



# The Year of Impossible Goodbyes

Sook Nyul Choi

Teacher's Guide  
By Robin Stevens



LIVING  
LITERATURE  
SERIES

A Perma-Bound Production

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## Synopsis

Sookan is a ten-year-old Korean girl who lives in Pyongyang during the Japanese occupation in 1945. She lives with her mother, grandfather, Aunt Tiger, Kisa, and youngest brother, Inchun. Her three older brothers are in Japanese labor camps, her father works for the Korean independence movement in Manchuria, and her sister, Theresa, is a nun at a convent.

Sookan loves to study Korean language and history every morning under the watchful eye of her scholarly grandfather. Her mother has been successful in keeping her and her brother out of the Japanese schools Korean children are forced to attend. Her mother runs a sock factory on their property, and the family is hounded with daily visits from the Japanese police captain Narita. Sookan loves to talk to the sock girls as they come and go to work. One day they have a birthday party for Haiwon, a sock girl, but the police raid the party and ruin the festivities. Captain Narita orders the removal of their metal dishes and has the beautiful old pine tree in their yard cut down. The destruction of this beloved tree is the catalyst for the death of Sookan's grandfather three days later.

Devastated by the events, Sookan's mother goes into mourning. Then, Captain Narita threatens to take her sock girls to serve as "spirit girls" for the Japanese soldiers at the front. The entire family works day and night to save the sock girls, but to no avail. The sock girls are taken away. Soon after, Sookan and Inchun are sent to a Japanese school where they are forced to make weapons to be

used against "the white devils," the Americans.

When Mother falls deathly ill, Kisa travels to the convent to get medicine and discovers that the war has ended. After the Japanese retreat, the Korean citizens revel in their newfound freedom, pulling out hidden stores of rice and traditional Korean clothing. Korean flags are hung everywhere as people rejoice at once again being able to speak

Korean freely in the streets. This joy, however, is short-lived as the wounded and sick men begin to return from the labor camps. Sookan's family waits in vain for the return of their family members.



Shortly after the Japanese retreat, the Russian troops move in and Korea is split into two parts at the 38th parallel. The Korean people are forced to attend Communist meetings and hail Mother Russia. Soon the town of Pyongyang is worse off than before. Both children and adults are urged to turn in their family and friends as traitors. Sookan's family lives in fear, waiting anxiously for word from her father and brothers. At last, Kisa sees Sookan's father, who is helping

people escape to South Korea. Her father arranges for Sookan, her mother, and brother to escape, but their guide turns out to be a double-agent and their mother is captured. For several days, Sookan and her brother look for their mother until a kindly old man at a train station advises them to leave before they are captured by the Russians, and helps them escape.

Sookan and her brother make it under the barbed wire fence of the 38th parallel to safety and join their father and brothers in Seoul. Six months later their mother arrives. Theresa also escapes and tells them that Kisa and Aunt Tiger were executed as traitors. They never hear of the sock girls again.

## Author Sketch

Soak Nyul Choi was born in Pyongyang, Korea. She later came to the United States, where she obtained her B.A. degree from Manhattanville College. A former teacher of elementary school in New York City, Choi has two daughters. She is now a writer and teacher of creative writing to high school students in Massachusetts.

Choi began writing as a grammar school student in Korea. Her early love of books served as the backdrop for her writing aspirations and desires. After teaching in American schools for almost twenty years, she began writing in English. She received numerous accolades for her *Year of Impossible Goodbyes*, among them a Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books Blue Ribbon Book citation, an American Library Association Children's Notable Book citation, an American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults citation, the Judy Lopez Book Award in 1991, an American Bookseller Pick of the Lists citation, and the New York Public Library best book for teenagers citation. In 1992, she won the Cambridge YWCA Women of Achievement Award and was also a selected author for the creative writing workshop at Boston Public Library.

