

KEO FIGHTS FOR FREEDOM



Welcome to Hong Kong

Welcome to Hong Kong—a giant city located in Southeast Asia. It is a beautiful place where 7.5 million people and over ten thousand tall buildings fit neatly between jungle-covered mountains and the South China Sea. Because of its location, Hong Kong is a great place for people from different parts of the world to meet and do business with each other. Hong Kong is a fast-paced, modern city full of stores, banks, markets, and restaurants. Traditionally, Hong Kong was a part of China, but for most of the 1800s and 1900s, it was a colony of Great Britain. While under British rule, Hong Kong culture became very different from China's. In 1997, Great Britain gave Hong Kong back to China, and it has been under Chinese rule ever since. Even into the third decade of being back together, Hong Kong has maintained an identity that is unique from the rest of what is called "mainland China," and these differences cause conflict.

Colony:

A country or area under control of another country. Hong Kong was a part of the British Empire from 1841 to 1997.



Meet Keo

This is Keo. He lives with his mom and dad in a high-rise apartment in Hong Kong. Keo's middle school is one of Hong Kong's many international schools—some of his classmates and friends are like him, born and raised in Hong Kong, but many come from Europe, the United States, and other places from around the world. Like most people who live in Hong Kong, Keo speaks multiple languages. When at home with his family, or out with his friends, he usually speaks a type of Chinese called Cantonese. In school, Keo speaks English, and like most of the younger generation of Hongkongers, he has learned Mandarin—the type of Chinese that is spoken most often in mainland China.

Outside of school, Keo likes playing role-playing video games online with his friends. His favorite subject in school is history, and he especially likes video games that transport players into time periods long-ago. Keo also loves basketball. He plays shooting guard for his school team and is a massive fan of the NBA's Golden State Warriors. Hong Kong is on the other side of the world, so Keo doesn't get to watch as many games as he'd like. Most NBA games are played at night, and when it's night in America, it's morning in Hong Kong. On school days during lunch, Keo and his friends love to check game highlights and talk about the NBA.



Hongkonger:

What a resident of Hong Kong is called.



A time zone is an area on Earth that has a specific time that all citizens can set their clocks to. Different time zones exist as you move around the surface of the Earth.

Changes for Hong Kong

In Mainland China, there is a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) that controls the government and restricts what people can and cannot say. There is no freedom of speech. The CCP monitors what Chinese people say and do, and they get very upset when citizens disagree with their governmental decisions. If Chinese citizens say anything that the CCP does not like, they can be arrested and put in jail. The same rules apply to the media and the internet. In China, the government often tells newspapers, magazines, and TV shows what they can and can't publish in their articles, and if a Chinese citizen posts something on their social media that the government doesn't like, they can get in serious trouble.

Under British rule, Hongkongers had freedom of speech, the press was free to publish stories and articles about any topic, and people were free to gather in groups to demonstrate and protest government decisions. Hongkongers were used to having greater freedom than mainland Chinese people. To help with the transition, Britain and China agreed that the people of Hong Kong would keep their freedoms for 50 years—until 2047—despite being under Chinese authority. This agreement was called “One Country, Two Systems,” and it remains in place today. When the agreement came into effect, there was cautious hope in Britain and the United States that over five decades, the freedoms in Hong Kong might spread to the rest of China, and the entire country would slowly move to a freer society.



Communism: a system of government where private property is not allowed and the government controls what its citizens can say and do.



One Country, Two Systems

1997

2047

For 50 years, it was agreed that Hong Kong would have a different system of government than mainland China.

Impact on Keo's Family



Unlike Keo, most Hongkongers have first names that could easily be found in London or in America. For example, Keo's dad is named James, his mom goes by Vicki (short for Victoria), and his brother goes by JJ (short for James Jr.). Vicki works in a bookstore, James is a journalist, and JJ (who is 13 years older than Keo) works in a restaurant. For the last 26 years, James worked as a political reporter for a Hong Kong newspaper that covered local current events. James is a talented writer and many of his best articles have won numerous journalism awards.

Before the transition to Chinese rule, James doubted the CCP would honor the "Two Systems, One Country" agreement. He thought there was no way the communists would allow Hong Kong to have freedom of the press. He was scared that he would not be free to report the news without interference from the government. However, he was pleasantly surprised because for the first 15 years of the agreement, the life of a Hong Kong journalist remained very similar to when the British were in charge. Unfortunately, things began changing in 2012.





Protests



In the summer of 2012, Keo's brother JJ was protesting for freedom instead of preparing for his upcoming junior year of high school. Hong Kong erupted with student-led political demonstrations and JJ was a leading protester. The Chinese government initiated a new Moral and National Education (MNE) program to control what was being taught in Hong Kong schools. Protesters believed that Hong Kong schools should be free to choose what is taught. Many also felt the MNE unfairly promoted the Chinese Communist Party and unfairly criticized the government of the United States.

