

Korea Education

Insider

MONTHLY
KOREAN EDUCATION CENTER
IN LOS ANGELES

09 SEPTEMBER
2026



GROWING THROUGH KOREAN & SAMULNORI
(Jolainie Rivera's Story — Korean Education)



FROM K-POP DREAMS TO KOREA
(Luis' Three-Week Adventure — Study in Korea)



HAEGEUM & I: BEYOND THE FAMILIAR
(Joyce Kang — Heritage Education)



EARLY LITERACY INITIATIVES
(Teaching Kids to Read, and to Love It — Education Policy)

Korea Education Insider - Connecting Cultures, Building Futures



**KOREAN EDUCATION
CENTER IN LOS ANGELES**

JOLAINIE RIVERA: GROWING THROUGH KOREAN LANGUAGE AND SAMULNORI

Ambassador School of Global Education
Korean Dual Language Program Teacher,
Seunghwan Conno Jeon



It was wonderful to
watch her proudly help
other students practice
reading Korean

Among the many students I have had the privilege of teaching over more than 20 years, both in Seoul and in the United States, one student stands out as a particularly memorable example of how learning Korean language and culture can help a child discover new talents, confidence, and a love of learning. Her name is Jolainie Rivera, and she is now a fourth-grade student at Ambassador School of Global Education.

My journey with Jolainie began when she was in my first-grade class. She learned to read Korean remarkably quickly and soon began sharing what she had learned with her classmates. I gave her the special role of being our little “Korean Reading Teacher,” and it was wonderful to watch her proudly help other students practice reading Korean.

Among the many students I have had the privilege of teaching over more than 20 years, both in Seoul and in the United States, one student stands out as a particularly memorable example of how learning Korean language and culture can help a child discover new talents, confidence, and a love of learning. Her name is Jolainie Rivera, and she is now a fourth-grade student at Ambassador School of Global Education.

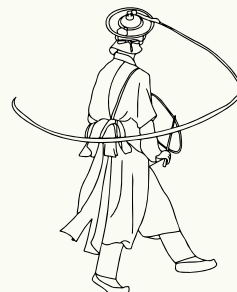
The first grader I once knew is now a fourth grader, but her enthusiasm for Korean language and culture continues to grow. She still wants to learn more Korean, and today she plays an important leadership role as our Samulnori team helping lead

I do not know where Jolainie’s dreams will take her in the future. But I hope the joy, confidence, and curiosity she has discovered through Korean and Samulnori will stay with her for many years to come. And, one day, we hope she will look back and

leadership role on our Samulnori team, helping lead and inspire younger students.

As a teacher, few things are more exciting than watching a student take something she first discovered in the classroom and make it her own. Jolainie has grown from a first grader learning to read Korean, to a little teacher helping her classmates, and now to a young musician and leader bringing traditional Korean rhythms to life in new and creative ways.

And perhaps one day, she will look back and remember that learning Korean and playing Samulnori helped her discover just how much she was capable of.

[Home](#)[Next](#)

K-EDUCATION INSIDER

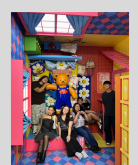
Korea America Education Foundation
680 Wilshire Pl. #200, Los Angeles, CA 90005
Tel: 213-386-3112
Email: kecla3112@gmail.com
Social: @reallygreatsite

From K-Pop Dreams to Korea

Luis' Three Week Adventure

Meet Luis Grijalva,

A 12th grader at Rise Kohyang High School, who turned a childhood dream into a three-week adventure in Korea.



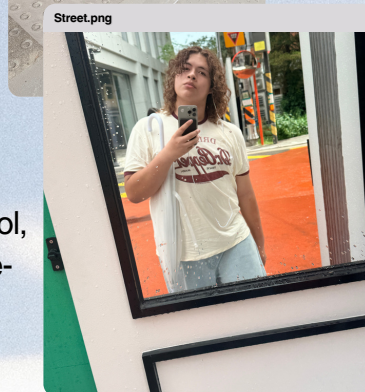
Together.jpg



Luis.jpg



Olive_Young.jpg



Street.png

For Luis, visiting Korea wasn't just another summer trip. It was a dream he'd carried for years.

"I think it's been a dream of mine ever since I can remember," Luis says. "Like everyone else, I stumbled upon K-pop and K-dramas, and after that, I really wanted to visit Korea and experience it for myself."

This summer, that dream finally became a reality when Luis joined **Seokyeong University's three-week Korean language and cultural program** through the **KECLA Study Abroad in Korea Program**.

And judging from his stories, he made the most of every minute.

This is where I finally made it

Luis discovered the program at school when his Korean teacher, Ms. Che, shared information about several Korean universities offering short-term summer programs.

He immediately knew he wanted to go.