*Echoes of the White Giraffe*, the sequel to *Year of Impossible Goodbyes*, was published in 1993. Through her writing, she brings to life the culture and history of Korea, thus helping Americans and others gain insight into a very different and interesting culture.

## Critic's Corner

*The Year of Impossible Goodbyes* is a beautifully written tale of a young girl's experience during war. Michael Shapiro of the *New York Times Book Review* called the book a "powerful and moving autobiographical novel" that would also be suitable for adults.

While the story may be suitable for adults, its impact will not be lost on young adults. The story tells us what it is like to live in an occupied country under wartime conditions. Sookan's family handles their fears and sorrows with bravery and determination, providing an example of what people can do in the face of hardship and misery.

The popularity of this book almost certainly stems from its quality as well as its ability to pull in the reader. While some of the adult themes of the book may be difficult for the younger readers to understand, they will understand the struggles, hopes, and desires of Sookan to be with her family and friends, and to live in peace once again. For multicultural classrooms, this book will serve as the forum for much discussion and comparison as children from different cultural backgrounds will be able to share their own culture and experiences, thus broadening the scope of any class and enhancing the powerful nature of the book.

## General Objectives

1. To gain some knowledge of recent world history
2. To gain a better understanding of Korean culture
3. To gain an understanding that different Asian countries such as Japan and Korea, have different religious, political, and cultural beliefs
4. To learn some foreign language vocabulary words

## Specific Objectives

1. To be able to retell the story of *Year of Impossible Goodbyes*
2. To be able to tell how Korea was divided into North and South
3. To be able to recognize and use vocabulary words from *The Year of Impossible Goodbyes*

## Meaning Study

In italics below are words that have a specific meaning in the novel. Explain the meaning of each. Page numbers pinpoint the context in which the item appears.

1. The sun reflected off the handle of his sword, the rims of his glasses, and his gold and red epaulets. (p. 6)  
(*A decorative shoulder piece worn on uniforms.*)
2. A smile played upon his lips as he examined us with apparent disdain. (p. 6)  
(*To think something or someone is unworthy.*)
3. The women in town called him "Patriot Grandfather" or "Scholar Grandfather." (p. 3)  
(*A learned person, someone who has a great deal of knowledge.*)

4. Theresa, my oldest sibling, had entered the convent when I was very little. (p. 21)  
*(A brother or sister.)*
5. She knew the honor that was being bestowed upon her. (p. 25)  
*(To give or confer, to present as a gift, prize, or honor.)*
6. Aunt Tiger, tired and somber, left the room. (p. 37)  
*(A feeling of gloominess and depression.)*
7. There were massacres in all the small Korean settlements. (pp. 39-40)  
*(The indiscriminate, unnecessary killing of a large number of people. A senseless mass killing.)*
8. I always had a vague notion that something horrible might happen if the girls did not produce enough socks. (p. 53)  
*(Not clear or definite about something.)*
9. I could sense that with each passing day, Mother and Aunt Tiger were growing more and more apprehensive. (p.57)  
*(Uneasy or fearful that something might happen.)*
10. There was no break from these tedious recitations. (p.74)  
*(Long and tiresome activity, causing boredom.)*
11. Suddenly the familiar Japanese national anthem came blaring over the loudspeaker. (p. 70)  
*(A hymn or song of praise, devotion, or patriotism.)*
12. He swung his arms back and forth vigorously to help propel himself to town. (p. 86)  
*(To move with lots of energy.)*
13. That dull burlap funeral outfit made her look like a dying old woman. (p. 96)  
*(A plain-woven, rough brown fabric.)*
14. The smell of dark bread permeated the air. (p. 103)  
*(To fill something up or saturate.)*
15. The little proletariat can do important work. (p. 108)  
*(Working-class people.)*
16. In the meantime, be very visible at the Party meetings, praise Communism, and hoist the red flags high. (p. 117)  
*(To raise up or lift.)*
17. The station became chaotic as people got off the train. (p.129)  
*(Very confused or disorderly situation.)*
18. I had heard horrible stories about Communist interrogation techniques. (pp. 147-148)

