

BRINGING KOREAN AMERICAN ETHNIC STUDIES TO LIFE:

FROM TEACHING RESOURCES TO MEANINGFUL LEARNING
AND CLASSROOM APPLICATION

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Why Ethnic Studies? A Brief Historical Context

Origin

Social justice movements of the 1960s and 1970s challenged the absence of communities of color from curriculum.

Movement

The 1968-69 Third World Liberation Front **strike** at San Francisco State University helped lead the nation's **first College of Ethnic Studies**.

Core Commitments

- Counter-narrative
- Cultural identity
- Race, power & Justice
- Community knowledge & engagement
- Student voice & agency

KAES grew from this broader movement to make historically underrepresented communities visible within education.



From Advocacy to Curriculum Recognition

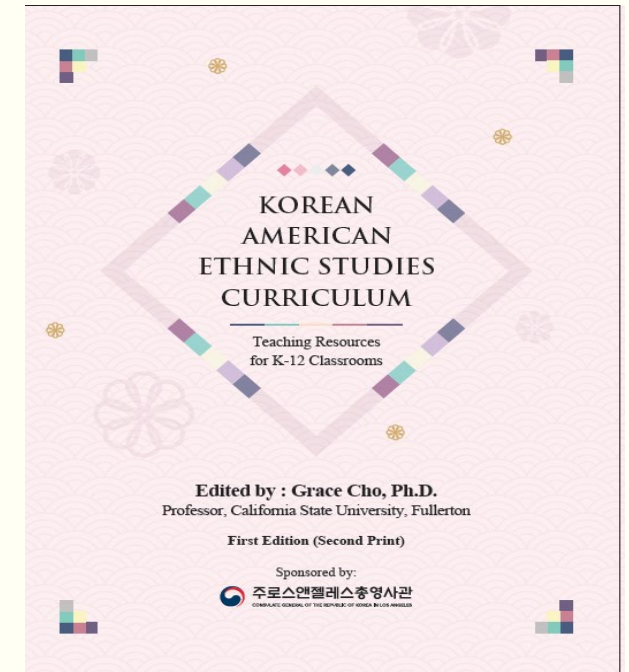
2020-2021| Building Korean American Representation in California's ESMC

- Korean American **educators, scholars, and community members** organized statewide advocacy.
- **Petitions, public comments, coalition-building, and community participation** strengthened the call for Korean American representation.
- Scholars and educators **contributed historical expertise and developed Korean American Ethnic Studies lessons.**
- Korean American experiences were **ultimately represented in California's adopted Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.**

Community Voice + Scholarship + Educator Expertise → Curricular Recognition

From Curricular Recognition to Usable Teaching Resources

- The original seven lessons provided an important foundation.
- The **supplementary curriculum team**:
 - Organized resources into eight thematic units.
 - Developed Teacher Guides
 - Added student activities
 - Developed assessments and rubrics
 - Created extensions and follow-up activities
 - Expanded instructional resources and references



Seven lessons → Eight thematic units → More practical and usable K-12 resources

- Supported by a **\$50,000 CSUF grant** and additional support from the **Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Los Angeles**.

From Seven Lessons to Classroom-Ready Resources

Units 1-4

1. Korean Diaspora & Korean Americans
2. Early Korean Immigrants & Dosan Ahn Chang Ho
3. Sammy Lee & Korean American Immigration
4. Korean Independence Movement

Units 5-8

5. Young Oak Kim: Hero & Humanitarian
6. Korean War & Transnational Adoption
7. Saigu & Social Justice
8. Korean Americans in the 21st Century/K-POP

★ Explore the digitalized resources: kasonline.net | kasef.org

★ **Recognition is not the endpoint.**

★ **Resources still require access, teacher learning, & thoughtful curricular application₅**

From Resources to Meaningful Practice

Strong teaching resources are the beginning—not the endpoint.

The next challenge is helping teachers recognize the connections that make culturally relevant resources meaningful for their students.





