

DIDACTIC UNIT 4

# North Korea

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## The Ongoing Dictatorship for Decades

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## Title

North Korea: the Ongoing Dictatorship for Decades.

## Grades addressed

Students from 13 to 18 years.

## Duration

5 Sessions (40 minutes for each).

## Sources

- *1984, by George Orwell*
- *CBN News: Article “Kim Jong Un Bans Christmas, Forces Worship of Grandmother”*
- *Video: “Growing Role of Technology in Modern Life”*
- *BBC News: “North Korea's tightly controlled media”*

## Aims

1. To increase students’ knowledge and understanding of human rights
2. To raise awareness and foster students’ critical thinking regarding the consequences of mass violations of human rights
3. To make students get to know the negative impacts of totalitarian regimes
4. To foster the critical analysis of the governance
5. To demonstrate an ability to think critically about human behavior
6. To change their attitude and start taking action

### **Other aspects**

- Classroom arrangements: Students will be sitting in pairs.
- Groups: Students will work individually and in groups.
- Equipment: A computer, speakers and a projector and internet connection are needed for the video about “*Growing Role of Technology in Modern Life*” in Activity 3. The novel *1984*, by George Orwell.

## 2. BIOGRAPHY RATIONALE

Throughout much of history, people acquired rights and responsibilities through their membership in a group –a family, indigenous nation, religion, class, community, or state. Most societies have had traditions similar to the "golden rule" of "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." The Hindu Vedas, the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi, the Bible, the Quran (Koran), and the Analects of Confucius are five of the oldest written sources which address questions of people's duties, rights, and responsibilities. In addition, the Inca and Aztec codes of conduct and justice and an Iroquois Constitution were Native American sources that existed well before the 18th century. In fact, all societies, whether in oral or written tradition, have had systems of propriety and justice as well as ways of tending to the health and welfare of their members.

Its roots, however, lie in earlier tradition and documents of many cultures; it took the catalyst of World War II to propel human rights onto the global stage and into the global conscience. The UDHR was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, partly in response to the atrocities of WWII.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) urges member nations to promote a number of human, civil, economic and social rights, asserting these rights as part of the "foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world." The declaration was the first international legal effort to limit the behavior of states and press upon them duties to their citizens. Although the first sentence of the Preamble to the Declaration of Human Rights says that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" it is not the case in reality.

To violate the most basic human rights is to deny individuals their fundamental moral entitlements. It is, in a sense, to treat them if they are less than a human and undeserving of respect and dignity. One well known example based on prejudice involves the Jews who have endured mistreatment and persecution for thousands of years. The largest scale attempt to destroy this group of people occurred during WWII when millions of Jews were exterminated in German concentration camps in the name of Nazi ideals of "racial purity".

In this plan, we have issued the effects of violation of human rights under some circumstances. In this respect, students will be aware of having responsibility not just for themselves but also for

others who suffer from this violation through learning striking examples from history and today and their negative results on humanity. They will also be able to internalize not to ignore the humiliation of others and co-operate with murderers.

Students will get to know the consequences of gross-violations of human rights which are violated by totalitarian regimes in some parts of the world. Regarding to this aim, we will make a study of North Korea which has been one of the world's most secretive societies. It is one of the few countries still under nominally communist rule. Some main methods that have been used by Kim family to maintain power are going to be analyzed in terms of violation of human rights.

### 3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

#### 3.1. THE RISING OF SOUTH AND NORTH KOREA

On August 6, 1945, the United States dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, and two days later, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan and launched an attack on Japanese forces in Manchuria. On August 9, a second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, and on August 15, 1945, Japan surrendered.



The devastation of Hiroshima after the nuclear bomb was dropped on it.