- (A period of questioning, usually by an official.)*
19. I hoped he might prattle on about something as my head was aching from trying to think about what we should do next. (pp. 151-152)  
*(To talk or babble about something unimportant.)*
20. It came as no surprise to me that the Comrade Major was less ominous. (p. 149)  
*(Something threatening or possibly harmful.)*
21. My head started to spin when I looked at the dark turgid waters below. (p. 163)  
*(Swollen or distended.)*
22. He offered shelter and employment to many refugees from the North. (p. 167)  
*(People who flee from a place of danger or trouble.)*
23. Inchun and I remained in bed for several weeks recuperating. (p. 166)  
*(To get better after being sick, tired, or injured.)*
24. What is an epilogue? (p. 166)  
*(The conclusion or ending of a story.)*

## Comprehension Study

### Chapters 1-2

1. On page 1, why is “the spring day no different from the bitter gray days of winter for the people of Kirimni, Pyongyang”?  
*(Spring is normally a time of hope and renewal; however, because the Japanese occupation has lasted so long, the Korean people feel hopeless, like it is always winter.)*
2. Why wasn’t Kisa taken to a labor camp with the other men?  
*(Kisa was crippled by an injury and he has a limp.)*
3. Why is the pine tree in the front yard special?  
*(It is considered a magic tree that represents peace and harmony, important concepts in Korean culture.)*
4. Why did Grandfather insist that Mother include the Korean word “chun” in the names of Sookan’s brothers?  
*(The word “chun” means spring. He hoped that the Korean people might enjoy the beauty and wonder of spring again, free from Japanese oppression.)*

5. How did Aunt Tiger earn her nickname?  
*(She liked to tell stories about tigers.)*
6. What does it mean on page 17 when it says “the sock girls disappeared into the liberation of darkness”? What is the liberation of darkness?  
*(The liberation of darkness is evening, when the sock girls were able to go home and rest. So, the setting of the sun liberated them, or set them free, from their hard work.)*
7. Why did the nuns at the convent have more news about the war than the people of Pyongyang?  
*(They had a radio hidden in the basement of the convent and also had some contact with American priests.)*
8. How did Captain Narita punish Grandfather for writing Chinese and Hangul?  
*(He had his beloved tree cut down.)*

**Chapters 3-4**

1. On page 34, the author describes Grandfather’s hair as “combed into lifeless perfection.” What does this make you think of? Why does it upset Sookan?  
*(Sookan has always seen Grandfather’s hair flying wildly in the wind. Now his hair is combed into an unnatural state, representing death. Sookan wants to see it full of life again.)*
  2. Why did the Japanese cut off Grandfather’s and the other scholars’ topknots?  
*(Scholars are very respected in Korean culture. When the Japanese gathered the scholars in a square and cut off their topknots, they were symbolically trying to cut off the living roots of Korean culture and identity.)*
  3. What is an independence movement? Why did Sookan’s family become involved in an independence movement?  
*(An independence movement is an organized attempt to claim freedom from the oppressor. Sookan’s family wanted the Japanese to leave Korea.)*
  4. On page 44, it says that Grandfather “swallowed his sorrow.” What does it mean, to swallow sorrow?  
*(He did not want to share his pains and sorrows*  
*with Sookan and Inchun, so he was quiet and did not complain.)*
5. What are “conflicting emotions”? Have you ever had conflicting emotions?  
*(Conflicting emotions are when one part of you feels one way and another part feels a different way. For example, when Sookan didn’t like being a Korean child because she thought the Japanese children were more fortunate, she was having conflicting emotions.)*
  6. Who is Nuna? Why is she called Nuna?  
*(Sookan is Nuna. Nuna is the Korean word for big sister.)*
  7. Where did Captain Narita take the sock girls? What is the front?  
*(Captain Narita took the sock girls to be “spirit girls.” The spirit girls—more commonly known as “comfort women”—were women and girls forced into brutal sexual slavery as prostitutes for Japanese soldiers. An estimated 200,000 women of Chinese, Korean, Dutch, and other nationalities were used by the Japanese Army for this purpose throughout the war zone. Of these, only 25 percent lived through the war. Those who survived often faced intense shame, post-traumatic stress, and ongoing health problems due to venereal disease and physical abuse, including the inability to have children. Very few of those responsible for these war crimes were ever punished. The front is the area where the opposing forces meet in combat.)*
  8. What did the police take from Sookan’s mother during the night? Why?  
*(They took the sock-making machinery. They planned to use the metal for weapons and said Mother did not need the machines anymore since she did not have any workers.)*

