

The Girl-Son

by

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Book InformationAnne E. Neuberger, The Girl-Son

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Book Level: 5.0

Interest Level: MG

The story is based on the life of Induk Pakh, whose widowed mother disguised her as a boy at the age of eight in order for her to attend school, a choice forbidden to girls in early twentieth century Korea.

Award: Society of School Libr. International Best/Honor

Topics: Countries/Regions, Korea, North and South; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 6-8; Recommended Reading, NCSS/CBC Notable Social Studies; Series, Adventures in Time

Main Characters

C.G. Steinhart a blind American man who sponsors Induk at the mission school, paying her room and board expenses all through high school and college

Induk Pakh the main character and narrator of the story; a young Korean girl who achieves her dream of getting an education

Miss Frey an American teacher at the Ewha mission school who, over the years, befriends Induk and becomes like a mother to her

Onyu Pakh Induk's widowed mother, who breaks many customs and makes many sacrifices to send her daughter to school

Sim-Sung a close friend of Induk's during her school days, who encourages Induk to go on to high school and shares many experiences with her

Vocabulary

benevolent marked by or disposed to doing good

han'gul Korean alphabet

jee-geh an A-framed pack, worn on the back to carry goods

kimchi traditional Korean food made from pickled cabbage and hot peppers

podari a small cloth bundle used to hold a brush, ink stone, and ink cake

Synopsis

Induk Pakh became an educator and lecturer in Korea after overcoming social beliefs of her time that girls could not learn to read and write. This story is based on Induk's life, as told in her own words.

Induk's father and brother died of cholera when she was six years old. Her mother was faced with the decision of moving in with a male relative or trying to raise her daughter on her own in a country that expected girls and women to be quiet, obedient, and gentle. After arranging to have a man teach Induk the alphabet at home, Induk's mother realized that she was able to learn and decided to send her to school. Not only would the two have to make it on their own, but Induk had to be disguised as a boy in order to be admitted to school.

Induk studied hard and learned quickly in school, but her mother realized Induk would not pass as a boy forever. She packed up their few belongings and then sent Induk to a brand-new school where she could be a girl again. At Samsung Mission School for Girls, Induk learned many new things, but she was forced to live there alone while her mother traveled from village to village to sell her weavings. At eight years of age, Induk learned to cook for herself and filled the long nights studying her lessons. One day, Induk walked several miles to surprise her mother with a visit. Her mother did not welcome her, realizing that Induk should be discouraged from leaving school often to find her. After that, Induk better accepted her life at Samsung and even made a close friend there named Sim-Sung.

After completing her studies at Samsung, Induk traveled to Seoul with Sim-Sung to attend a free mission high school. As it turned out, only the tuition

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was free at Ewha High School. Induk did not have enough money for room and board, so she was to return to her mother the next day. After convincing the principal to let her stay, Induk began classes. One day, the principal, Miss Frey, announced that an American man had agreed to sponsor Induk - he would pay her expenses for high school and also college!

After graduating from college, Induk was asked to stay on as a teacher. At the time, Korea had just been forcefully taken over by Japan, and her countrymen were in a state of unrest. Induk was sent to prison for participating in a demonstration against the Japanese government. While in prison, Induk was haunted by thoughts of freedom. There, she vowed to use her freedom and education to free others from "the many kinds of prison."

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

The day Induk went to visit her mother, she was turned away. Explain what Induk meant when she said, "It would be even longer before I understood that the pain I felt that day was but a fraction of what Mother felt."

Induk's mother was a very strong woman and had to make great sacrifices to give her an education. Because she cared very deeply for Induk, she must have found it painful to give up the only thing she had left in the world ... her daughter.

Literary Analysis

There are some examples in the book in which colors are shown to have a different meaning in Induk's culture. Explain one such difference in the book.

Induk's mother wears white when she is in mourning. We traditionally wear black to funerals in the United States. Also, Induk feels that the color pink is for boys. We usually use pink for girls and blue for boys in our culture.

Inferential Comprehension

How did Induk know that her mother was proud of her?

She said, "You will be a scholar, just like your father! How proud I was of him."

Constructing Meaning

While at college, Induk told a classmate, "We are part of the world, not just part of a household!" Why do you think Induk said this?

She wanted the other student to realize that, even though they were giving up a lot, they were very lucky to be allowed a chance to get an education.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting The early years of Induk's life took place in a tiny village in northern Korea. Have the students investigate the country and time period (Korea, at the turn of the century) and write a short paper on the lifestyles of the people. They can write about city life, as depicted in the book when Induk reached Seoul or about village life. There are many aspects that can be discussed, such as schooling, clothing, diets or family structures.

Understanding Characterization Induk's mother made great sacrifices so that Induk could get an education. This idea of sacrifice is prominent in the stories of other influential figures in history, as well as renowned athletes, musicians, etc. Have the students research one of their favorite athletes, celebrities or historical figures. In a

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group discussion, the students can explain the ways in which others (family members, friends, coaches, etc.) influenced and helped them rise to their "celebrity" status.

Comparing and Contrasting Throughout the book, we are given glimpses of a culture much different than our own. Have the students write about some of the cultural differences they picked up in the reading, such as the treatment of girls versus boys or the importance of education.

Responding to Literature Have the students use the guide to birth signs at the back of the book to chart signs for themselves and their family members. Have them discuss the accuracies they see between the people and their signs. Or, have the students check out books on the Chinese alphabet and try to paint their names on a scroll or other absorbent paper.