The Soviets quickly took Manchuria and entered Korea. Because it was impossible for U.S. troops to get to Korea in time and fearing the Soviets would take the entire peninsula, War Department Colonels Charles H. Bonesteel and Dean Rusk hastily drafted an agreement which set out a demarcation line for the zones of influence for Korea marking the Soviet zone from the China/Russia border to end at the 38th parallel, while South of the 38th parallel would be the zone of influence for the United States. This a “The original plan for Korea” was for the Soviets to accept the surrender of Japanese forces in the North and the US to accept the surrender of Japanese forces in the South, and once order was restored, the Korea people would have elections to have a new government and a “free and independent Korea”.

However, it was clear the Soviets did not intend to ever allow a free and independent Korea, and as soon as U.S. forces arrived in Seoul, they began receiving reports of the Soviet military erecting permanent markets along the 38th parallel. Furthermore, the Soviets selected the leader of the North Korean communists who had fought against the Japanese to serve under their influence. On February 8, 1946, Kim Il-Sung became the leader of the Interim People's Committee. This most important post established Kim's power and he became the dictator of North Korea until his death on July 8, 1994.

The Soviets sent many specialists to help Kim consolidate power and establish a communist government while simultaneously training and sending thousands of agents into the south to establish Communist organizations and cells to de-stabilize the efforts by the United States to establish a democracy. In addition, Kim immediately began to form the Korean People's Army to develop a fighting force in case the political efforts to unite the two Koreans under communism failed.

In 1947, the United Nations established the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK) to oversee a free and fair election in Korea and elections were held on May 10, 1949. But the Soviets refused to participate in the elections, so no one north of the 38th parallel participated. On August 15, 1948, the Republic of Korea was established with President Syngman Rhee as its president and the United Nations recognized the Republic of Korea as the only legitimate nation on the Korean peninsula.

Ten days later, on August 25, 1948, under Soviet sponsorship, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was established with Kim Il-Sung as leader. The same year the United Nations, in



reaction to the atrocities of World War II, adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the only nation in the world today that does not enjoy one single human right enshrined in this document is the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

To consolidate power, Kim launched the Concentrated Guidance Campaign: a massive ideological census and registration of the background and political purity of each and every North Korean and began rounding up, jailing and even executing “counter-revolutionaries.” From August 1945 to September 1948, approximately 800,000 North Koreans fled to South Korea, an exodus that would affect millions during the next decade. Counter-revolutionaries were defined as anyone whose family members had fled South Korea, former members of any anti-Communist organization; property owners and businessmen, natives of South Korea and their families, and perhaps the worst counter-revolutionaries of all: Christians and their families.

Kim Il-Sung was setting up a state in which he would be “god,” something Christians would not accept. Kim knew that the church had played an important role in preserving Korean culture and resistance to Japanese colonization and therefore would be an obstacle to his own consolidation of power. By 1962, Kim Il-Sung boasted that: “We have executed all Protestant and Catholic church cadre members and all other vicious religious elements have been sent to concentration camps.”

Soviet style reforms under Kim Il-Sung were enacted including the nationalization of major industries, seizure of privately owned land, labor reforms and a propaganda campaign to enhance Kim Il-Sung’s image in the minds of the Korean people. Arbitrary line did not take into account the political boundaries, nor the natural features of waterways and rivers or the rail lines or highways. While the capital of Seoul was in the U.S. zone, almost all of the major industry including coal and electricity were produced in the North. At that time, northern Korea was the industrialized part of Korea while the south was largely agrarian.

### 3.2. KOREAN WAR

Having successfully consolidated power with the Soviet Union’s support, Kim was obsessed with attacking South Korea and reunifying Korea under communism. He prepared by getting substantial help from the Soviet Union including military advisors, who drew up invasion plans, and military equipment. By 1950, he had double the army, double the artillery and a six to one advantage in aircraft and tanks compared to South Korea. The month before the invasion, Kim Il Sung cynically and publicly wished for peaceful unification and a unified national assembly.