**Chapters 5-6**

1. What did Sookan daydream on the way to her first day of school?  
*(She imagined that a Buddha fell out of the sky and the Japanese could not make it move. The Korean students laughed at the Japanese police and, finally, the Japanese police laughed with them.)*
2. Why was it so important to sing the Japanese

national anthem?

*(Because the Korean children would be punished harshly for not showing their loyalty to Japan by knowing the words to the song.)*

3. Why did the students always face east when they stood at attention?  
*(To face the shrine of the Shinto god, which faces the direction of the sunrise as well as the Japanese Emperor's palace in Japan.)*
4. What did the Japanese mix with the rice Sookan's mother and Aunt Tiger bought?  
Why?  
*(Since the rice was sold by weight, they mixed sand with the rice to make the bags heavier so they could make more money from the Koreans, thus cheating the Koreans. The Koreans couldn't protest for fear of retribution.)*
5. Why wasn't it safe to go in the streets even though Sookan's family knew the war was over?  
*(The Japanese still had not retreated and were armed and dangerous. After they left with their families, it was safe to go out.)*
6. What is "newfound freedom"? What are some of the things Sookan and her brother, Inchun, do with this freedom?  
*(It is freedom that you have not had in a while: They planted flowers, read books, studied, practiced writing Hangul and Chinese characters, listened to records, etc.)*
7. What does "Korea was a little shrimp caught in a struggle between giants" mean? Who are the giants?  
*(The superpowers of Russia, Japan, and China—the giants—all fought for control of little Korea—the shrimp.)*
8. How did Korea get divided into two parts?  
*(The Russians moved into North Korea and the Americans stayed in the South, dividing the country into two parts at a border called the 38th parallel.)*

#### Chapters 7-9

1. Why didn't Mother trust the Russians?  
*(She thought the Russians were lying when they promised equality and food, but that many*

*Koreans were so worn down from the years of struggle with the Japanese that they believed the Russians.)*

2. What are Town Reds and Phony Reds or Pinks? What was Sookan's family considered?  
*(Town Reds are Koreans that supported the Russians and Communism, and Phony Reds or Pinks are the Koreans who did not. Sookan's family was considered Phony Reds.)*
3. What did Natasha and Comrade Kim want the children to tell about their families? What did Sookan and Inchun tell? What would you do?  
*(They wanted the children to spy on their families, so they would know who the "traitors" were. Sookan and Inchun fabricated stories at home with their family to tell at school so they would not be considered traitors.)*
4. Who found Sookan's father? What did Sookan's father say?  
*(Kisa ran into Sookan's father on the road. Father said that her brothers were safe in the south and gave Kisa directions for Sookan, Mother, and Inchun to escape.)*
5. What did Aunt Tiger do to help the family? Was it helpful?  
*(She volunteered to do more work for the Communists to make the family look dedicated to Russia and keep people from thinking they might be planning an escape.)*
6. Why did the guide tell Sookan and Inchun not to tell anyone who their mother was?  
*(So people would not think they were trying to escape.)*
7. What happened when they tried to escape with their mother?  
*(The children went through the checkpoint, but their mother was detained. They followed the guide to the old woman's house, where they stayed overnight.)*
8. Describe the old woman in the thatched-roof house. What did she tell the children? Do you think she was helpful?  
*(She told them the guide was a double-agent, gave them food, and asked them to leave since she could be arrested. Answers will vary.)*

