

Activity 3.2 A Sage of China

Performance Objectives Students read, analyze, and paraphrase translations from *The Analects* as a means of understanding key elements of Confucianism.

Grade Level 6–8

Variation Grade Level 9–12

Essential Questions What do the sayings attributed to Confucius tell us about the values inherent in Confucianism?
In these sayings, what is specific to Zhou China and what is universal?

Standards Social Studies

World History

- Explaining the importance of analyzing narratives drawn from different times and places to understand historical events
- Investigating key events and developments and major turning points in world history to identify the factors that brought them about as well as their long-term effects
- Examining the social/cultural, political, economic, and religious norms and values of Western and other world cultures
- Interpreting and analyzing documents and artifacts related to significant developments and events in world history

Civics, Citizenship, and Government

- Analyzing how the values of a nation and international organizations affect the guarantee of human rights and provide for human needs

Language Arts

Language for Critical Analysis and Evaluation

- Analyzing oral and written texts in terms of the evidence, attitudes, and assumptions they convey, identifying, for example, significant ideas, whether stated, implied, or omitted, and means of emphasizing particular interpretations
- Approaching with useful linguistic and interpretive strategies the reading of texts across topic areas—including those that are densely written or visually forbidding.

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Time Required One class period for work with handout; writing assignments may require one class period of editing and revising rough drafts, and a final class period will be needed to share papers

Materials Sayings of Confucius handout
Writing materials for essay
Photocopies of the *Portrait of Confucius* and **Introductory Questions** from the beginning of this section or the *Visible Traces* poster.
Board and chalk to record translations
Colored markers
Paper banners (cut standard 8 1/2 x 11 sheets of paper in half lengthwise; tape together, end to end, to create banners)
Tape

Procedure

1. No doubt students have heard of Confucius and his wise sayings. Canvass the class for typical phrases attributed to Confucius.
2. Have students read the **Sayings of Confucius** handout.
3. Have students work individually or in pairs, to translate the phrases into their own words or work through the sayings as a class, recording interpretations on the board as they are given.
4. Discuss students' interpretations and how they think Confucius's philosophies apply to life today.
5. Have students make banners or bumper stickers of a saying in their own words.
6. Looking at the *Portrait of Confucius*, discuss with the class the **Introductory Questions**. Further discuss the following in relation to the *Portrait of Confucius* by asking students the following questions:
What is Confucius wearing in this portrait?
Is he characterized as particularly handsome?
Does he look proud or humble? Why?
Does this representation seem to embody the idea of wisdom? Why?

Extension Have students generate a fable leading to a moral that highlights one of the sayings on the handout. Share fables with the class, emphasizing the elements of Confucianism reflected therein.

Variation for Grades 9–12 Ask students to do further research on the sayings of Confucius and choose one to write about in a position paper. Students should defend the statement they write about and use specific examples to support their position. Confucius had a great deal to say about both the rights and responsibilities of individuals and society. You may choose to narrow the paper topic by assigning an analysis of human rights according to Confucius.

Handout Sayings of Confucius

Note:
Numbers indicate chapter and
verse where the saying is found in
The Analects.

5:5 Wealth and rank are what men desire, but unless they be obtained in the right way they may not be possessed. Poverty and obscurity are what men detest; but unless prosperity be brought about in the right way, they are not to be abandoned. If a man of honor forsakes virtue how is he to fulfil the obligations of his name? A man of honor never disregards virtue, even for the space of a single meal. In moments of haste he cleaves to it; in seasons of peril he cleaves to it.

5:11 What I do not wish others to do to me, that also I wish not to do to them.

15:20 The noble man seeks what he wants in himself; the inferior man seeks it from others.

11:11 While still unable to do your duty to the living, how can you do your duty to the dead? Not yet understanding life, how can you understand death?

2:15 Learning without thinking is useless. Thinking without learning is dangerous.

2:17 Shall I teach you the meaning of knowledge? When you know a thing to recognize that you know it; and when you do not, to know that you do not know—that is knowledge.

15:38 In teaching there should be no class distinctions.

Source Confucius. *The Analects*. Translated by William Edward Soothill. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1995.