First-Grade Lesson

K-Pop Demon Hunters

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Georgia Social Studies Standards

- **SS1G2** Identify and locate the student's city, county, state, nation (country), and continent on a simple map or a globe.
- **SS1G3** Locate major topographical features of the earth's surface.
  a. Locate all of the continents: North America, South America, Africa, Europe, Asia, Antarctica, and Australia.
  b. Locate the major oceans: Arctic, Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Ocean.
  c. Identify and describe landforms (mountains, deserts, valleys, and coasts).

Background Information

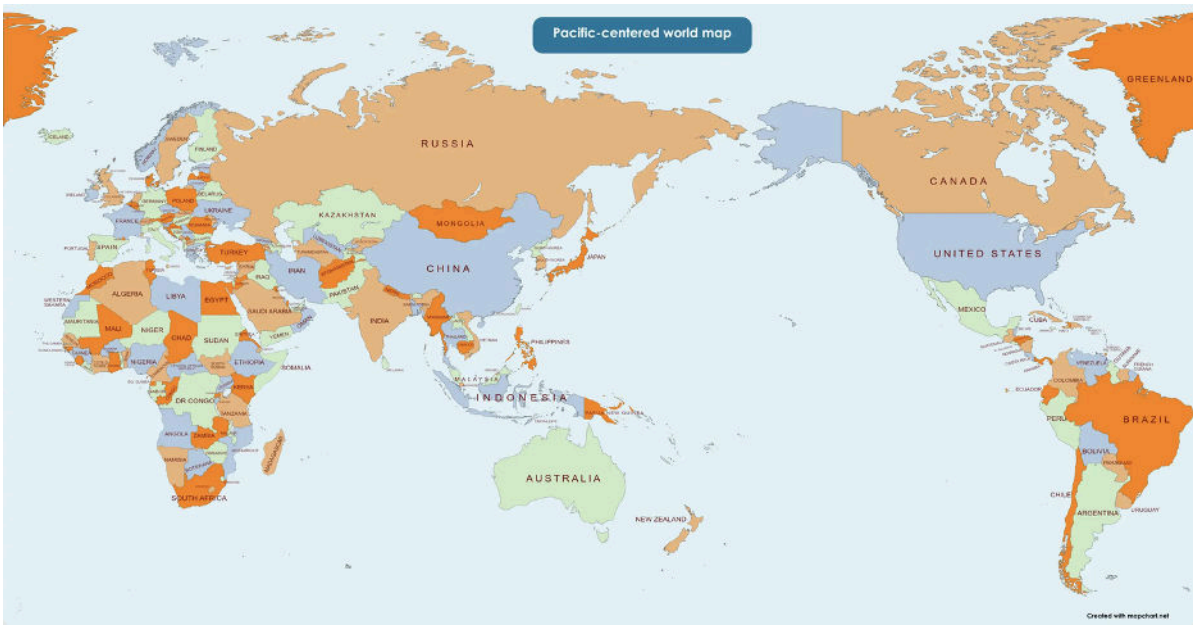


Long before K-pop became a global sensation, the vibrant landscape of East Asia was filled with rich folklore, towering landforms, and storytelling traditions passed down through generations. For today's students, the nation of South Korea is an exciting place that shows up in the music they listen to, the dances they practice, and the animated stories they love. A prime example of this is the hit animated musical-fantasy film *K-Pop Demon Hunters*, created by Maggie Kang and Chris Appelhans. Released globally on Netflix, the movie quickly became a massive cultural phenomenon, even appearing as a giant balloon in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

The story follows *Huntrix*, a girl group who are global pop stars by day and secret demon hunters by night, protecting the human world from bad spirits. While the bright colors and catchy songs feel modern, the film's roots run deep into traditional Korean history. By pairing the adventures of *Huntrix* with geography, teachers can guide young learners on a journey across oceans and continents to discover how ordinary people used art, humor, and their natural surroundings to share messages of hope and resilience.

To understand where this story begins, students must first look at their own place on the world map. Students learn to use a simple map or a classroom globe to identify and locate their own city, county, and the state of Georgia. From there, they zoom out to see that they live in the nation of the United States, which sits on the continent of North America. Once students have found their home, they can trace a path westward across the vast waters of the Pacific Ocean. Traveling west across this ocean brings the class to the continent of Asia, which is the home of South Korea.

This helps young learners contextualize Asia within the world's seven continents, alongside North America, South America, Africa, Europe, Antarctica, and Australia. Nestled on the eastern edge of Asia, South Korea is a peninsula surrounded by beautiful coasts and defined by its stunning natural features. South Korea is famous for its rolling mountains and deep green valleys, which stand in sharp contrast to flat deserts found in other regions of the globe. These mountains and valleys did not just shape the physical map; they also became the backdrop for centuries of Korean art and storytelling.





Deep within the animated world of *K-Pop Demon Hunters*, two characters named Derpy and Sussie bring laughter and joy to the screen. These two characters are walking, talking examples of ancient Korean folk art. Their playful banter and unlikely friendship are modeled directly after

minhwa (pronounced pronounced *meen-whah*), a style of traditional painting created by ordinary people rather than wealthy royal artists.