**Chapters 9-10**

1. Where did Sookan and Inchun live for three days and how did they get food to eat? What would you do?  
*(They slept in a barn and babysat for a vendor while they watched for their mother. The woman gave them steamed corn at the end of each day as payment for their services.)*
2. On the fourth day, what daring thing did Sookan and Inchun do? Why was it daring?  
*(They went to the checkpoint where their mother disappeared and asked what the guards had done with her. It was daring because they could have been captured and taken away.)*
3. Did the Russian soldier, Dobraski, help them? How?  
*(He gave them some bread, brought them to another guard shack to ask about their mother, and then motioned for them to leave the guard-house area before it got dark.)*
4. Who helped the children after they left the guard station?  
*(An old man who swept the train station. He helped them escape and gave them food.)*
5. Why was the man "at risk" by helping the children? What would you have done if you had been the man?  
*(He would have been considered a traitor and probably killed if he had been caught. Students' answers will vary.)*
6. What didn't the old man tell the children about their escape route?  
*(He didn't tell them they had a train trestle, or bridge, to cross before they could run for the 38th parallel.)*
7. What happened after Sookan and Inchun crossed the bridge?  
*(They ran about a quarter of a mile toward the fence and crawled underneath to safety, with dogs and Russians chasing them. The Red Cross took care of their wounds and sent them to Seoul to be with their father and brothers.)*

**Epilogue**

1. When did they find their mother after they arrived in South Korea?

*(She did not escape to South Korea until six months later.)*

2. What were Sookan's father and brothers doing in Seoul?  
*(Their father owned a soy sauce factory and was helping refugees. Her brothers all attended universities.)*
3. How did Sookan's mother find tunnels? What were the tunnels for?  
*(Sookan's mother accidentally fell into a tunnel when she was trying to escape. The tunnels were built by the Communists to invade the South.)*
4. Why didn't peace and happiness last for Sookan and her family?  
*(In 1950, war broke out between North and South Korea.)*
5. What happened to the people they left behind?  
*(Kisa and Aunt Tiger were called traitors and executed. They never heard anything about the sock girls or Sookan's friend, Unhi. Theresa escaped with the other nuns.)*

**Alternate Assessment**

1. What is the plot of this story?  
*(It is the story of how Sookan and her family endured the hardships of the Japanese occupation only to face the arrival of the Russians, the division of Korea into two parts, and their dangerous escape to South Korea.)*
2. Who are the characters?  
*(Main characters: Sookan, Inchun (her youngest brother), Mother, Grandfather, Aunt Tiger, Kisa. Other characters: Father, Sookan's three brothers (Hanchun, Jaechun, and Hyunchun), the sock girls (Haiwon, Okja), Captain Narita, Narita Sensei, Unhi, Natasha, Comrade Kim, the guide, old woman in hut, old man in train station, mother with baby, Russian soldiers (Dobraski).)*
3. Is this a story of courage and bravery or is it about cowardice, or giving up? Why?  
*(It is a story of a brave family and their efforts to beat the odds by trying to escape from oppression to freedom. It also tells about their efforts to retain their culture despite continuous efforts by the Japanese occupiers to destroy it.)*

## Across the Curriculum

### Drama

1. Produce a play as a class project. Have students research Korean language, culture, and history to help produce the play accurately.

### Art

1. Find a book on how to write Hangul and Chinese characters. Have the class try to write some characters, like the ones mentioned in *The Year of Impossible Goodbyes*.
2. Find pictures of Korean and Chinese art. Have the class make wrapping paper or book covers by tracing the pictures, like Sookan and Inchun.
3. Have your students draw pictures of the story as they see it and make a book. Students who do not like to draw can write the story lines to accompany each picture.
4. Have an art show that showcases the work the students have done.

