give some examples of this?

The metaphor of “banana” refers to the physical/cultural “duality” of being yellow (physical-Asian) on the outside and white (cultural-Caucasian) on the inside. In this sense, the metaphor of “banana” is not a positive and affirming metaphor to describe the Korean/Asian American identity. An example of this would be someone who is completely “Americanized” to the point where Korean American cultural traits are mostly absent and/or who deliberately denies his/her Korean American connections. Please note that the metaphor used in this poem is different from the way this metaphor is popularly understood and used among Korean Americans. This metaphor is generally received by most Korean Americans as a pejorative expression to describe someone who has disowned his/her connection with Korean American roots.

- 2 What is the author trying to say in this poem?

Let students respond freely. The author describes the “angst and doubt” in being Korean American. The author is keenly aware of the ambiguity of straddling two different worlds at the same time. But the author is coming to terms with and embracing the ambiguity by claiming that it is not necessary to define one’s self as either/or.

- 3 How well does this poem and the story of Grace reflect your experience as a Korean American? Do you consider yourself more American than Korean or more Korean than American? Why?

Let students respond and share how the poem reflects or does not reflect their experience of being Korean American. The follow up question of what most appeals to them in the poem is intended to help with thinking about how this poem speaks or does not speak to their experience. Please note that this is not a value judgment question. This question helps the students to understand that being Korean American, having a bicultural identity, is a fluid concept where one’s degree of identification with either culture can vary from one context to another. Allow students to share different self-understanding of how American or Korean they are with affirmation. Please note that the teacher may have to give a concrete example before students can answer how American or Korean they are. For example, are you more Korean or American when it comes to.... The teacher may also use the questions from the questionnaire “How Banana Are You?” at the beginning of the chapter.

- 4 Do you consider yourself Korean American? What does this mean to you?

Let students answer. It is important to help students to understand 1) that all of them are Korean Americans regardless of their immigrant status and the number of years they have lived here and 2) that Korean American means to be a “bicultural”



Focus

All Americans are people with various cultural backgrounds (Italian American, African American, German American, Irish American, Korean American, Chinese American etc.). This means that every American is a bicultural (or multicultural) person whether one recognizes this or not. Koreans are no exception. Korean Americans are neither Koreans living in America nor Americans without any cultural heritage. Korean Americans, as bicultural people, are those who are fully American with their own unique Korean cultural heritage.

NOTES:



Text

20 minutes

Genesis 41:45-52

45 Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-Paneah and gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, to be his wife. And Joseph went throughout the land of Egypt. **46** Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from Pharaoh's presence and traveled throughout Egypt. **47** During the seven years of abundance the land produced plentifully. **48** Joseph collected all the food produced in those seven years of abundance in Egypt and stored it in the cities. In each city he put the food grown in the fields surrounding it. **49** Joseph stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea; it was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure. **50** Before the years of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. **51** Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." **52** The second son he named Ephraim and said, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering."

Daniel 1:3-9

3 Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility— **4** young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. **5** The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service. **6** Among these were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. **7** The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego. **8** But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. **9** Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel,

Although Joseph achieved great stature in Egyptian society he never forgot that he was a Jew or where he came from. In fact, even though he was married to an Egyptian priestess, he gave his two sons the Hebrew names Ephraim and Manasseh.

NOTES:



Scan

- 1 In what ways were Joseph and Daniel bicultural? Identify/describe their characteristics based on the scripture. (* See Commentary Box from the previous page)

They kept their cultural identity and remembered their cultural roots although they held significant positions in Egypt and in Babylon.

- 2 How did Joseph and Daniel attempt to retain their cultural heritage? How did they accommodate dominant cultures (Egyptian/Babylonian) within them?

They kept their names and customs. In Joseph's case, he even gave his two sons Hebrew names when he could have given them Egyptian names. In Daniel's case, he maintained his Jewish dietary custom despite the pressure to assimilate into the Babylonian culture and religion.

- 3 In your opinion how did God use their bicultural backgrounds to achieve His plan? Please feel free to make use of stories of other figures in the Bible (e.g., Moses) to answer this question.

We believe that the preservation of the Israelites in foreign lands through difficult times and the witness of God's sovereign rule in the world were the central message in the story of Joseph and Daniel (see Daniel Chs. 2, 4 & 5). Joseph and Daniel were the people who played a pivotal role in realizing God's plan as they were bicultural leaders during this important period. They were bicultural leaders because they embraced their ethnic identity as Israelites while they were fully competent in the Egyptian or Babylonian culture. They integrated their bicultural background into their faith.

NOTES:



Message

Both Joseph and Daniel were bicultural and minorities in a dominant culture. This bicultural reality created for them a unique opportunity to serve God and humanity. Their faith enabled them to navigate between the two cultures in a way that faithfully witnessed to God's sovereignty. Knowing more than one culture enables us to get a deeper understanding of God and God's action in history.



Download & Apply

15 minutes

- 1 In what ways are you bicultural? What do you think are the advantages of being bicultural? For example, what kind of practical advantages do you think are there for being able to speak two different languages fluently, i.e., Korean and English? (examples: dating, getting a job, college admission, enjoying mass media-drama and music)

The concept of biculturality is the idea that one is able to relate to two different cultures with ease and that he/she is able to understand the general cultural/ethical/social dynamics of each culture. The advantages are many: e.g., the ability to communicate with a greater number of people and in a variety of contexts; the ability to understand and see things from more than one viewpoint, thereby gaining a "diverse and broader" perspective and understanding the appreciation of the beauty and goodness of different cultures; and finally there is practical advantage in getting a job, working in multi-national companies and enjoying Korean and American friends.

- 2 What are some of the ways that we can develop or deepen our "bicultural-ness?"

Please note that being bicultural as a Korean American means that we are simultaneously immersed in both Korean AND American culture. So deepening our bicultural-ness must always involve our efforts in learning about both Korean and American cultural life. Brainstorm with students and see what ideas emerge. There are many things we can do to deepen and nurture our "bicultural-ness": e.g., visit Korea; write a research paper at school with topics related to Korea and its life; get involved with school organizations and local community; study Korean American history; talk with our parents and hear their stories of immigration.

- 3 In what ways can God use you because of your bicultural-ness? Discuss this in light of other bicultural people in the Scripture (e.g., Moses, Paul, Esther, etc.).

About Authors

Hak Joon Lee is the Associate Professor of Theology and Ethics at New Brunswick Theological Seminary. Lee received his Ph.D. degree from Princeton Theological Seminary, and has published several books, including *Covenant and Communication: A Christian Moral Conversation with Jürgen Habermas*, *We Will Get to the Promised Land: Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Communal-Political Spirituality*, *Bridge Builders*, and numerous articles. He was a keynote speaker for the celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday in several cities of NJ and NY. An ordained minister of Word and Sacrament in the PC (USA), he has been engaging interracial and intercultural issues for over 20 years, and recently founded G2G Christian Education Center, a research institute on Asian American Christianity and Culture, for the empowerment of Asian American churches.

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