

Title: A Survey of Ancient Religions

Subject: Sociology

Grade Level: This lesson is for grades 10-12 in a basic sociology class. It could easily be used for the lower grades and even to a different subject.

Time Duration: This lesson can be completed in two class periods.

Overview: During the Sociology unit on Religion, students will have the opportunity to learn more about their eastern religions.

Objective:

- Students will gain a basic understanding of Confucianism and Buddhism.
- Students will be able to draw comparisons and contrasts between Confucianism and Buddhism
- Students will be able to recognize the difference between monotheistic religions (such as Christianity) and Confucianism and Buddhism.
- Students will demonstrate awareness of ethnocentrism and cultural relativism in examining Confucianism and Buddhism.

Materials:

- K-W- L
- Introduction to Buddhism from: <http://www.aolsvc.worldbook.aol.com/wb/Article?id=ar081080>
- Introduction to Confucianism from: <http://www.aolsvc.worldbook.aol.com/wb/Article?id=ar129220>
- Venn Diagram sheet

Activities and Procedures:

Day 1

- Bell work: Students will complete the "Know" on their K-W-L sheet for Confucianism and Buddhism.
- Students will pair share what they have written (1-2 minutes)
- Students will share through a directed discussion what they know with the class. 3 minutes
- Teacher will record these things on the K-W-L overhead for all the students to see.
- Next students will think-pair-share and complete the "W" section on what they want to know.
- Teacher will lead a directed discussion over what the students want to know, and will try to focus their wants on things that they will learn from the reading and discussion.
- Teacher will record these things on the K-W-L overhead for all the students to see.
- Next teacher will hand out the Introduction to Buddhism and the Introduction to Confucianism.
- Students will read each of these items, highlighting important points and making notes of questions they have about different points.
- Homework: Students will complete the above process for homework. They will also complete the Venn Diagram sheet.

Day 2

- Students will begin class with a think-pair-share about what they read about Confucianism and Buddhism. They will discuss the questions that they have generated from their reading.
- Teacher will lead a directed discussion allowing the students to share these things with the class.
- The students and teacher will work together to complete the "L" - what have they learned using their completed Venn Diagram sheets.
- Teacher will record the things the students suggest on the overhead.
- Students will be instructed to go back and review the "K" section. Was everything that you thought you knew correct? What wasn't correct? How has what you have learned changed your views?
- For the remainder of the period students will engage in an analysis discussion of the difference between Confucianism, Buddhism and Christianity and how their own person frame of reference influences how they interpret what they have learned.

This lesson is part of a larger unit on the role of religion in society. Please understand that in your assessment, as it may seem to be a stranded on its own, but it is really part of a larger picture.

INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHISM

Buddhism  «BU dihz uhm or BOO dihz uhm», is one of the major religions of the world. It was founded in India about 500 B.C., or shortly afterward, by a teacher called Buddha. At various times, Buddhism has been a dominant religious, cultural, and social force in most of Asia. In each area, Buddhism has combined with elements of other religions, such as Hinduism and Shinto. Today, Buddhism has about 350 million followers. Most live in Sri Lanka, the mainland nations of Southeast Asia, and Japan.

The beliefs of Buddhism

All Buddhists have faith in (1) Buddha; (2) his teachings, called the *dharma*; and (3) the religious community he founded, called the *sangha*. Buddhists call Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha the *Three Refuges* or *Three Jewels*.

Buddha probably was born sometime during the 500's or 400's B.C. in southwestern Nepal. His real name was Siddhartha Gautama. According to later Buddhist accounts, he was a member of a rich and powerful family. At the age of about 29, Gautama became overwhelmed with the conviction that life was filled with suffering and unhappiness. This conviction led Gautama to abandon his wife and infant son and to seek religious enlightenment as a wandering monk.

After traveling throughout northeastern India for about six years, Gautama experienced enlightenment. He believed he had discovered why life was filled with suffering and how people could escape from this unhappy existence. After others learned of his discovery, they called him *Buddha*, which means *Enlightened One*. See [Buddha](#).

The dharma. Buddha preached that existence was a continuing cycle of death and rebirth. Each person's position and well-being in life was determined by his or her behavior in previous lives. For example, good deeds may lead to rebirth as a wise and wealthy person or as a being in heaven. A person's evil deeds may lead to rebirth as a poor and sickly person or even in hell.

Buddha also taught that as long as individuals remain within the cycle of death and rebirth, they can never be completely free from pain and suffering. Buddha said people could break out of the cycle by eliminating any attachment to worldly things. By ridding themselves of such attachment, people would gain a kind of perfect peace and happiness. Buddha called this state of peace and happiness *nirvana*. According to Buddha, those who are willing and able to follow the Middle Way and the Noble Eightfold Path will conquer their attachment to worldly things and thus achieve nirvana.

The Middle Way is a way of life that avoids both the uncontrolled satisfaction of human desires and the extreme forms of self-denial and self-torture.

The Noble Eightfold Path consists of (1) knowledge of the truth; (2) the intention to resist evil; (3) saying nothing to hurt others; (4) respecting life, morality, and property; (5) holding a job that does not injure others; (6) striving

INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHISM

to free one's mind of evil; (7) controlling one's feelings and thoughts; and (8) practicing proper forms of concentration.