### Geography

1. Draw a map that shows Korea, China, Japan, and Russia. Show where Sookan's family lived. Illustrate their travels with dotted lines.
2. Draw a map illustrating Sookan's escape route. Include rivers, bridges, hills, etc.

### Language and Culture

1. Have students write down all the italicized words in the text and make an alphabetized dictionary or glossary of the Korean, Japanese, and Russian words.
2. Have the students make a chart illustrating the foods eaten by people from different countries in the book. Add American food to the chart, and compare and present to the class.
3. Have the students study the descriptions of different clothing in the book. For a research project, have the students study funeral clothing worn by different cultures, starting with Sookan's friend, Unhi.
4. Discuss the idea of symbols of culture with the students. In groups have students identify American symbols of culture, such as apple pie and baseball, and the symbols of Korean culture in the book (the pine tree, topknots, etc.)
5. Make flags from the different countries represented in the story.

### History/Social Studies

1. Have students name the different religions in the book on a chart and then research and do a report for the class on the differences between each one.
2. In pairs or groups, have students do reports on capitalism, communism, socialism, etc. Then have the students get into new groups, with one student from each philosophy represented, and discuss and compare their research.
3. Study World War II. Have different students study different countries during that period and construct an illustrated and annotated class map showing what was happening in each country during that time.

### Other

1. Try to make dye out of rose petals and dye fingernails as Sookan did in the story, or use as coloring far pictures.
2. Using items that produce different tones, have the students make a secret code that can be used like the pots and pans in the story.

## Student Involvement Activities

1. Have your students pick a character and write a description of that character's personality and life. Afterwards, have students read about their character and have the rest of the class guess who the character is.
2. Have students interview adult immigrants in your community and report on their life experiences. Either write a report, discuss in groups, or make a presentation for class. Illustrate with family trees, maps, etc.
3. Have a Korean culture week: break the class into teams, with each team researching different aspects of Korean culture, such as religion, food, and history. The week culminates with a Korean day that includes food, costumes, storytelling, a guest speaker, etc. Invite students from other classes to visit.
4. Have the students make a time line that illustrates the events in Sookan's life or in Korea.
5. If you have a multicultural classroom, ask the students to tell the class about their family or someone else they know who had experiences similar to Sookan and her family. Use a family tree, pictures, etc., to tell the story.
6. Have books available from the related reading

list for your students to read during silent reading time or at home for book reports. Compare the stories, events, and circumstances in each book and report to class individually or in small groups.

## Related Reading

- Choi, Sook Nyul. *Echoes of the White Giraffe*. Houghton Mifflin Co., 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Gathering of Pearls*. Houghton Mifflin Co., Sept. 1994.
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- Nash, Amy. *North Korea*. Chelsea House, 1990.
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- Teigen, Diane, ed. *Something About the Author*. Vol. 73, pp. 32-33. Gale Research, Inc., 1993.



## Vocabulary Test

Match each of the following vocabulary words in Column A with their definitions in Column B.

### Column A

1. \_\_\_\_\_ epaulet
2. \_\_\_\_\_ disdain
3. \_\_\_\_\_ scholar
4. \_\_\_\_\_ sibling
5. \_\_\_\_\_ bestow
6. \_\_\_\_\_ somber
7. \_\_\_\_\_ massacre
8. \_\_\_\_\_ vague
9. \_\_\_\_\_ tedious
10. \_\_\_\_\_ epilogue
11. \_\_\_\_\_ anthem
12. \_\_\_\_\_ vigorously
13. \_\_\_\_\_ burlap
14. \_\_\_\_\_ permeate
15. \_\_\_\_\_ proletariat
16. \_\_\_\_\_ hoist
17. \_\_\_\_\_ chaotic
18. \_\_\_\_\_ ominous
19. \_\_\_\_\_ refugees
20. \_\_\_\_\_ recuperate

