

Asian Odyssey

A National K-12 Interdisciplinary Curriculum Model

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THE FOUR RELIGIONS OF EAST ASIA

Grade Level

This lesson was developed for Middle School students.

Purpose

To provide an introduction to China and Japan's four major religions: Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, and Shinto.

Concepts

- Buddhism is a religion based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, an Indian prince who lived in the 6th century BCE. He became so troubled by human suffering—particularly poverty, disease, old age, and death—that he abandoned his privileged life to become a wandering monk seeking a way to end all suffering. After many years of meditation he awakened to the truth and became known as the Buddha, or Enlightened One. Buddhism was formulated to teach other people how to overcome suffering and reach personal enlightenment.
- Confucianism began as a school of thought founded by Confucius, a Chinese thinker who lived between 551 and 479 BCE, which defined the necessary hierarchy of duties and responsibilities between individuals to achieve harmony and stability in all social and political relationships.
- Daoism developed in the 6th century BCE as a way of thinking about man's relationship to nature and the universe, the Dao means "path" or "way" to lead man to live a virtuous life in harmony with nature.
- Shinto ("Way of the *Kami*") is a belief system deeply rooted in Japanese culture that attempts to explain the relationship between human beings and the forces of nature.

Key Ideas

- **Buddhism** as a religion was formulated to teach each individual to overcome suffering and reach personal enlightenment (*satori*). It was introduced into China from northeastern India (now Nepal) in the first century CE. It became one of the three main Chinese religious traditions, along with Confucianism and Daoism.
 - Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha, based his teaching on the "Four Noble Truths":
 - ❖ Life entails suffering.

- ❖ Suffering is due to vanity and attachment to material objects.
- ❖ Suffering can be stopped if you let go of the attachment.
- ❖ Suffering can be overcome by leading a disciplined, moral life and by practicing deep meditation (*zazen*).
- Buddhism spread rapidly through the Asian continent and was practiced throughout Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka as well as Indonesia, China, Japan, and Korea; today it is practiced worldwide.
- Buddhism became very popular, particularly in times of political and social unrest, as it focused on liberation from the world of suffering, impermanence, and death.
- A person continues to be reborn in this life depending on his or her *karma*, the belief that a person's current life is determined by actions in a previous life. According to Buddhism, selfishness and ignorance about the cause of suffering keep an individual forever trapped in the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (*samsara*). The aim for a Buddhist is to overcome this ignorance and break out of the cycle. The ultimate goal for every Buddhist is to achieve a state known as *nirvana* (enlightenment).
- A *bodhisattva* (enlightened being) is an individual who has broken this cycle of birth and rebirth and is thus able to achieve enlightenment but chooses to stay on earth and help other people attain *nirvana*.
- Buddhism was introduced into Japan in the late sixth century where it took hold quickly as the country was in the middle of a period of political turmoil with warring feudal clans continually attacking each other. In 604, Prince Shotoku, the country's ruler, in an attempt to create a unified state, issued a constitution that combined principles of Buddhism and Confucianism.
- **Confucianism** is based on the teachings of a scholar named Confucius, who lived from 551-479 BCE and is considered the most important thinker in all of Chinese history. Confucius' ideas became the basis for the organization and functioning of the Chinese state from the 2nd century until the Communist takeover in the 20th century. Confucius was not worshiped as a deity until the Tang dynasty (618-907) when the emperor ordered a Confucian temple built in every Chinese province and county.
 - For Confucius an individual did not have to be born noble but could improve himself and become a "superior" person by cultivating five virtues: humanity or goodness (*ren* or *ji*), righteousness (*yi*), proper conduct (*li*), wisdom (*chi*), and trustworthiness (*xin*).
 - The basis for all of these virtues was what Confucius called "filial piety (*xiao*)," the respect and obedience of children to their parents.
 - Confucius maintained that when family relationships are in order, that is when each person performs his duties and responsibilities and shows proper respect, to those both above and below him in the family, society will be ordered and function smoothly.
 - For Confucius, this model of proper relationships within the family could be translated to the political sphere where a wise and virtuous ruler acts as a father to his subjects.

