

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

STORY

North Korea's Military Posturing May Signal Leadership Shift, 06/02/2009

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/world/jan-june09/korea_06-02.html

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

[Student Worksheet](#) (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

PROCEDURE

1. WARM UP

Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

2. MAIN ACTIVITY

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

3. DISCUSSION

Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.]

INITIATING QUESTIONS

1. Where is North Korea? Who are its neighbors? What can you infer from its geography?

2. What is a military dictatorship?

3. What is Communism? Where is Communism practiced today?

4. When was the Korean War? What was at stake? How did it end?

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – [Student Worksheet](#)

1. Who is Kim Jong II?

ANSWER

The secretive leader of North Korea Kim Jong II, who recently set off international alarm bells by testing missiles and a nuclear device, has signaled that his 26-year-old son will assume the ruling family dynasty.

2. How is North Korea different from America?

ANSWER

Imagine living in a country where the military controls what you see on TV and the Internet, and life revolves around the cult of personality of the "Dear Leader," a short unpredictable man who wears platform shoes, drives fast cars and is obsessed with movies and theatrical spectacle.

One of the most isolated nations on the planet, North Korea has been developing nuclear weapons for decades.

3. Why do some analysts believe Kim Jong II is testing missiles and nuclear devices now?

ANSWER

Who will eventually rule the North after him has been the focus of intense media speculation since "Dear Leader" Kim, 67, reportedly suffered a stroke last summer. That sparked regional concerns about instability and a possible power struggle if he died without naming a successor.

Analysts believe he may be using the growing tension over nuclear and missile tests as leverage to nominate his own successor.

Immediately following the tests, North Korea sent a message to its diplomatic missions demanding diplomats pledge allegiance to Kim's 26-year-old third son, Jong Un, according to South Korean media reports.

4. What is known about Jong Un?

ANSWER

Little is known about the son, whose youth is a potential predicament in a society that greatly exalts the importance of seniority.

Born either in 1983 or early 1984, Kim Jong Un, studied at an international school in Switzerland and intelligence sources have said he appears to be the most capable of Kim's three known sons.

While studying in Switzerland, he avoided Western influences, returning home when not in school or eating with the North Korean ambassador, the BBC reported.

Kim Jong Il's former sushi chef, a Japanese man writing under the pseudonym Kenji Fujimoto, said in his memoir that the son looks and acts just like his father and is the leader's favorite.

Leader Kim has three known sons by two women. The eldest, Jong Nam, 38, had long been considered the favorite to succeed his father -- until he was caught trying to enter Japan on a fake passport in 2001. He reportedly told Japanese officials he wanted to visit Tokyo Disneyland.

Fujimoto said Jong Un is the "spitting image" of his father, but the young Kim has never been photographed by the Western media.

Kim Jong Un also apparently shares some of his father's health problems, and is reported to have diabetes and heart disease due to a lack of exercise.

Like his film-loving father, Jong Un is said to enjoy popular culture, and is apparently a fan of NBA basketball.

5. How does the Kim regime maintain power?

ANSWER

The Kim regime has been accused of massive human rights abuses by different organizations. It controls the media, does not allow for dissent, and reportedly holds hundreds of thousands of political prisoners.

Journalist Christopher Hitchens described the country in a 2005 article in Slate magazine: "In North Korea, every person is property and is owned by a small and mad family with hereditary power. Every minute of every day, as far as regimentation can assure the fact, is spent in absolute subjection and serfdom. The private life has been entirely abolished," Hitchens wrote.

While it maintains a large army, it relies on foreign aid to feed its poor population and suffers from economic and military sanctions imposed by the United Nations in 2006 as punishment for its pursuit of a nuclear weapons program.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

1. Why is President Obama concerned about what happens in North Korea?

2. From what you've read here, how is North Korea like a cult?

3. What do you think would happen if North Koreans suddenly had access to the internet and the Web?

4. What should be the U.S. policy towards North Korea?

5. Do you think Americans should be concerned with who rules North Korea? Why or why not?

Extension Activity

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.