### Column B

- a. long and tiresome, boring
- b. ending of a story
- c. not clear or definite
- d. people fleeing from place of danger
- e. to fill up or saturate
- f. to move with lots of energy
- g. to raise up or lift
- h. a learned person
- i. get better after being sick
- j. gloomy and depressing
- k. working class people
- l. decorative piece worn on uniforms
- m. killing many people for no reason
- n. a song of praise or patriotism
- o. something threatening or harmful
- p. very confused or disorderly
- q. to give or confer upon
- r. brother or sister
- s. to think something is unworthy
- t. a plain-woven, rough brown fabric

## Comprehension Test A

### Part I: Multiple Choice (20 Points)

Read the question carefully and write the letter of the best answer in the space provided.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. During the Japanese occupation, Sookan's mother ran a \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. rice factory
- b. soy sauce factory
- c. sock factory

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. The imperial police punished Grandfather for writing in Chinese and Hangul by \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. cutting down the pine tree
- b. taking his brush and ink away
- c. cutting off his topknot

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. Sookan's father worked for the \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. Japanese police force
- b. Korean independence movement
- c. American church movement

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. Sookan was expelled from school because she \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. lost her mother's hairpin
- b. could not sing the anthem
- c. clapped for a boy

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. Kisa found out the war was over when he \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. visited the convent
- b. went to the market
- c. escaped to the south

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. After the Japanese left, Sookan's father and brothers went to \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. Manchuria
- b. South Korea
- c. America

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. Aunt Tiger helped the family with their escape by \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. volunteering for more work
- b. packing their suitcases
- c. working for the Japanese

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. The old woman in the thatched-roof house told Sookan and Inchun that \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. their father was a spy
- b. the guide was a double-agent
- c. she would help them escape

\_\_\_\_\_ 9. Sookan and Inchun escaped to South Korea \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. with the train conductor
- b. with their mother
- c. by themselves

\_\_\_\_\_ 10. This story can be described as a story of \_\_\_\_\_.

- a. courage
- b. cowardice
- c. crime

**Part II: True/False (20 points)**

Read each statement carefully and circle the best answer.

- T F 1. Kisa was taken to a labor camp because of his limp.  
T F 2. Captain Narita worked at a sock factory with Sookan's mother.  
T F 3. Japanese school, the Korean children could only speak Japanese; otherwise they were punished.  
T F 4. All members of Sookan's family were considered Town Reds.  
T F 5. Aunt Tiger escaped to South Korea with Sookan's mother.  
T F 6. Nuna is the Korean word for big sister.  
T F 7. Sookan's sister was a nun at a convent.  
T F 8. According to Sookan's grandfather, dragons symbolize good fortune and dignity.  
T F 9. Grandfather lost his toenails in an accident.  
T F 10. The Naritas occupied a house owned by Sookan's friend Unhi's family.

**Part III: Short Answer (20 points)**

Answer the following using complete sentences.

1. Describe Sookan.

2. Describe Sookan's family.

Tell about the schools Sookan and Inchun attended in Pyongyang. Include examples of their activities in school.

4. How did Sookan and Inchun escape Pyongyang?

**Part IV: Essay (40 Points)**

In two or three paragraphs, retell the story of Year of Impossible Goodbyes.

