



State Library
of Louisiana



Educator Discussion Guide

IN THE SHADOW OF THE SUN

by Anne Sibley O'Brien

Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Nominee 2019-2020

Grades 6-8

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Mia is on a trip to North Korea with her aid-worker father and her brother, Simon. Mia was adopted from South Korea as a baby; so being on this trip makes her question her place in life. While on the trip, her father is arrested for spying, leaving Mia and Simon alone. Mia receives pictures of slave-labor camps, and so she and Simon must figure out a way to get the pictures out of the country in order to save their father.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anne Sibley O'Brien is a children's book author and illustrator who has created over thirty picture books. *In the Shadow of the Sun* is her first novel. She grew up in South Korea as the daughter of medical missionaries, which inspired her to write about multicultural, multiracial, and global subjects in her children's books.

Biographical Information about the author was taken from her website

<http://annesibleyobrien.com/>

Accessed 1 October 2018

BOOK AWARDS

A Junior Library Guild Fall 2017 Selection

Bank Street College of Education, The Best Children's Books of the Year, 2018 Edition

NCSS/CBC Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People 2018

International Literacy Association Teachers' Choice

Maine Student Book Award Nominee

PREREADING ACTIVITIES

Different Types of Governments

Ask your students to think about different kinds of governments. Do they know what kind of government the United States has? (Democracy or Democratic republic) Do they know what that means? Do they know what kind of rights they have because of the American system of government?

What about a dictatorship? Have they ever heard that word before? Can they think of examples of dictatorships?

From <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>

Democracy: a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections

Dictatorship: autocratic rule, control, or leadership
Lead an open discussion on these topics.

North Korea

Ask your students if they know anything about North Korea. Do they know anything about North Korea and how it is run? Do they know who the leader is? Do they know how that leader came into power? Do they know why there is a South Korea and a North Korea?

This is a timeline from the BBC (including a basic timeline) to give students an overview:
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-15278612>

This is a TED talk from a woman who escaped from North Korea, which gives students a perspective on what North Korea is like now:

https://www.ted.com/talks/hyeonsoo_lee_my_escape_from_north_korea?language=en

There are more resources listed in the Author's Note at the end of the book, if there is time to give students more background information.

Traveling Out of the Country

Ask your students if they have ever traveled to another country. Which countries? What were some things they had to do to prepare?

Discuss with the class things that international travelers need to be aware of: Passports, Embassies, different currency, different size electric plugs and voltage (none of their electronics would work without adaptors), would their cell phones work (different phone networks), special laws and rules in that country, how to stay safe, etc. You can also mention the US Department of State travel advisories, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories.html/>.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What would you do if you thought one of your parents was hiding something from you? Would you follow them like Mia did? Would you question them about it?
2. Why do you think the tourists were not allowed to take pictures of the military? How would you feel if someone took your camera or phone and deleted photos you took while you are on vacation because it was the law?
3. How would you feel if you were chosen to be one of the students in the performance? Remember that you would not have the choice to refuse the invitation to perform.
4. What would you have done with the package? Would you have opened it, like Mia did? Would you have listened to Mr. Lee and not opened it? Why or why not?
5. What would you have done when you found the phone? Would you have taken it with you? Would you have told someone about it? Why or why not?
6. What would you have done when you saw pictures on the phone?
7. Mia and Simon don't seem to get along at all. Why do you think she went to him with the pictures?
8. When you were reading the book, what did you think of Daniel Moon? Did you think he was a friend, like Mia did? Did you think he was working with the men who took Mia's dad, like Simon did?
9. How would you have helped Simon when he cut his leg?
10. What skills do you have that would have helped you in the lean-to?
11. Why do you think Mia trusted Soon-ok? Would you have trusted her?
12. Would you have gone with Mr. Shin? Do you think Mia and Simon were right to trust him?
13. Do you think Simon made the right choice in throwing the phone? What would you have done?

14. Do you think the men left the key in the ignition on purpose? Why would they do that?
15. Did Simon make the right choice by not telling Mia about the phone? Why or why not?
16. Why do you think Mia wanted her mother to come to Korean school? Why do you think her mother was hesitant to go with her?
17. Was there anything surprising to you about Daniel and Mia's father's involvement with the police in North Korea?
18. Scattered throughout the book are short first-person accounts of minor characters in the book. These sections are in black. Why do you think the author chose to insert the thoughts and stories of these minor characters? Did you find this helpful to better understand what life is like in North Korea?