"I wanted to go last year, but I couldn't," he explains. "So when I found out they were having it again this year, I really wanted to go this time."

Then came the moment he had been waiting for.

When Luis stepped off the plane in Korea, it suddenly hit him: **he was actually there.**

"It was around four in the morning, but I could see everything and feel the breeze outside. In my head I thought, 'This is where I finally made it.' It felt like I had accomplished a dream."

Korean class in the morning,
K-pop in the afternoon



The three-week program at Seokyeong University combined Korean language learning with cultural experiences.

Mornings were spent studying Korean, while afternoons could mean anything from learning K-pop choreography and songs to exploring Korean art, traditional games, and cultural activities.

The group also visited some of Korea's most popular destinations, including **Gyeongbokgung Palace and Myeongdong**.

But one of Luis's favorite parts wasn't necessarily a famous tourist attraction—it was the people he met along the way.



During the program, he made friends with students from **India, Taiwan, and Guam**.

"I live in LA, which is a very diverse place," Luis says. "But it was different because they actually lived in those countries. I got to experience their cultures too."

For him, the program became more than a Korean language class. It became a chance to connect with young people from around the world.

I had to use Korean.



Luis had already been studying Korean for four to five years before his trip—mostly through self-study and, more recently, through Korean classes at school. But knowing Korean in a classroom and actually using it in Korea were two very different things.

"While I was learning Korean here, I would get really nervous to practice," he admits. "But while I was in Korea, I had to use it because I was in the country where they use the language."

And he found a creative way to challenge himself. If he didn't know a word, he would quickly look it up on his phone—but instead of simply showing the translation to the other person, he would read the Korean out loud and try saying it himself.

"I feel like if I just showed them my phone, I wouldn't be practicing." That attitude helped him gain confidence. "And when they understood what I said, that made me really happy," Luis says.

Even though the program was only three weeks long, he felt that being immersed in Korean helped strengthen the foundation he had already built.



Korea taught me to be on time

One of the biggest cultural differences Luis noticed?

Punctuality.

The early mornings also gave him more time to explore. He would walk around, enjoy the fresh air, and make the most of his day. And speaking of walking... **10,000–15,000 steps a day!**

One thing Luis definitely noticed about life in Korea was how walkable everything was.

"There was so much to do, and everything was so close. You don't have to have a car to get somewhere."

His daily step count? **Around 10,000 to 15,000 steps.** The only downside was the hills.

“Everyone is so punctual,” he says. “Everyone is on time.”

In Korea, even being a few minutes late could result in a message reminding him that class was about to start. Surprisingly, Luis loved it.

“I’m actually not very punctual,” he laughs. “So while I was in Korea, it helped me learn how to become more punctual and motivated to wake up early and start my day.”

The unexpected star of the trip: Sundae-guk!

Of course, no trip to Korea would be complete without trying Korean food—and Luis definitely had some memorable food experiences.

One of his biggest surprises?

Sundae-guk (Korean blood sausage soup).

He had never tried it before going to Korea, but once he did, he was hooked.

“I tried sundae-guk for the first time in Korea, and it was so good!”

Apparently, that was one Korean food experience he wasn’t expecting—but definitely won’t forget. And then there were the convenience stores.

From Korea
to a future in
skincare



Luis’s love for Korea goes beyond K-pop, food, and shopping.

He has been interested in **dermatology and skincare** since he was young, and Korea’s reputation as a global skincare destination made the trip even more meaningful for him.

And his future dream?

“I want to open my own skin clinic someday.” Could Luis own a skincare clinic in Korea—or perhaps LA—in the future?

“The walking was tiring because Korea is mostly hills,” he says. “But I didn’t mind. It was worth it. I got my steps in!”

After returning to LA, however, Luis noticed just how different his lifestyle had become.

“When I came back, for the first few days, I barely walked at all.”

If Luis could bring one thing from Korea back to LA, his answer came immediately: **Convenience stores.**

“I wish we had them here. We do have 7-Eleven, but it’s not the same!”

During his time in Korea, visiting convenience stores became part of his daily routine.

“I would wake up and just go to the convenience store every day.”

After returning to LA, he even tried going to 7-Eleven.

“I did not like it,” he laughs. “I wanted to go back to Korea!”

From snacks and drinks to everyday essentials, Luis loved how convenient Korean stores were—and how easy it was to find things throughout the city.

I miss Korean convenience stores!



Korea might be
in his future
after high school

The trip also changed the way Luis thinks about his future. Before visiting Korea, he had dreamed about living there for a year someday. After actually experiencing daily life in Korea, that dream became even stronger.

“Being there really made me realize that I do want to live there for a year.”

Now, as a high school senior researching colleges, Luis is even considering applying to universities in Korea. For Luis, the trip wasn’t just about visiting Korea. It helped him imagine

Don't be surprised.

just as exciting as seeing his potential and imagine what his future there could actually look like.