After Buddha's death, his followers collected the traditions that had developed around the dharma. The oldest of the many Buddhist schools compiled a scripture called the *Tripitaka*. This word means *Three Baskets*. The first part, the *Basket of Discipline*, deals with the rules for regulating the order of Buddhist monks. The second part, the *Basket of Discourses*, consists largely of sermons. The third part, the *Basket of the Higher Dharma*, contains later and more systematic discussions of doctrine. Later Buddhist schools have added their own scriptures.

The sangha. The word *sangha* sometimes refers to the ideal Buddhist community, which consists of those who have reached the higher stages of spiritual development. The word also refers to the order of Buddhist monks and nuns. In addition, the term means the community of monks, nuns, and laity.

The order of monks has always had a special role within the sangha. It has played an important part in preserving and spreading Buddhism. In many Buddhist groups, the discipline of monastic life is considered essential to those who seriously seek nirvana. In most Buddhist countries, monks are expected to live a life of poverty, meditation, and study. Monks are also expected to avoid sexual activity.

Some Buddhists become monks for life, but others serve in the sangha for only short periods of time. The monks wear special robes and are a common sight in all Buddhist countries.

The laity also has an important role in the life of the sangha. Members are expected to honor Buddha, to follow basic moral rules, and to support the monks. They are also expected to pay special honor to images of Buddha and to objects that are associated with him.

Many of the laity have influenced the history of Buddhism. During the 200's B.C., Ashoka, an Indian emperor, supported Buddhism. Ashoka established a tradition that has led to close relations between religion and government in many Buddhist countries. In 1956, B. R. Ambedkar, an Indian layman, led a mass conversion that brought more than 1 million former Hindus in India into the sangha.

INTRODUCTION TO CONFUCIANISM

Confucianism is a philosophy based on the ideas of the Chinese philosopher Confucius. It originated about 500 B.C. From the 100's B.C. to the A.D. 1900's, Confucianism was the most important single force in Chinese life. It influenced Chinese education, government, and personal behavior and the individual's duty to society.

Many people consider Confucianism a religion. But Confucianism has no clergy and does not teach the worship of a God or gods or the existence of a life after death. Confucianism can more accurately be considered a guide to morality and good government.

Early Confucianism. Confucius was born about 551 B.C. At that time, constant warfare raged among the many states that made up China. Rapid political change altered the structure of Chinese society, and large numbers of people no longer respected the established standards of social behavior. Confucius feared that this threat to orderly social life would lead to the destruction of civilization.

Confucius believed his society could be saved if it emphasized sincerity in personal and public conduct. The key to orderly social life was the gentleman. Confucius defined a gentleman not as a person of noble birth, but as one of good moral character. A gentleman was truly reverent in worship and sincerely respected his father and his ruler. He was expected to think for himself, guided by definite rules of conduct. Confucius included many of these rules in sayings. For example, Confucius taught a version of the golden rule—"What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others" (see [Golden rule](#)). A gentleman also studied constantly and practiced self-examination. He took, as Confucius said, "as much trouble to discover what was right as lesser men take to discover what will pay."

Confucius believed that when gentlemen were rulers, their moral example would inspire those beneath them to lead good lives. Virtuous behavior by rulers, he declared, had a greater effect in governing than did laws and codes of punishment.

When Confucius died about 479 B.C., he was largely unknown. His followers spread his ideas. The most important early Confucian philosophers were Mencius (390?-305? B.C.) and Xunzi (mid-200's B.C.). Mencius believed people were born good. He stressed the need to preserve "the natural compassion of the heart" that makes people human. Mencius emphasized the past as an ideal age and a model for examining present problems. In contrast, Xunzi believed people could be good and live together peacefully only if their minds were shaped by education and clear rules of conduct.

By about 200 B.C., the first large, unified Chinese empire had begun. The rulers approved of Confucianism's emphasis on public service and respect for authority. In 124 B.C., the government established the Imperial University to educate future government officials in Confucian ideals. The university based its teachings on five books of Confucian thought called the *Five Classics*. Mastery of the *Classics* became proof of moral fitness and the chief sign of a gentleman.

Later Confucianism. The early Confucianists concerned themselves primarily with the needs of society. However, ideas from Taoism and other philosophies helped shift the emphasis to additional areas of human experience. For

INTRODUCTION TO CONFUCIANISM

example, a person's ability to live in harmony with nature was a minor issue to Confucius. But it became an important theme in Confucian thought during the 200's and 100's B.C.

From about A.D. 200 to 600, interest in Confucianism declined in China. Many Chinese turned instead to Buddhism and Taoism. These religions dealt with problems that the teachings of Confucianism largely ignored, such as the meaning of suffering and death.

A revival of interest in Confucius' philosophy began in the 600's. By the 700's, candidates for government jobs had to take a civil service examination based on Confucian ideas. The examination carried out Confucius' belief that an enduring state must be built on the merit of its rulers' advisers.

Zhu Xi (1130-1200) became a leader of a movement called *Neo-Confucianism*. Zhu developed a branch of Neo-Confucianism called the *rational wing*. It emphasized study and investigation of *Li*, the pattern behind human and natural relationships. Scholars led by Wang Yangming (1472-1529) developed the *intuitional wing* of Neo-Confucianism. They sought enlightenment by a combination of meditation and moral action.

Confucianism continued to actively influence Chinese life until it came into conflict with European ideas, especially Communism, in the 1900's. For many years, the Chinese Communist government opposed Confucianism because the philosophy encouraged people to look to the past rather than to the future. However, official opposition ended in 1977.

Name _____

Date _____

Period _____

BUDDHISM AND CONFUCIANISM

VENN DIAGRAM

Buddhism

Commonalities

Confucianism