South Korea, weary of the constant threat of an invasion from the North, was totally caught off guard when the North attacked. The North Korean Army invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950, and took Seoul in just three days. President Harry S. Truman authorized U.S. air and naval support, sought, and won support from the United Nations to intervene on behalf of the Republic of Korea. Without the Soviet Union's presence, the UN Security Council voted for the first time for the United Nations to commit troops and support in defense of a member country.

Sixty-seven nations participated in the effort, the most nations in history to ever support an ally in war. Of that number, sixteen provided troops, with the vast majority of those troops coming from the United States of America, as well as the UN Force Commander: General Douglas MacArthur.



The troops are crossing 38th parallel- the border of North and South Korea-

During 1950, the UN Forces were driven back to the Pusan perimeter, but by September following a daring landing at Inchon planned by MacArthur, the UN Forces were able to liberate

not only South Korea but drive the North Korean Army back across the 38th parallel to the Manchurian border. Coming to Kim's rescue and motivated by concern that a united Korean democracy might be at China's border, Mao Zedong responded with the deployment of 300,000 Chinese Communists troops in its "War to Resist America and Aid Korea." The November, 1950 attack caught the Allies by surprise and the overwhelming number of Chinese troops forced an allied retreat which enabled the Chinese and North Korean forces to recapture Seoul in three months. The UN forces launched a counter offensive that retook Seoul and pushed the Chinese and North Korean forces back to the 38th parallel by the summer of 1951.

Only in recent years has the People's Republic of China acknowledged that it was North Korea that attacked South Korea and started the conflict. Its earlier statements blamed the United States for assembling a United Nations force and invading North Korea. Even today, however, there is debate about the number of Chinese casualties. The PRC officially recognized 183,108 deaths including noncombatants. The UN Forces estimate places the number at least 400,000 while others believe the Chinese casualties were close to one million. It is generally believed that China lost more soldiers than any country in the Korean War.

A formal treaty ending the Korean War has never been signed, but a ceasefire has remained in effect since the Korean War Armistice was signed on July 27, 1953.

## 4. BIOGRAPHY

### Kim reign over North Korea

North Korea has done the thing that no other major dictatorship has done, and that is keeping the dream of Kim's alive for three generations. When people think of Adolf Hitler, his Reich, and all the terror he brought to this world, people see it as the most successful dictatorships in history with all that he accomplished. His downfall is that his Reich and his beliefs were succeeded by no one to keep take his power and keep his dream alive. Many successful dictators in history left their heir to no one, therefore killing the idea of their mission to live on. When comparing Famous dictatorships to the current communist party that is running North Korea, you see that although they might have not accomplished as much as some of these more notorious rulers, the one thing they have done is passed on the torch of their mission. The North Korean government, although not being as huge of a threat such as other major dictatorships in the past, has still been able to keep control of the nation with no revolutions or issues.

*How did the North Korean government gain and maintain the power and avoid major conflict with both outside nations as well as keep their citizens from fighting back?*

There are five main methods the Kim regimes have used to maintain power: brainwashing, isolation, an elaborate classification system known as *songbun*, controlling access to resources, and fear through an elaborate system of “reeducation centers,” i.e. political prison camps. North Koreans are brainwashed from early childhood



Kim Il Sung, Prime Minister, Military Leader, President

to revere and honor Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-il as gods. They are fed a steady diet of propaganda to believe that they live in a “paradise” and are far better off than the rest of the world, and that South Korea is occupied by the “yankee imperialist wolves,” i.e. United States.

To control the population, Kim Jong-il established *juche* or kimjongilism, a national policy of self-reliance to differentiate his brand of Marxism from that of his Soviet sponsors. In North Korea's first years, its citizens were taught both Marxism and *juche*. Once the Soviet Union collapsed, *juche* became the central source of education and “group think” in North Korea. Every citizen is expected to study regularly at the hundreds of thousands of Kim Il Sung Revolutionary Research Centers. Daily allegiance is given to the required portraits of Kim Il Song and Kim Jong-il found in every home in North Korea. There are no opportunities for independent thought or even independent discussion as organizations such as unions, civic associations and even alumni groups are not allowed. Only the Worker's Party with its unswerving allegiance to the regime is permitted.