One trip. A whole new perspective.

Three weeks may not sound like a long time.

But for Luis, it was long enough to step outside his comfort zone, practice Korean with real people, meet students from different countries, experience Korean culture firsthand, and imagine a future that once seemed far away.

Most importantly, Korea stopped being just a place he had seen in K-pop videos and K-dramas.

It became a place he had experienced for himself.

"I like traveling around," Luis says. "But since I was finally able to complete a dream I'd had for a while, it made me realize that I want to go back more."

And maybe that's the best part of studying abroad: sometimes, a three-week trip doesn't just give you memories. **Sometimes, it gives you a glimpse of where you might want to go next.**



Luis's *Korea* Favorites

< Notes



This year, it was...

- ✓ Best Food discovery: Sundae-guk
- ✓ Daily step count: 10,000-15,000
- ✓ Must-have Korean item: Convenience Store Snacks
- ✓ Biggest cultural surprise: How punctual everyone was
- ✓ Dream for the future: Open his own skincare clinic

Luis.png



Luis



Korea

Would he go back to Korea? Absolutely.
Would he consider studying in Korea? Definitely!

[Home](#)

[Next](#)

K-EDUCATION INSIDER

Korea America Education Foundation
680 Wilshire Pl. #200, Los Angeles, CA 90005
Tel: 213-386-3112
Email: kecla3112@gmail.com
Social: [@reallygreatsite](#)

Joyce Kang

Columbia University
Former Heritage Education
Students in KECLA



Q1. Could you introduce yourself and share how long you've been participating in KECLA's Heritage Education program?



My name is Joyce Jiyeon Kang and I am a freshman at Columbia University where I am planning to major in Political Science on a pre-law track. I have been participating in KECLA's Heritage Education program since I was in third grade.

I was motivated to join the program after learning about the various classes KECLA offered. I then took an introductory haegeum class which is where I discovered my passion for traditional Korean music.

Q2. What inspired you to learn the Haegeum, and what did you find most appealing about playing a traditional Korean instrument?

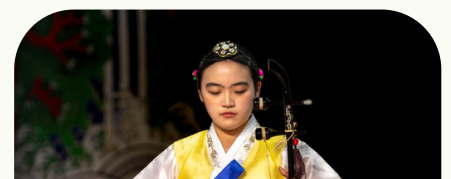
My desire to be more in touch with my Korean heritage inspired me to learn the haegeum. I have been taking language classes at my local Korean school which has allowed me to communicate and connect with Korean people.

However, I wanted to dive deeper into Korean culture and practice something not many do, which has drawn me to traditional Korean music. Many people have heard traditional Korean music, whether it is through Korean dramas or K-pop songs. Although the sounds may be familiar, not many can name a Korean instrument, or let alone visualize a traditional Korean instrument.

Therefore, the aspect of being able to share a relatively unknown instrument like the haegeum is the most appealing about playing a traditional Korean instrument. I enjoy seeing the intrigued faces of those who I perform for and am even more ecstatic to answer their questions afterwards.

Q3. Looking back, how has your long-term experience with Heritage Education and learning the Haegeum shaped your personal growth and mindset?

Looking back at my experience with Heritage Education, I am proud to say that it has played a significant role in making me the proud Korean



American I am today.

Learning the haegeum has allowed me to have various unique experiences that have shaped my personal growth and accomplishments. Competing at traditional Korean music competitions, and performing for my local community has helped me realize the immense joy in disseminating Korean culture even if it was on a smaller scale.

In high school, I took a step further and performed the haegeum at Carnegie Hall in New York City. In a concert hall full of performers in classic black dresses and suits, I stood out, in my pastel green hanbok. Instead of feeling embarrassed, however, I felt proud that I was showcasing the underrepresented genre of Korean music.

These experiences were extremely useful in demonstrating who I was during the college application process. I wrote about my passion for sharing traditional Korean music and how it strengthened my identity. My experiences also influenced my future career aspirations as I aspire to become a haegeum educator and a civil rights attorney, representing minority populations and musical genres.



Q4. What advice would you give to younger students who are considering Heritage Education or looking to build their own unique stories?

To those who are considering Heritage Education or looking to build your own unique stories, I would definitely recommend exploring activities or traditions that relate to your heritage.

Taking a step towards discovering your own self through culture can be extremely valuable as it opens up new opportunities. Whether you find your interest in traditional Korean music like me or not, I strongly advise you to step out of your comfort zone and eagerly search for your own story.

Q5. Is there anything else you would like to add or share with our readers and the KECLA community?

I hope my story in discovering my passion for traditional Korean music has inspired you to take initiative. Who knows? Taking that Korean language class you have always been interested in, but was too intimidated by, may lead you to becoming a Korean language professor.