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Language Arts:

- In an essay ask students to compare and contrast their day to day life and freedoms with what it would be like if they were living North Korea, based on what they have learned by reading the book. Ask them to imagine themselves in the shoes of a middle grade North Korean student. What would be different, what would be the same?
- Students will read about and discuss literature in North Korea. How different is writing and publishing literature in North Korea compared to other countries?
<https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/a-collection-of-north-korean-stories-and-the-mystery-of-their-origins>

Social Studies:

- Have students create maps that follow Mia and Simon's trip. Students will mark the different locations of the trip on the map and trace their journey.
 - Blank map for students:
<https://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/printpage/printpage.php?l=/webimage/countrys/asia/outline/kp.gif>
 - Labeled map for reference: <https://www.britannica.com/place/North-Korea/media/322222/2968>
- Students will look at a family tree of the Kim family to see how the power has been passed down for decades. <http://content.time.com/time/interactive/0,31813,2107093,00.html>
- Share with students information about the Arirang Mass Games. In the book on pages 29-34, Mia attends the North Korean Mass Games. This intermittent event of gymnastics, dance and artistic performance includes over 100,000 people involved in the show. There is nothing else like it in the world. When the performances are held, the people involved, some as young as five years old, must practice for months and then perform it for months. Historically these performances have had a lot of military involvement, showing tanks and their missiles in the performances.
 - Here is an overview from Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arirang_Mass_Games
 - Show this 2 minute video or another short video overview of the Mass Games, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OccI5AuQfzg>.
 - Be sure to point out the 20,000 children holding the large cards that make a human Pixel backdrop display. It is like showing giant advertising billboards behind the performance stage. These children practice for months to hold their cards up at the

right time. According to multiple news resources there are concerns on the treatment of these children. They have to bring their own food, leave their homes at 7 am and don't return until 10 pm so they can rehearse, often in very hot conditions. Information from this and other sources: http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2018/12/03/2018120301565.html,

Art:

- Using the information directly above, students will read about the 2018 Mass Games held for North Korea's 70th anniversary.
 - Individually or in groups, they will discuss the art form of the human pixel wall where the children hold up the large color cards in unison to display pictures and slogans. Using a Google Image search for "mass games human pixels" they can see the different artistic pictures used at the mass games. Have them research other art forms and compare the mass games human pixel art to other art forms they locate. <https://apnews.com/40da556f67684a25bb5ad795c38fae81>
 - For a project, students can attempt to do a brief performance in unison to see how difficult it would be. Imagine how it would be for a 3 hour performance in front of thousands of people with hundreds cards. Students would need to decide on a few pictures, print out sheets of paper to be the pixels, choreograph it to music.
- Students will learn about the process of basket weaving, as Mia does while they are staying in the lean-to. If there is time for a longer unit, students will make their own baskets using the skills they have learned. <https://feltmagnet.com/crafts/1975-Basketwork>

P.E.:

- Students will do a relay based on Mia and Simon's journey through the countryside. They will map out the locations Mia and Simon travel and mark the spots, then complete the relay as teams.

Vocabulary:

Protectorate	Compliance	Camouflage
Occupation	Humanitarian	Ministry
Guerrilla	Embassy	Bureau
Demilitarized	Defector	Passport
Reunification	Faction	Labor Camp
Surveillance	Embassy	Dictator
Propaganda	Sanctuary	Arirang Mass Games

RELATED WEB SITES

Adoption Statistics

https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/Intercountry-Adoption/adopt_ref/adoption-statistics.html

Details on adoption statistics in the United States based on country of origin. This will help students who do not have much familiarity understand how common it is in the United States.

China-North Korea Border

<https://www.wired.com/story/photo-gallery-china-north-korea-border/>

Photographs and a description of the border between North Korea and China, which would give students a better understanding of what Mia and Simon had to cross.

Korean Demilitarized Zone

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/destinations/asia/south-korea/things-to-do-photos-demilitarized-zone-dmz/>

Photographs and a description of the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea, which will help students understand the tensions between the two countries.