

HOME Story Time | October 2021

Lynden Sculpture Garden

HOME program: www.home-at-lynden.org

Recordings and downloads: www.lydensculpturegarden.org/calendar/home-story-time

Book, English & Spanish edition: *Waiting for Mama/엄마 마중* written by Lee, Tae-Jun and illustrated by Kim, Dong-Seong

HOME Story Time Readers: Jennifer Johung (English) and Kyoung Ae Cho (Korean)

Art activity by Lynden art educator: Claudia Orjuela

Synopsis

This story takes place in the early 1900's in Korea when the country was under Japanese occupation. In this quiet tribute to filial devotion, a little Korean boy climbs onto the high platform of a streetcar station to wait for his mother. As each streetcar arrives with passengers hurrying to and fro, he asks the driver if his mama is coming. Time passes, the wind blows and snow falls as the obedient child waits patiently without moving or speaking until his mother arrives. Presented in Korean Hangeul as well as English, the spare text depends on the illustrations for context and mood. The muted watercolors capture people and scenery as they might have appeared in Seoul in 1938, when the story was first published. A perfect union of text and illustration tell a simple but moving story.

Activity: Let's Share and Reflect!

1. There's an additional twist to the book mentioned by the illustrator in an interview, he said: In the book... "the real world was done in monotone, and the imaginary world had color". Check the book's illustrations again with this information in mind. Does the meaning of the story change? Is the reunion with the mother imaginary or did it actually happen?
2. In the picture book *Waiting for Mama*, the author does not describe what the boy is thinking or feeling, so there are questions left unanswered in the story. Let's try to answer these questions based on our own imagination and the historical context of Korea in 1938. What are your questions about the reading? What is the name of the boy? How old is he? Where did the mother go? Is there something delaying her return? Does the boy have a father?
3. Imagine that you are child waiting for mama in the train station day after day. Close your eyes and stand in the shoes of this little boy waiting for his mother to

arrive. How would you feel? Would you act the same way the boy does? Would you think of a different way to find your mother?

4. **Comparing and Contrasting.** *Waiting for Mama* was written in 1938, 83 years ago and it shows how the people and scenery looked back then in Seoul, Korea. Look closer to the book's illustrations: Observe how people dress, how people sit, how women carry their babies, and how people carry packages. Even today in Seoul, you can see people doing things like 80 years ago. Observe the illustrations closely and compare how these things are done in Korea and how people do the same things here in the United States.
5. **Imagine Alternative Endings.** The ending of the story is not a happy or sad ending, but rather an ambiguous one. The only indication that the child and mother end up together is from the illustrations which were added to the story in 2004; 66 years after the original story was written. The original story does not show a child and mother together in the end.

An ambiguous ending is an opportunity for us -the readers- to complete the story. The current ending is a mother and child walking through a snow-covered scene. Now, imagine an alternative or different ending. If you were the author, what ending would you give to the story? What happens to the boy and to the mother in this new ending? You can write or draw (or both) your alternative ending.

Citations

Yoo Kyung Sung. WOW Review Volume 1 Issue 2. Worlds of words. The University of Arizona. <https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/reviewi2/9/>

Kristi Loos. Bilingual Book Reviews: Waiting for Mama. <http://loosreviews.weebly.com/waiting-for-mama.html>

Interview with Illustrator, Kim Dong-Seong. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lv9Mj9WCIOo>