Taking that K-pop dance class may inspire you to create a K-pop dance class at your school. Education is a powerful tool that can drive you to pursue your passions.



Haeguem & I

Beyond the Familiar: Sharing



Beyond the Familiar: Sharing
Traditional Korean Music and
Building a Unique Identity



[Home](#)

[Next](#)

K-EDUCATION INSIDER

Korea America Education Foundation
680 Wilshire Pl. #200, Los Angeles, CA 90005
Tel: 213-386-3112
Email: kecla3112@gmail.com
Social: [@reallygreatsite](#)



Early Literacy Initiatives: Teaching Kids to Read, and to Love It

Alice Lee, Ed.D.
Senior Director of Elementary Schools,
Torrance Unified School District

[Explore our articles](#)

Across classrooms in Seoul and Los Angeles County alike, educators share the same goal: teaching every child not just to read, but to develop a lifelong love of reading. That goal is most urgent in the earliest grades.

Third grade marks that turning point, the shift from learning to read to reading to learn. For years, many U.S. schools embraced "whole language," an approach built on the belief that reading develops naturally, the way spoken language does, if children are simply immersed in engaging, meaningful books.

Popularized in the 1980s and 1990s, whole language classrooms leaned on context clues, picture cues, and guessing strategies, sometimes called "three-cueing," rather than direct, systematic instruction in how letters and sounds connect. For many students, this worked well enough. But for many children, it left gaps that often surfaced only years later.



Decades of research in cognitive science, linguistics, and neuroscience have since converged on an evidence-based model now known as the "science of reading."

Rather than assuming reading unfolds naturally, this approach



recognizes it as a skill that must be explicitly and systematically taught on five interlocking pillars: Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension. Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds in spoken words, entirely apart from print.

Phonics connects those sounds to written letters and letter patterns, giving children a reliable code for sounding out unfamiliar words rather than guessing at them.

Fluency and decoding describe the ability to read text accurately, smoothly, and with appropriate expression, reading for meaning rather than word-by-word.

Vocabulary is word knowledge built through both direct instruction and rich exposure to language.

Comprehension, the ultimate goal, is the ability to make sense of, remember, and think critically about what has been read.

What research continues to reveal is that the most effective early literacy instruction is:

- 1) explicit, systematic, and consistent
- 2) foundational skills are taught within an efficient and effective manner, especially for young learners
- 3) responsive to each child's background, culture, and home language

The stakes are real: on the 2024–25 California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress, only 48.82 percent of students met or exceeded the ELA standard, and among third graders alone, just 44.21 percent did. California Education Code 53008, signed in July 2023, requires every district serving kindergarten through second grade to screen students for risk of reading difficulties, including dyslexia. And beginning with the 2025–26 school year, the Screening for Risk of Reading Difficulties became mandatory and annual for every K–2 student in California.

As schools implement structured screeners and phonics routines, administrators play a critical role in protecting dedicated time for daily read-alouds and sharing of diverse texts with students, since children arrive at school already fluent in language, well before they can read a word. A preschooler "reads" by flipping through a picture book, studying its illustrations, recognizing characters, and retelling a story's big moments from memory. Read-alouds build on that instinct and remain among the most beloved routines of the early school day, not only for the language and vocabulary they build, but for how they help children work through struggles and feelings alongside a character, offering both a mirror of a child's own life and a window into one entirely new.

The screener is not a diagnosis, rather a starting point. Results help teachers identify which students may need additional phonemic awareness practice, structured phonics support, or closer progress monitoring, long before a child falls far behind. For families and administrators, that information opens the door to timely intervention.

In Torrance Unified School District, early literacy instruction and initiatives takes a concrete, daily form through the UFLI Foundations program from the University of Florida Literacy Institute. From kindergarten through second grade, every lesson follows the same eight-step routine:

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 1) phonemic awareness | 5) new concept |
| 2) visual drill | 6) word work |
| 3) auditory drill | 7) irregular words |
| 4) blending drill | 8) connected text |

moving students from hearing individual sounds to reading them fluently in real, decodable books.

Alongside every screener, drill, and decodable passage, our classrooms still need room for the funny book, the courageous and fantastic character, the imaginary world that carries a child somewhere new. Raising lifelong readers depends on holding rigor and joy together, not choosing between them.



While the explicit, consistent instruction in literacy is critical, children should continue to be immersed in literature-rich, joyful reading on a daily basis. Most teachers were already weaving phonics and phonemic awareness into their teaching; new laws like this one simply ask for that work to happen more intentionally, for every child, not only the ones who happened to catch on early.



[Home](#)

K-EDUCATION INSIDER

Korea America Education Foundation
680 Wilshire Pl. #200, Los Angeles, CA 90005
Tel: 213-386-3112
Email: kecla3112@gmail.com
Social: [@reallygreatsite](#)