Isolation plays a central role in keeping the population literally “in the dark” about the outside world. All newspapers, books, and magazines are distributed by the government to glorify Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-il and now Kim Jong-un. North Koreans are forbidden to listen to foreign broadcasting or read foreign newspapers. They cannot travel outside their country without permission, nor can they even travel from one city to another without a permit.

In the 1960s, the regime established the *songbun* classification system in which there are 51 categories, almost like a caste or apartheid system. All resources are controlled—livelihood, school, lodging, whom one can marry are all based on your ranking. *Songbun* is inescapable and generational. Those highest on the *songbun* system, the “elites”, are considered the most loyal and are able to live in Pyongyang and have access to material goods, medical care, and other benefits. But, if your grandfather fled to South Korea or you had a relative who owned land or was a professional, no matter your talents or abilities, you will have a low *songbun* and be denied access to the best schools and best jobs in North Korea and forced to live outside the capital city.

The Public Distribution System, which provided for the distribution of food and material goods until its collapse during the famine years, also provided a means of control: those considered most loyal to the regime had access to food and material goods, while those considered hostile or wavering received limited distribution. For example, the elites would be given white rice, while those lower on the classification system would get corn meal. The cruelty of this system manifested itself most tragically during the famine of the 1990s where areas like North Hamyong Province, considered disloyal to the regime, were cut off from international food assistance. At

least one million North Koreans died from starvation (North Korean defectors estimate the deaths totaled closer to three million).

North Korea has an elaborate system of political prison camps that are as deadly as any Nazi death camp or Soviet gulag. Established by Kim Il Sung to imprison and “reeducate” potential opposition as he established his regime, there are estimated to be at least 150,000 to 200,000 people imprisoned in these camps today where they endure forced labor, beatings, forced abortions, torture, rape, starvation, and unsanitary conditions. Because the regime imprisons three generations of a family if one person is accused of a crime, even children are sent to these camps, and children are born to parents in these camps and can remain there for the rest of their lives.

By 2014, over 23,000 North Koreans had escaped to live in South Korea and other free nations. Their testimonies have confirmed that Kim Jong-il, the late father of the country’s current ruler, was among the world’s worst violators of human rights. Between failed economic policies, diversion of international food assistance, and a vast network of political prison camps, Kim Jong-il killed millions of Koreans. He was also involved in proliferating weapons of mass destruction; the transfer of nuclear technology to countries like Syria and Iran; international drug trafficking; currency counterfeiting; the abduction of South Korean, Japanese and citizens from at least ten other nations; and having continuously detained prisoners from the Korean War.

Since his ascension to power in 2011, Kim Jong-il’s son Kim Jong-un has given every indication of continuing his father’s cruel policies. The ongoing state of human rights in North Korea demands renewed attention and international pressure because while there has been growing awareness, little has been done to actually improve the human rights conditions for the North Korean people. For example, the United Nations (UN) launched a Commission of Inquiry (COI) on human rights in North Korea in 2013 which concluded in a report released in early 2014 that “unspeakable atrocities” were being committed and that “the gravity, scale and nature of these violations reveal a State that does not have any parallel in the contemporary world.” The UN COI furthermore stated these crimes against humanity had gone on for decades and are ongoing citing: “extermination, murder, enslavement, torture, imprisonment, rape, forced abortions and other sexual violence, persecution on political, religious, racial and gender grounds, the forcible transfer of populations, the enforced disappearances of persons and the inhumane act of

knowingly causing prolonged starvation.” Because of the crackdown on the China-North Korea border and China’s complicity in forcing escaping North Korean refugees back to North Korea, the North Korean refugee situation is worse today than ever before since Kim Jong-un came to power. The significant drop in North Koreans making it to freedom is clear evidence of this crackdown as there has been a steady decline in refugees making it to freedom each year but no improvement of internal conditions.

