

Reading Zone 13.3

Read the following editorial from the early 1990s about Kim Il Sung, who ruled in North Korea until 1994. Remember our strategies for reading journalistic writing, such as distinguishing between fact and opinion and mapping an argument. You can check your answers to the questions on page 251.

Kim Il Sung, the North Korean dictator—redeemer to his people, and madman with a bomb to almost everyone else—sits in isolation in his capital, Pyongyang, letting the world guess what he is thinking. He is eighty-one years old and affects the trappings of semiretirement. He wears Panama hats and color-coordinated outfits. He hunts wild boar from a safe distance, with rifles fitted with telescopic sights. He is said to have relinquished the everyday affairs of state to his son and heir, Kim Jong Il, who is fifty-one. All that is missing is a photograph with grandchildren. He is believed to have at least two.

The affectation is deceptive. Forty-eight years after Stalin set Kim Il Sung on his throne, he remains an object of fear, and perhaps never more so than now. This is a considerable achievement for a ruler whose economy is believed to be in such ruin that his people are encouraged to eat just two meals a day. Kim Il Sung inspires fear not only because he may possess one or two nuclear weapons but also because he has made the world believe he would not hesitate to use them. Through the fall and winter, the United States has been trying to get North Korea to allow inspections of seven sites where bombs may be being made. Negotiators have trod warily, first hunting at confrontation and then backing off, the better not to provoke him.

A deal may be near—one in which the North Koreans will allow International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors to visit those seven sites but not two additional sites where inspectors suspect they might find evidence of bomb production. Satellite surveillance has its limits; the I.A.E.A. is demanding on-site inspections. The North Koreans, in return for complying with terms that they had in fact agreed to in 1985, will win the suspension of the United

States-South Korea war games known as Team Spirit, which usually begin in late winter. And, more important, the North Koreans will force the Americans, whom they blame and despise for splitting Korea at the end of the Second World War, to negotiate the future of diplomatic relations between North Korea and the United States directly, and not in tandem with the South Koreans whom the North Koreans dismiss as American puppets.

But those who have watched Kim Il Sung over the years don't expect the crisis to end here. This confrontation with the West, they feel, is just the beginning. There is a growing suspicion that after the North Koreans agree to inspections they will contrive to make the visits difficult, if not impossible. The North Koreans are considered capable of reversing themselves once the inspectors arrive, perhaps barring entry to some of the sites, or maintaining that they never agreed to inspections at the very places specified in the agreement. Kim Il Sung has been waiting a long time for the moment when his powerful enemies—the Americans, in particular—are compelled to accept him as the leader of a nation that matters.

For decades, Kim Il Sung endured as a journalistic chestnut: the lunatic who presided over the world's most bizarre and longest-lasting cult of personality. North Korea was an Orwellian nightmare—a source of stories of a robotic people wearing Kim Il Sung pins, chanting his name, holding up colored placards to generate his likeness along the length of Kim Il Sung Stadium, and extolling the manifold accomplishments of the Great Leader and his son, the Dear Leader. Then the North Koreans would hold the crew of a captured American spy ship for eleven months, as they did after seizing the *U.S.S. Pueblo*, in 1968; or blow up half the South Korean Cabinet, as they did in 1983, in Rangoon; or blow up a South Korean airliner, as they did in 1987. For a while, at least, the eye-rolling would stop, and people in Washington, Seoul, Tokyo, and every other capital who felt themselves threatened by the angry whims of Kim Il Sung would once again try to determine just who it was they were dealing with.

The task was not easy. Although North Korea has diplomatic relations with more than a hundred countries, it has effectively cut itself off from most of the world. Visitors find their tours and their access tightly limited and closely monitored. Diplomats who have spent years in Pyongyang tell of never visiting a North Korean home, or even having a candid conversation with a North Korean. The word that recurs when they speak of that posting is “irrational.” I have never met Kim Il Sung. Though I have been to South Korea many times, I have never been granted permission to visit the North. American journalists visit North Korea on rare occasions; usually, the visit is arranged for a group and coincides with a showcase event, like Kim Il Sung’s birthday. He almost never grants these visitors an interview. He spoke with the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* for the first, and last, time in 1972. It has been tempting, then, to see Kim Il Sung only in terms of threatening bombast, the vulgarity of his cult, the monuments he has ordered built to preserve his likeness for eternity. But to do that is to underestimate his cunning. Kim Il Sung has always known what he wanted for himself and for the nation he created in his own image. He wanted the powerful countries to come to him, and to treat him and his small nation as an equal. And, because he has been willing to take his nation time and again to the brink of disaster, to risk war with the United States, he has made his enemies dread him. Now, to the world’s discomfort and chagrin, he is on the verge of realizing his vainglorious dream.

1. According to the passage, the picture of Kim Il Sung as an uninvolved, relaxed man is
 - (A) exaggerated
 - (B) accurate
 - (C) difficult to believe
 - (D) a complete lie
 - (E) an enticing image

2. The annual military exercise between South Korea and the United States was known as
- (A) the I.A.E.A.
 - (B) the Pyongyang Conflict
 - (C) the Wargames
 - (D) the Winter Games
 - (E) the Team Spirit
3. According to the passage, all of the following are attributed to the North Koreans EXCEPT
- (A) seizing of the *U.S.S. Pueblo*
 - (B) raiding the South Korean border for supplies
 - (C) blowing up a South Korean airliner
 - (D) blowing up half the South Korean cabinet.
 - (E) holding American soldiers captive for eleven months
4. According to the passage, the economic state of affairs in North Korea is considered
- (A) dire
 - (B) recovering
 - (C) booming
 - (D) pre-industrial
 - (E) industrial
5. Kim Il Sung's attitude toward war can best be described as
- (A) cavalier
 - (B) brinksmanship
 - (C) reluctance
 - (D) recalcitrance
 - (E) silent

6. The author would most likely DISAGREE with which of the following statements?
- (A) Kim II Sung remains a leader worth fearing.
 - (B) Kim Jong II is not as powerful as Kim II Sung.
 - (C) The on-site nuclear inspections will most likely, under the I.A.E.A., go smoothly.
 - (D) Kim II Sung is unlikely to grant another Western interview.
 - (E) Kim II Sung is a smart, albeit difficult, man.
7. The North Koreans despise the Americans because of
- (A) the warlike posture the United States has held toward dictatorships
 - (B) the economic stability of the United States
 - (C) resentment over the splitting of Korea after World War II
 - (D) resentment over the colonization of Korea in the 1950s
 - (E) the growing suspicion over nuclear rearmament
8. As described in the passage, the term “journalistic chestnut” means
- (A) reporter’s enigma
 - (B) investigative riddle
 - (C) reporter’s comestibles
 - (D) investigative prize
 - (E) investigative power
9. The tone of the passage can best be described as
- (A) threatening
 - (B) jocular
 - (C) objective
 - (D) warning
 - (E) occluding

10. According to the passage, tours to North Korea can be best described as
- (A) difficult and unimpressive
 - (B) awkward and unenlightened
 - (C) ignorant and ill-considered
 - (D) limited and unrevealing
 - (E) enlightening and frightening