

Nonfiction Reading Test

A Tale of Two Countries

Some call it the "Hermit Kingdom." It is a place where the outside world has been walled off. American pop music is illegal here and you can get executed for watching soap operas. This is not a make-believe world in a science fiction novel. It's a 46,000 square mile nation hanging off the east coast of China. It is one of the poorest nations in the world and it is armed with nuclear weapons. It is North Korea.

Immediately to the south lies a nation with one of the world's richest economies. About one-third of all phones and TVs are made here. The people of this nation are among the world's most educated. Unemployment is low, job security is high, and workers in this nation enjoy the highest salaries in Asia. It is South Korea. The people of this nation share origins with their northern neighbor, but they have since grown far apart.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (known to Westerners as North Korea) was founded in 1945 after World War II. Their neighbor at the end of the Korean Peninsula, South Korea or the Republic of Korea, was established at the same time. These two nations have an unusual history. For one thing, they have technically been at war since 1950.

Though they were born at the same time, these two countries had different parents. The United States supported South Korea in its infancy. China and the Soviet Union supported North Korea. The U.S. and the Soviet Union may have ended World War II as allies, but they had different ways of organizing their societies.

The U.S. is a capitalist country. That means that some people are rich and some people are poor. Resources are distributed unevenly. Business are owned by private entities. The Soviet Union claimed to have a communist system. That means that everybody supposedly gets the same. Resources are distributed more evenly. Business are owned in "common" by the government. These two superpower nations raised North and South Korea in their own images.

North Korea and South Korea share a border. Since they are locked in state of perpetual war, it's not a regular border with a simple checkpoint. The border they share is known as a "demilitarized zone." A demilitarized zone is supposed to be free from military installations. Yet, the Korean Demilitarized Zone is the most heavily militarized border in the world. Both nations have their biggest guns lined-up on the divide and pointed at the other side. It is literally the opposite of what the phrase "demilitarized zone" implies.

The two Koreas went to war in 1950. The North attacked and took over much of South Korea. But the United States jumped in and pushed the North Koreans back to the Chinese border. Then China got involved and pushed the Americans and South Koreans back. The nations agreed to a ceasefire. Millions of people were dead and the living returned to their original boundaries. The war never officially ended, though combat has ceased for the most part.



After the war, South Korea was one of the poorest nations in the world. In 1960 the average citizen made \$79 a year. The country did not have a lot of natural resources to sell, but they did have many hardworking people. During the 1960s, the country began manufacturing labor-intensive products. Selling these products to people in other nations made South Korea rich. They now have one of the largest and most thriving economies in the world. As of 2012, the average South Korean citizen makes around \$32,020 a year.

The economy of North Korea is dramatically different. Since its birth in the 1940s, North Korea has been one of the most secluded countries in the world. They promote an idea of self-reliance that they call Juche. Under this idea, they do little to no trading with other nations. Up until the 1980s, they received large cash infusions from China and the Soviet Union. But the Soviet Union fell apart in the 80s and became separate capitalist countries, of which Russia is largest. Without the Soviet contributions, North Korea entered a long period of *famine* that lasted through the 90s. Food was hard to come by and some estimate that millions of people starved to death. Still, the country persisted when much of the world thought that it would fall apart. Not only did they survive, they managed to build a nuclear arsenal during this time.

Someday Korea may be unified again. It seems unlikely now, but stranger things have happened. Yet, even if they did unify, how could these very different societies acclimate to one another? They have grown in different directions. One country is among the wealthiest, the other amongst the poorest. The average North Korean male is estimated to be five-inches shorter than a South Korean (some suspect because of malnutrition). With such big differences, will they ever be able to see eye to eye?