Over 24 million people live in a darkness of isolation and deprivation that the communist dictatorships of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong-il have produced and that continues today under the Kim Jong-un dictatorship despite increased awareness and appreciation for the atrocities being committed against the North Korean people.

The Korean peninsula also provides a vivid illustration of the effects of communism vs. democracy on a people group. Korea is a divided country where we can see and compare the results of two governmental systems: the communist Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (South Korea.)

Measurements of the health of a country provide a stark contrast between the two systems. South Korean men have a life expectancy of 76.67 years, women 83.13, while North Korean men have a life expectancy of 65.96 years and women 73.86 years. The most revealing contrast is the infant mortality rate, the number of infants that have died within a year of their birth. In South Korea this figure is 3.93 per one thousand births, while in North Korea this figure is 24.5 per one thousand births. Years of living under communism have even stunted the growth of the North Korean people, with North Koreans several inches shorter than their South Korean counterparts.

The economic systems also reveal a stark contrast in living standards with the annual per capita income of democratic South Korea \$33,200 compared to communist North Korea’s \$1,800. News coverage of North Korea tends to center on the threats and provocations of the Kim Jong-un regime and the regime’s development of its nuclear weapons program. But a new focus is emerging on the human rights conditions in North Korea, due to twenty thousand defectors and a landmark 2014 United Nations report that have confirmed what has long been suspected: North Korea is a land of unrelieved repression with no human rights or freedom for its citizens. It is a regime unlike any other in modern times.

## 5. ACTIVITIES

### 5.1. ACTIVITY 1: "Worship my grandmother"



Students read the following text and discuss how totalitarian regimes violate "Human Rights".

#### **"Kim Jong Un Bans Christmas, Forces Worship of Grandmother"**

*North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un is banning Christmas and forcing the entire country to celebrate the birth of his grandmother instead.*

*Many North Koreans already pay homage to Kim Jong-suk or "Sacred Mother of the Revolution," who was born on Christmas Eve in 1919. However, Jong Un is taking further steps to ban any celebrations of the birth of Christ.*

*Not only are the citizens being required to worship the wife of North Korea's first dictator and the mother of former leader Kim Jong II, they can no longer erect Christmas trees or display any religious symbols on trees.*

*The North Korean leader went as far as threatening South Korea in 2014, for its plans to erect a Christmas tree along its border.*

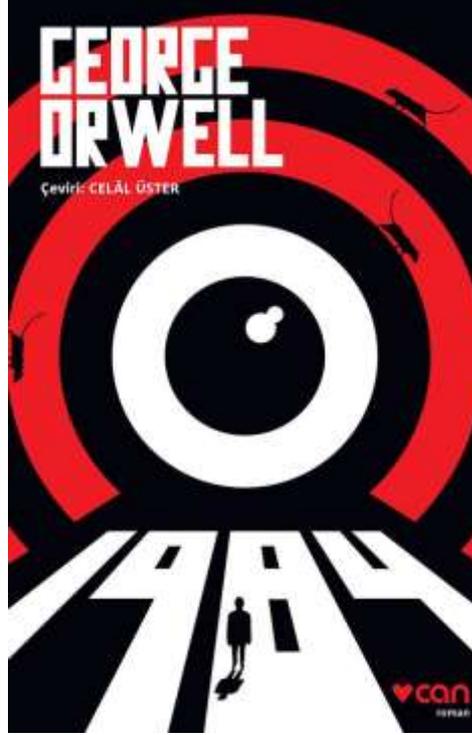
*The tree was never put up.*

*Experts say that this ban is a form of religious persecution as North Korea has clamped down on all Christian activities in the country.*

*"Under the rule of Kim Jong-Un, North Korea remains among the world's most repressive countries. All basic freedoms have been severely restricted under the Kim family's political dynasty," Humans Rights Watch wrote in a recent report on North Korea.*

*"The DPRK ostentatiously treats anyone of faith, but especially Christians, as hostile," Doug Bandow, a Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute, wrote. "Believers place loyalty to God before that of the North Korean state. Churches allow people to act and organize outside of state entities. Christianity also has ties to a world seen as almost uniformly threatening by Pyongyang."*

## 5.2. ACTIVITY 2: Through the perspective of George Orwell: 1984



Students read the novel *1984* by George Orwell and answer the questions.