## Comprehension Test B

### Part I: Multiple Choice (20 Points)

Read the question carefully and write the letter of the best answer in the space provided.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. The nuns at the convent had more news about the war because they \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. lived in Seoul
  - b. knew Japanese spies
  - c. had a radio
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Grandfather died after the Japanese police \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. took away his shoes
  - b. cut off his toenails
  - c. cut down the pine tree
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. The Korean word for big sister is \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. Nuna
  - b. Narita
  - c. Chun
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. At the Japanese school, Sookan and Inchun had to \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. study hard
  - b. make weapons
  - c. make socks
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. North and South Korea are divided into two parts \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. in Seoul
  - b. at the 38th parallel
  - c. in Pyongyang
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. The Russians promised the Korean people \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. work and money
  - b. freedom and school
  - c. equality and food
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Kisa finally saw Sookan's father \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. in North Korea
  - b. at the 38th parallel
  - c. in South Korea
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Sookan's mother \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. escaped with Sookan and Inchun
  - b. was captured at the checkpoint
  - c. was executed as a traitor
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. The old man at the train station \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. was a double agent who turned Mother in
  - b. helped Sookan and Inchun escape
  - c. escaped along with Sookan and Inchun
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Kisa and Aunt Tiger were \_\_\_\_\_.
- a. called traitors and executed
  - b. double agents for the Russians
  - c. in Seoul with Sookan's family

### Part II: True/False (20 Points)

Read each statement carefully and circle the best answer.

- |   |   |                                                                      |
|---|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| T | F | 1. Sookan's grandfather lived in Manchuria.                          |
| T | F | 2. The Japanese police took machines from Sookan's family.           |
| T | F | 3. Sookan gave her lunchbox to a friend at school.                   |
| T | F | 4. The Russians came to Korea when the Japanese left.                |
| T | F | 5. A train conductor risked his life to help Sookan and her brother. |

- T F 6. The sock girls never came back from the front.  
T F 7. The Japanese wanted the Koreans to pray to Buddha.  
T F 8. Sookan once painted her fingernails using rose petals.  
T F 9. Children studied reading, writing, and math at the Little Proletariat school.  
T F 10. Many Koreans were upset that the Americans did not come to the north to save them from the Russians.

**Part III: Short Answer (20 points)**

Answer the following using complete sentences.

Describe Inchun, Sookan's brother.

2. Describe Sookan's Grandfather.

3. Why did Sookan's family leave Pyongyang?

4. Tell about Sookan's escape.

**Part IV: Essay (40 points)**

In two or three paragraphs, describe what life was like for the people of Pyongyang, both during and after Japanese occupation.

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## Answer Key

### VOCABULARY TEST

- |       |       |
|-------|-------|
| 1. l  | 11. N |
| 2. s  | 12. F |
| 3. h  | 13. T |
| 4. r  | 14. E |
| 5. q  | 15. K |
| 6. j  | 16. G |
| 7. m  | 17. P |
| 8. c  | 18. O |
| 9. a  | 19. D |
| 10. b | 20. I |

### COMPREHENSION TEST A

#### Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. c | 6. B  |
| 2. a | 7. A  |
| 3. b | 8. B  |
| 4. c | 9. C  |
| 5. a | 10. A |

#### Part II: True/False (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. T  |
| 2. F | 7. T  |
| 3. T | 8. T  |
| 4. F | 9. F  |
| 5. F | 10. T |

#### Part III: Short Answer (20 points)

Answers will vary.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

### COMPREHENSION TEST B

#### Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. c | 6. C  |
| 2. c | 7. A  |
| 3. a | 8. B  |
| 4. b | 9. B  |
| 5. b | 10. A |

#### Part II: True/False (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. T  |
| 2. T | 7. F  |
| 3. F | 8. T  |
| 4. T | 9. F  |
| 5. T | 10. T |

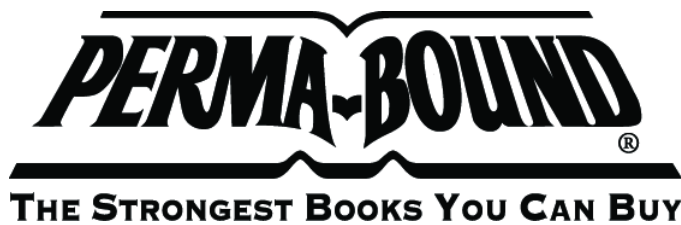
#### Part III: Short Answer (20 points)

Answers will vary.

#### Part IV: Essay (20 points)

Answers will vary.





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617 East Vandalia Road • Jacksonville, Illinois 62650  
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