Protests lasted for two months and demonstrations included up to 90,000 protesters. In response to the protests, the government decided not to go ahead with MNE in September of 2012. A generation of young Hongkongers learned that peaceful public demonstrations can have powerful effects and JJ was able to finish high school without interference from China.



Two years later, demonstrations were organized to protest a new proposal that would have given the Chinese government the power to choose who Hongkongers could vote for. It was yet another example of Mainland China violating the “One Country, Two Systems” deal. This time, over one hundred thousand people gathered, blocking public spaces, shopping districts, and roads.



JJ was again a protest leader and helped organize the gatherings. Nowhere else in China would this behavior have been allowed. In China, it is illegal to publicly question the government, so any participation in political demonstrations would lead to arrest. In Hong Kong, for three months, very little conflict occurred between the protesters and police. On September 28, 2014, however, things changed and police began using tear gas and physical force to break up crowds. Many people suffered injuries and many arrests were made. Smartphones captured much of the action and videos of the arrests were shared through social media. As the protests continued, the crowds grew in size.



In anticipation of more tear gas, protesters began using umbrellas strategically to protect themselves and others. The world was spellbound by the photos of hundreds of thousands of people holding umbrellas being attacked by police. The demonstrations became popularly known as the Umbrella Movement.



One local journalist who covered the Umbrella Movement closely was Keo's dad, James. With help from JJ, James was able to interview demonstration organizers and learn about perspectives from inside the protests. Having a well-respected journalist like James cover the story increased awareness and support for the freedom protests, but it complicated things for his newspaper.

Government officials began recognizing James at protests. Following the release of an article where James praised the courage of the protesters, he received a warning from the police. They told James he would be physically hurt if he returned to the protests. That night, four masked men broke into the newspaper office and set the place on fire. James, JJ, and many other protesters feared for their safety and decided not to continue demonstrating. Soon after, the protests began to die down. By the end of December 2014, the Umbrella Movement was over.





Protests Expand

After the Umbrella Movement, the Chinese communist government tightened its grip over Hong Kong, making it more and more like mainland China. For a few years, James remained quiet and did not write any articles that criticized the government. He did not want to be punished. During that same time, JJ finished college

and followed in his dad's footsteps by graduating with a degree in journalism. Small protests were held in Hong Kong from time to time, but James and JJ stayed away. During these years, tension grew between the Chinese government and the people of Hong Kong. "One Country, Two Systems" felt like one country, one system. Keo could feel the tension when he walked to school or roamed his neighborhood with his friends. In the spring of 2019, the streets of Hong Kong erupted into protests again—only this time, everything was much bigger than before.

During previous demonstrations in Hong Kong, it was not uncommon for protesters like JJ to be taken briefly into police custody and given warnings to stop. A very small number of those arrested received harsher punishments, such as long-term arrest or even torture in Hong Kong. In 2019, however, the Chinese government proposed a new rule that allowed authorities to arrest anyone in Hong Kong and hold them long-term in mainland China.

This proposal scared and infuriated many Hongkongers, who feared that they might be imprisoned away from their family and friends for a long time just for exercising their basic rights, so they took to the streets in protest. James and JJ decided they could no longer be silent, and this time Keo and his mom, Vicki, joined too. The family of four joined over one million other citizens of Hong Kong to march through the streets in defiance of Chinese control.



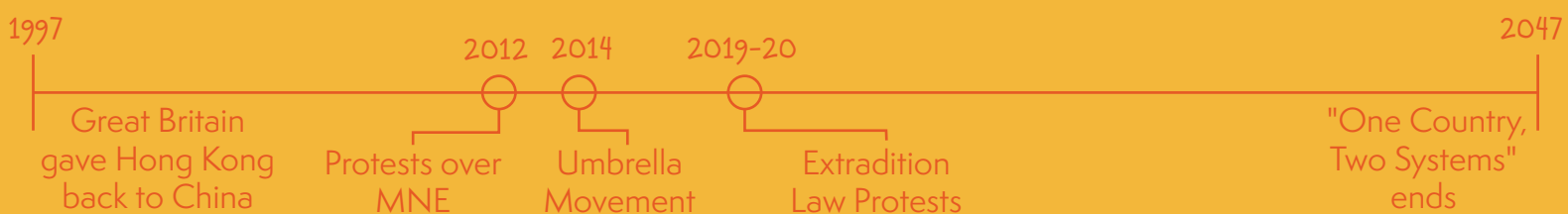
For over a year, protesters held massive demonstrations across Hong Kong. They took over huge sections of the city, including a few of Hong Kong's largest universities. Many protesters were inspired by the example of the United States of America and the freedoms its citizens enjoy. America's national anthem, "The Star Spangled Banner," became an anthem for freedom in Hong Kong, and was regularly played through phones and bullhorns. It was also common to see hundreds of American flags held high and waved in defiance of communist authority. The Chinese government scoffed at the protesters and their use of the American flags, but protesters proudly looked to the United States as an international symbol for freedom and liberty. The protesters also felt that their fight for freedom against China was similar to America's fight for independence against the British in the 1700s.