1. What do you understand by George Orwell comment that “Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past? To what extent do you agree with it, and its implications?”
2. What are the similarities between Kim and Big Brother’s control mechanisms over civilians?

### 5.3. ACTIVITY 3: Limited technology, unlimited tyranny

- Students watch the video about “Growing Role of Technology in Modern Life” and read the following text.

[http://0ws.pw/0n/effects\\_of\\_technology.mp4](http://0ws.pw/0n/effects_of_technology.mp4)

- They are asked to think about Kim’s cruel success of maintaining the control of people through eliminating the opportunities of technology to reach the information, which will raise their awareness.

**Media within North Korea - known officially as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea - are among the most tightly controlled in the world, and fall under the governance of the Korean Workers' Party or, according to some - until his death - the "Dear Leader" Kim Jong-il himself.**

The regime bombarded the population with flattering reports about Kim Jong-il and his daily agenda, with radio and television reports often leading on Kim's guidance visits to industrial, agricultural or military sites, where he was often photographed and filmed offering advice to local workers or servicemen.

North Korea's economic hardships or famines are not reported to the domestic audience, which is instead informed of technological advances as a result of the Leader's revolutionary thinking.

The internet is still not readily available within the DPRK, but mobile phones have appeared on the streets of the capital after a ban was lifted in 2008.

#### **Tight control on radio, TV**

Press freedom organisation Reporters Without Borders often cited Kim Jong-il as a "predator of press freedom", with only Eritrea ranked below North Korea in its 2010 press freedom index. While state media remain tightly controlled, the NGO noted that there had been an increase in the flow of news and information into the North thanks both to foreign radio stations and organisations which send multimedia content across the border.

Korean Central Television is the state-run TV channel seen by North Koreans. The network carries news programmes, documentaries and other programmes praising Kim Jong-il and his

father Kim Il-sung. It also reports on authoritative statements from the North Korean government, party and military. In addition, it carries revolutionary dramas, operas and other entertainment programmes.

Pyongyang also operates a number of national and local radio networks, including a station intended for servicemen stationed on the contentious border with the South. Newspapers, such as the official party mouthpiece Rodong Sinmun, are all owned by the state.

Radio and TV sets in North Korea are supplied pre-tuned to government stations and radios must be checked and registered with the police. According to reports from dissident and defector groups, some North Koreans purchase a second radio set that is not registered, enabling them to listen to foreign broadcasts.

One radio network is wired into most residences and workplaces. This carries news and commentary that is considered too sensitive for consumption outside North Korea, such as criticizing economic activities that are inconsistent with national policy.

Reports from refugees say that there are also those who take the risk of opening the preset radios in order to be able to tune in other frequencies. A number of radio stations operate from the South, but it is difficult to find out how successful they are at reaching their intended audience.

#### **Internet use remains restricted**

Internet access in North Korea is restricted to a small section of the elite who have received state approval, and to foreigners living in Pyongyang. The only option, in the absence of a broadband network, is through satellite internet coverage, which is available in some tourist hotels.

Mobile phone use was banned in 2004, but a service was re-introduced in 2008, jointly operated by the Egyptian Orascom company and the state-owned Korea Post and Telecommunications Corporation. According to the Daily NK website, the new service, despite its cost, has proved popular among affluent party members in Pyongyang.

Domestic users are said to be able to access the official Uriminzokkiri web portal via the 3G mobile phone network.

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