CONNECTING KOREAN AMERICAN STUDIES ACROSS DISCIPLINES

Candidates selected KAES lessons and asked: Where does this KAES resource connect authentically with my discipline and the students I may teach?

Math

Diaspora through
immigration data

PE

K-pop, movement,
and games

Life Science

Farms, labor, and
ecosystems

Music

Arirang, composers,
and cultural
meaning

Science

Kimchi as culture +
Chemistry

World Language/Social Studies

Sa-i-gu and
comparative history

Three Examples of Authentic Disciplinary Connection

	Science Kimchi, Culture & Chemistry	Math Diaspora Through Data	World Language/SS Connecting histories
KAES Resource	Korean food traditions and cultural significance (lesson 8)	Korean diaspora and post-1965 immigration (lesson 1)	Saigu/1992 Los Angeles (Lesson 7)
Disciplinary Connection	Fermentation, pH, enzymes, catalysts, activation energy (chemical processes)	Statistics, proportions, demographic patterns, data interpretation	Comparative inquiry with Zoot Suit Riots and other community histories.
Meaning	Cultural knowledge becomes the context for rigorous scientific inquiry	Immigration data opens inquiry into representation and the model-minority myth.	Students examine race, media, injustice, violence, memory, and community response.

Sometimes the Connection Surprises Us

“Arirang”

An older popular song becomes an unexpected point of recognition and connection.

WHAT HAPPENED ?

Music candidates—many of whom were not Korean—began singing Arirang. They already knew it.

WHAT DID IT REVEAL?

- Teacher Candidates bring cultural, disciplinary, and experiential knowledge that curriculum can activate.
- Teachers are not empty vessels—and neither are their students.

Music

Language

Memory

Community

What happens when Ethnic Studies becomes a point of connection rather than another body of content to “fit in”?



Four Dimensions of Meaningful Curricular Connection

Meaningful use emerged when candidates connected KAES resources to four dimensions.

Discipline

How does this connect authentically to my subject?

Students

How is this meaningful to my students?

Community

Whose histories, voices, and experiences are included or missing?

Teacher knowledge

What do I know, and what do I still need to learn?

Not every connection should be forced.

The goal is authentic connection that sustains rigor, representation, and relevance.



Representation Should Open Doors, Not Create Boundaries

“Everyone can benefit from learning about people and cultures who are different from them...”

— EDSC 410 Teacher Candidate

How do we affirm Korean American histories while creating meaningful entry points for all students?

How the Assignment Evolved

Earlier approach

- Choose one of eight KAES lessons
- Explore it deeply
- Connect it authentically to your discipline



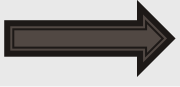
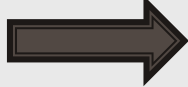
Current approach

- Explore KAES or another ethnic studies resource
- Consider students, community, and discipline
- Use an assets-based lens
- Design a meaningful classroom application

From using resources **to making thoughtful, inclusive curricular decisions.**



Korean American Stories Are American Stories

Korean Diaspora		Migration, immigration, transnational identity
Dosan Ahn Chang Ho		Labor, civic engagement, education, community building
Sammy Lee		Segregation, Immigration law, race, equity
Young Oak Kim		Military service, citizenship, leadership, hero
Korean War / Adoption		Cold War, displacement, family, identity
Saigu		Interethnic relations, systemic racism, solidarity, urban America.
K-pop /Hallyu		Media representation, identity, global culture

Korean American history is not peripheral to U.S. history—it is part of U.S. history.

FROM VISIBILITY TO MEANINGFUL LEARNING

What will it take for Korean American history to become part of the larger American story our students learn to call their own?

Resources are only the beginning.

Meaningful learning happens when educators, students, scholars, schools, and communities bring these histories to life.

The next chapter belongs to all of us.



Thank you!

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**Korean American Ethnic
Studies Curriculum:
Teaching Resources**

www.kasonline.net and/or
www.kasef.org