Specifically, Derpy and Sussie are a modern twist on a famous type of folk art called hojakdo (pronounced *ho-jahk-doh*), which translates to "painting of tigers and magpies". To fully appreciate why these characters matter, students can imagine traveling back in time to the late Joseon dynasty, a historical period spanning the 17th through the 19th centuries.





During this time, Korean society was organized under a very strict class system that separated wealthy aristocrats from ordinary commoners like farmers, artisans, and merchants. As the economy changed, ordinary people gained new opportunities and wealth, giving them the chance to make, buy, and enjoy art that reflected their own lives.

Every New Year, families would hang *hojakdo* paintings in their homes to welcome good fortune and keep their households safe. In these beautiful paintings, set against the natural landforms of the Korean landscape, two animals always took center stage.

Sussie mirrors the traditional magpie, a clever bird who acts as a cheerful messenger bringing glad tidings and good news. Derpy embodies the traditional tiger, a magnificent creature representing strength and guardianship.

However, these paintings also carried a secret, humorous message. Because everyday commoners were often treated unfairly by strict, powerful rulers, artists used *hojakdo* to safely poke fun at authority. They would paint the mighty tiger looking a bit foolish, silly, or clumsy, while the tiny magpie was painted looking brave, confident, and even scolding the giant beast.

This clever reversal allowed ordinary people to use humor as a form of quiet strength and resilience. Just like the ancient paintings, the film brings this tradition to life by making Sussie bold and witty, while Derpy balances his massive strength with a lovable, silly heart.

Suggested Teaching Activities

The lesson culminates in a hands-on creative workshop where first-grade students become folk artists themselves, focusing entirely on the creation of their own *hojakdo*.

To guide the students through this lesson, the teacher will lead the class through the following steps:

- **Step 1: Locate Our Home on the Map.** The teacher will gather students around a simple map or a classroom globe. Students will work together to identify and locate their own city, county, and the state of Georgia. From there, the teacher will help them zoom out to see that they live in the nation of the United States, which sits on the giant continent of North America.
- **Step 2: Journey across the Pacific Ocean to Asia.** Once students have found their home, the teacher will instruct them to place their fingers on North America and trace a path westward across the vast waters of the Pacific Ocean. Traveling west across this ocean brings the class to the continent of Asia, helping young learners contextualize Asia within the world's seven continents (North America, South America, Africa, Europe, Asia, Antarctica, and Australia). The teacher will point out Korea, nestled on the eastern edge of Asia.
- **Step 3: Introduce K-Pop Demon Hunters and Korean Folk Art.** Next, the teacher will play a short video clip and use lesson 1 of this PowerPoint presentation to introduce the film *K-Pop Demon Hunters* and traditional Korean folk art. Through the slides, the teacher will introduce the characters Derpy and Sussie, explaining how their friendship is based on *hojakdo* (traditional paintings of tigers and magpies). The teacher will show how traditional artists painted the strong tiger looking a bit silly and the tiny magpie looking brave and witty to make gentle jokes about powerful rulers, using this visual storytelling to show how ordinary people shared humor and hope.
- **Step 4: Students Making Their Own Hojakdo**. The teacher guides students to draw their own Hojakdo. Print out the appendix for each student. They can choose either a New Year's good-luck theme or a social-critique approach and add dialogue for the magpie and tiger in word bubbles. Then students will share their drawing with the class.
- **Step 5: Extension.** As a creative extension, students can discuss symbolic or meaningful animals from their own cultures and then create their own animal pairs to explore relationships or power dynamics in their lives or cultural contexts.

Suggested Resources

Introductory Video	A short introductory video on Minhwa—helpful as a lesson opener or visual hook. https://www.korea.net/Resources/Multimedia/Video/view?articleId=8056
Recorded Lecture	A comprehensive lecture providing art-historical context for Minhwa; useful for teacher background knowledge or student extension. https://old.koreasociety.org/component/k2/item/1663
PowerPoint Slides	Downloadable slides covering key themes, motifs, and examples of Korean folk painting for instructional use. https://lsa.umich.edu/content/dam/ncks-assets/ncks-documents/2013%20DoHee%20Morsman%20Korean%20folk%20painting.pdf
Background Article	A clear and accessible overview of Minhwa traditions, symbols, and cultural significance—ideal for teacher preparation. https://www.antiquealive.com/Blogs/Minhwa_Korean_Folk_Painting.html
Background Article	A teacher-friendly article on the history, styles, and meaning of Minhwa. https://www.cosycolours.nl/post/the-art-of-minhwa

Images Used:

1. Screenshots and poster from *K-Pop Demon Hunters* courtesy of Netflix, 2025.
2. Pacific Centered Map created with mapchart.net

Appendix. Graphic Organizer

Make Your Own Hojakdo

Decide what kind of *Hojakdo* you want to create—either a festive New Year scene or a playful critique of an unfair ruler. Imagine a short conversation between the magpie and the tiger. What might they be saying to each other? Write their dialogue in speech bubbles, then color your artwork to bring it to life!