Protests raged through 2019 and into 2020. The authorities arrested over 10,000 people and charged more than 2,500 with crimes in connection to demonstrations. About 2,600 people involved in the protests suffered injuries. Chinese authorities forced the closure of James's newspaper and arrested the owner of the publication for supporting the demonstrators. James and all his fellow journalists are now out of jobs. After graduating, JJ wanted to write about the protests for a newspaper or website, but as a known protester, he has yet to be hired by any outlet.


In 2020, the public demonstrations began to wind down. Hong Kong police officers' use of tear gas and water cannons became more aggressive, high-level protest organizers were jailed, and the COVID-19 global pandemic made gatherings of any kind nearly impossible. Because of social distancing rules, protesters have not been able to take to the streets, but their fight for freedom hasn't ended—they've just had to get very creative.

Timeline of Hong Kong Transition





Censorship



Some websites that Americans use everyday are not allowed in China. The CCP decides which websites Chinese citizens have access to. Currently, the people of China (including Hong Kong) cannot use Google, get on Facebook or Twitter, or watch videos on YouTube. Remember, it is illegal in China to say things that the government doesn't like, so authorities do not allow websites where information can be shared freely. When a government does not allow information to spread or people to communicate with one another, it is called censorship.

Censorship:

Restricting the use or availability of information considered unacceptable by authority.

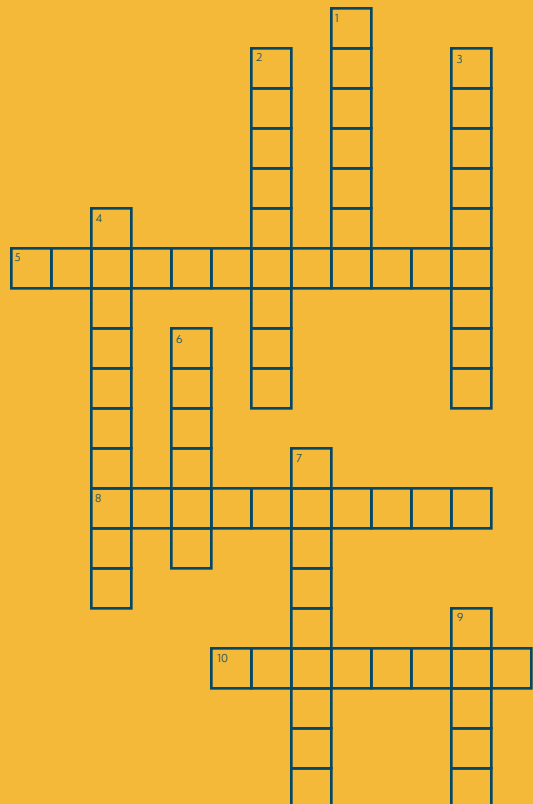
Internet censorship has made it very difficult for protesters in Hong Kong to communicate with one another. However, JJ and Keo are two of a growing number of freedom fighters who are getting around what has been nicknamed "The Great Firewall of China." Using Keo's role-playing video games, the brothers create characters and use the gaming platform as a virtual meeting hall and message board. Through the video games, protesters have disguised themselves as gamers and are able to organize and share ideas. The Chinese government is aware of these new methods of communication and they are moving to shut them down, but there are always new video games being made. Hong Kong's fight for freedom goes on.

Interview

During the protests, James interviewed many protesters. An interview is a series of questions to discover a person's opinions and experiences. Practice your journalism skills and interview a friend or family member about a time when they stood up for something they believed in. Take notes during your interview and then write a story with the information you discover. Your story should include as many of the Five Ws (who, what, when, where, and why) as possible.

Crossword

1. A statement or action expressing disapproval of or objection to something
2. The name for the style of government in the USA that the Hong Kong protesters have used as their example
3. The Chinese language dialect spoken most regularly in Hong Kong
4. Restricting the use or availability of information considered unacceptable by authority
5. The European country Hong Kong was a colony under during most of the 19th and 20th centuries
6. A country or area under control of another country
7. A system of government where private property is not allowed and the government controls what its citizens can say and do
8. What a resident of Hong Kong is called
9. Amount of years the "Two Systems, One Country" agreement was supposed to last
10. The Chinese language dialect spoken most regularly in mainland China



Become a Journalist



An important part of being a journalist is doing research. James wants to write a news article about how people in America have responded to the protests in Hong Kong. Keo told him that famous professional basketball players and employees have made comments about Hong Kong. Do some internet research and look for information about the NBA and Hong Kong protests. Take notes for James below:



Write your article on the front page of "The Daily News." You may even want to draw or print out pictures to include in the article.

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Images: Getty Images

Crossword Answer Key:

