



**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 9-12**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# **A Step from Heaven**

An Na

**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# A Step from Heaven

An Na

## TEACHER GUIDE

**NOTE:**

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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## Skills and Strategies

### Thinking

Analysis, brainstorming,  
research, compare/contrast,  
critical thinking

### Writing

Poetry, script, review, eulogy,  
newspaper, public service  
announcement, vignette

### Vocabulary

Target words, definitions,  
application

### Listening/Speaking

Interview, oral report,  
discussion

### Comprehension

Predicting, cause/effect,  
inference, sequence,  
problem-solving

### Literary Elements

Characterization, symbolism,  
simile, metaphor, imagery,  
personification, allusion,  
theme, universality, conflict,  
stream-of-consciousness

### Across the Curriculum

Art—drawing, caricature,  
collage; Music—ballad,  
mood; Drama—writing/  
acting; Current Events

**Genre:** fiction

**Setting:** Korea, United States

**Point of view:** first-person

**Themes:** hope, fear, survival, love, maturation

**Conflict:** person vs. self, person vs. poverty, domestic

**Style:** narrative, presented in short vignettes

**Tone:** varies between optimism and pessimism, ending on an optimistic note

## Summary

Young Ju emigrates from Korea to the United States with her family. A baby brother, Joon, is born after the family arrives in the United States. Young Ju relates her memories through a series of short vignettes, beginning with her early memory as a four-year-old child in Korea and ending as she prepares to go to college. Young Ju's father, Apa, violently lashes out at the family as frustrations of hard work and poverty, escalated by alcohol, consume him. Young Ju struggles to find answers to many "whys" in her life, especially questioning why her mother, Uhmma, stays with Apa and allows him to beat her. Young Ju excels in school, becomes "Americanized" in many ways, and finally begins to understand why her father treats his family shamefully. When he returns to Korea, Uhmma and the two children remain in the United States. In the epilogue, Young Ju reveals her understanding of and appreciation for her mother, the true strength of the family.

## Characters

**Young Ju Park:** protagonist, narrator

**Apa (Mr. Park):** Young Ju's father; frustrated with life; violent at times; works as a gardener and a janitor

**Uhmma (Mrs. Park):** Young Ju's mother; works two jobs

**Joon Ho:** Young Ju's younger brother

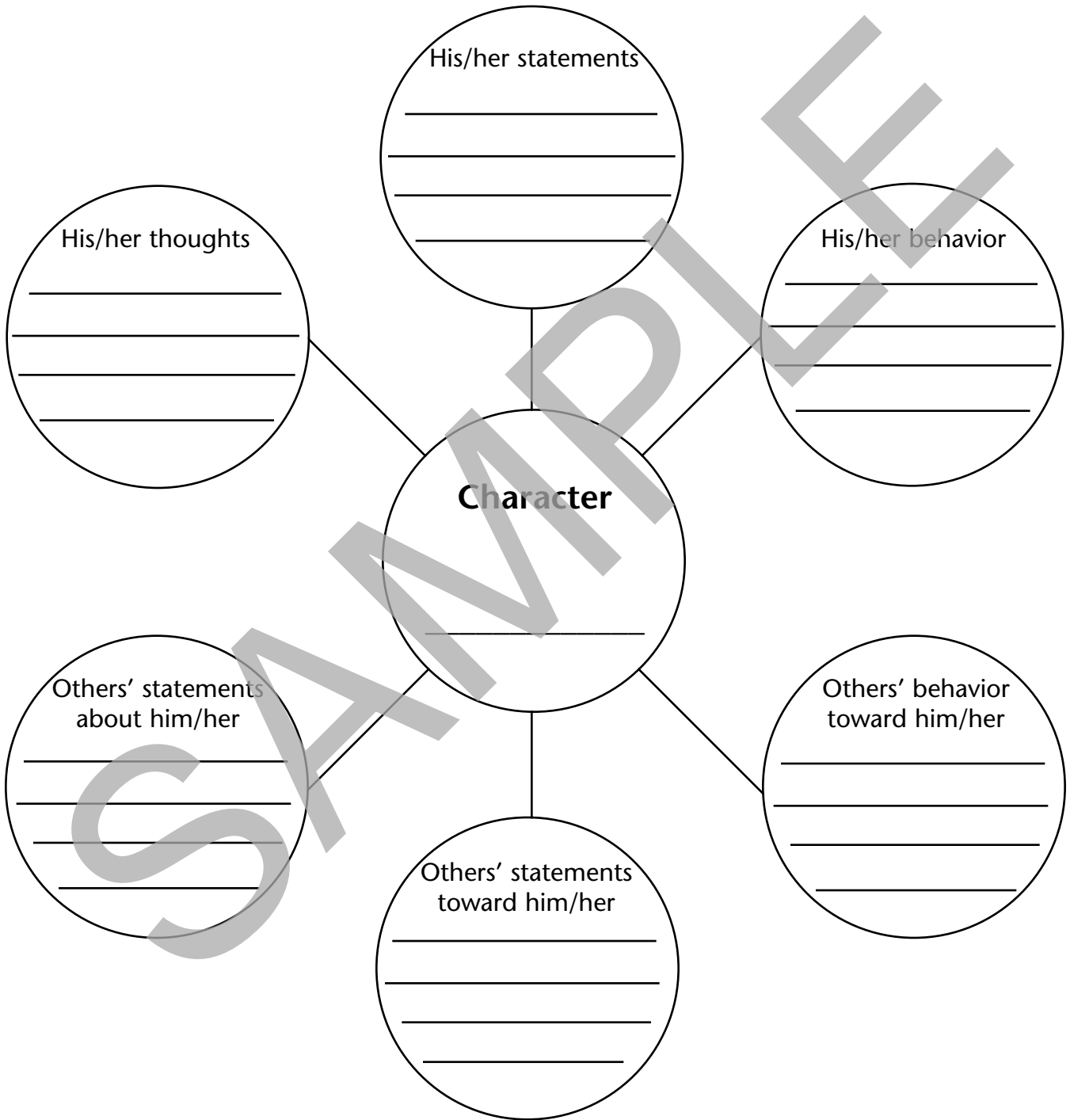
**Halmoni:** Young Ju's grandmother; Apa's mother

**Harabugi:** Apa's father (deceased); Young Ju thinks they are flying to heaven to see him.

**Ju Mi:** Young Ju's friend in Korea

## Attribute Web

**Directions:** Create an attribute web for a character in *A Step from Heaven* that lists clues about what he/she is like.



## Pages 142-156

Apa leaves the family and eventually returns to Korea. Uhmma and the children build a better life for themselves. Young Ju receives a scholarship for college.

### Vocabulary

misshapen (142)  
deciphering (148)

opaque (143)  
lithe (154)

murky (143)  
immigrated (155)

alien (148)

### Discussion Questions

1. Examine the cause and effect of Apa's arrest and the ensuing events. Note the typical pattern of an abused wife. *(Cause: Apa is arrested for beating Uhmma. Effect: She won't press charges against her husband. Cause: Apa is released but leaves with an Asian woman rather than returning to his family. Effect: Uhmma blames Young Ju for calling the police. Cause: The family's financial condition deteriorates. Effect: Uhmma works three jobs, hardly comes home, sleeps very little, begins to waste away, and has no time for church. Cause: Uhmma's work hours and the family's financial need. Effect: Uncle Tim pays Young Ju and Joon to help him; Young Ju buys the groceries and prepares the meals. Cause: Uhmma sees Young Ju preparing rice. Effect: apologizes for blaming Young Ju; Uhmma and Young Ju reunite in love. Cause: Apa returns to Korea. Effect: Uhmma and the family will remain and be strong together. pp. 142-145)*
2. Discuss changes in the family after Apa returns to Korea. *(They buy a small house. Peace and camaraderie return to their home and they begin to "dream" again. Uhmma and Young Ju have had some of Joon's paintings framed. Uhmma works for Gomo's new dry-cleaning business, Joon works after school at Kinko's, and Young Ju tutors. Young Ju receives a scholarship and is preparing to leave for college. pp. 146-148)*
3. Analyze the significance of Uhmma and Young Ju's reminiscing with pictures. Note the correlation with the first vignette. *(Young Ju finds out that Uhmma came from a wealthy family and that Apa did not like to be reminded of this. The pictures remind Uhmma of Korea and make her homesick. The picture of Apa and Young Ju stirs her memories as she portrayed them in the first vignette. Uhmma tells her Apa taught her how to jump in the waves and to be brave and that Young Ju is a dreamer like her father. Young Ju begins to view her father differently. pp. 148-152)*
4. Examine the significance of the title of the epilogue, "Hands." *(Uhmma's hands depict her life: as old as sand, rough from hard work and years of sewing, cooking, washing, and cleaning; holding a Bible; at times opened to hold children's small hands as she read "stories" in their palms; strength is ebbing away. Lines and scars of Uhmma's hands: early years—gathering and drying fish; scars from years she worked at the steak house; rough effects of eleven years of dry-cleaning and ironing; lifeline—full and long, marriage line—faint. Children's hands: lean fingers like Uhmma's but without hard, yellowed calluses; lithe and tender to turn pages of books, press keyboard buttons, and hold pencils and pens. Young Ju: strong intelligence line, perhaps a doctor. Joon: long life, successful, many children. pp. 153-156)*

## Supplementary Activities

1. Have students bring to class pictures of hands. Create a class collage depicting the myriad types of hands.
2. Have students respond in two or three sentences to the symbolism of the simile describing the family's new house: house...like a sitting hen ready to lay (p. 146).
3. Literary devices: **Similes**—Tiny seeds waiting to be rinsed and exposed like nuggets of pearls (p. 143); eyes...like the eyes of sleepy cats in the sun (p. 150); Uhmma's hands are as old as sand (p. 153); ...closes Uhmma's hands like a book, a Siamese prayer (p. 155) **Metaphors**—Uhmma's hands: flower finally open to the bees (p. 153); children: bees (p. 153); Uhmma's kiss: a raindrop on the water (p. 154); Uhmma's reading of children's lifelines: lullaby of dreams (p. 154); cut in Uhmma's hand: hard kiss of the dancing knife (p. 155)

SAMPLE