- **Daoism**, with Confucianism, is an indigenous Chinese philosophical and religious system. The basic Daoist text is the *Daodejing (Book of the Way and Its Power)* thought to be the work of Lao-tzu, the legendary founder of Daoism who is believed to be a contemporary of Confucius. Worship of Lao-tzu as a deity began in the 2nd century CE, and later the Tang emperors erroneously claimed descent from him.
 - The fundamental principle is the Dao as the source from which all things exist. It is formless and cannot be held as an object. It is the fundamental unity in which is resolved all the contractions that exist in the universe. Lao-tzu compared the Dao to a block of wood that had not yet been carved into a shape.
 - According to Lao-tzu wisdom begins by studying oneself, and a wise man takes no action that interferes with anything but leaves things alone. This principle of "acting without acting" or "actionless acting" is known as *wu wei* and is fundamental to Daoism. A person who acts this way has been compared to water, which flows everywhere and seems weak but is actually one of the strongest forces in nature.
 - Daoism appealed to the Chinese because of its emphasis on personal freedom and living in harmony with nature.
 - As opposed to Confucianism, which strictly regulated the relationship of the ruler and his subjects, Daoism argues that the best kind of government is one that governs least. The ideal ruler is one who is in touch with the Dao and who governs so effortlessly that his subjects are not even aware they are being governed.
 - In the Daoist tradition there are Eight *Immortals* (individuals who have achieved eternal life through a perfect realization of the Dao). These seven men and one woman are thought to live either in heaven or in the Islands of the Blessed (*Penglai*). Daoists believe the Immortals attained the status of immortality through strenuous meditation, performance of good deeds, and the act of making sacrifices. The Immortals have kept their bodily forms and remain in touch with those on earth. Their pictures are still hung in Chinese houses in hopes they will grant the family long life and future immortality.
- **Shinto** is Japan's native religion, and its beginnings are so old they are lost in obscurity. Shinto does not have a founder, nor does it have any sacred texts. It did not even have a name until the introduction of Buddhism in the 6th century made it necessary to distinguish the two. (Shinto is Japanese for "the way of the *kami*.")
 - Shinto is polytheistic, that is, many gods or deities known as *kami* are worshiped. For believers in Shinto, everything that exists is inhabited by a *kami*. Unlike other religions, there are no absolutes in Shinto and nobody is presumed to be perfect. But human beings are considered to be fundamentally good, so evil must be caused by evil *kami*. The purpose of Shinto rituals is to drive away these evil spirits through self-purification, prayers, and offerings.
 - The *kami* inhabit special trees, boulders, mountains, waterfalls, and other similar natural objects as well as gods and goddesses, and occasionally, extraordinary human beings. Not only is the *kami* an object of worship, but so is the place it resides.

- The powerful forces of nature, such as wind, thunder, lightning, are also controlled by *kami*, who are thought to be manifestations of the higher beings controlling the whole universe.
- Japanese mythology has its basis in Shinto, and the Japanese consider themselves to be a race descended from gods. In Japanese mythology, Amaterasu is the Sun Goddess. She is the daughter of the primordial couple, Izanagi (male) and Izanami (female), creators of the islands of Japan. It is Amaterasu's descendant, Jimmu Tenno, the first emperor, who is believed to be the ancestor of all subsequent Japanese emperors, and from whom they claim their right to rule. Throughout its history, all of Japan's emperors have belonged to the same imperial family, unlike China where there have been many different dynasties that change when the ruler becomes corrupt.
- Shinto shrines are places of worship dedicated to *kami* and are believed to be the home of extraordinary people who became *kami* when they died. People make pilgrimages to Shinto shrines to pay their respects to the spirits, to ask for particular favors, or to pray for good fortune.
- Shrines are approached through a *torii* (gateway), often painted orangey-red and black. The word *torii* means "bird-dwelling" as the upturned crossbeams resemble birds' wings stretching up to the sky. The *torii* symbolically separate the physical world from the spiritual one. Near the entrance there is usually a well or fountain for worshipers to clean their face, hands, and mouth before approaching the shrine.

Materials

Buddhist images

Bodhisattvas of the Ten Stages of Enlightenment, 1454, CMA 1973.70.1

The Eight Hosts of Celestial Nagas and Yakshis, 1454, CMA 1973.70.2

A Preaching Buddha, 8th century, CMA 1985.87

Seated Buddha, CMA 1915.352

Stele with Sakyamuni and Bodhisattvas, 534-549, CMA 1914.567

Nikko, the Sun Bodhisattva, c. 800, CMA 1961.48

Bodhisattva, c.750-850, CMA 1983.86

Standing Shokannon, 10th century, CMA 1984.69

Yakushi-Nyorai Buddha, 12th century, CMA 1973.85

Confucianism images

Lady Xuanwen Jun Giving Instructions on the Classics 1638, 1961.89

Court Lady Holding Plum Blossom: Tomb Figurine, 700's, 1987.13

Mirror with Confucian Maxim 15th century, CMA 1995.395

Daoist images

Miniature Mountain with Daoist Paradise, 18th century, CMA 1941.594

Dish with Laozi Riding a Water Buffalo (interior); Pavilion and Immortals in Rocky Landscape (exterior), 1723-1735, CMA 1989.315

Bowl with "Land of Taoists Immortals" Scene, 1426-1435, CMA 1962.260

Plate with Isle of the Immortals, 1723-1735, CMA 1956.709

Raft Cup, 1345, CMA 1977.7

Shinto images

Shinto Deity, 9th-10th century, CMA 1978.3.1-2

Zao Gongen, 13th century, CMA 1973.105

Enno Gyoja, 1185-1333, CMA 1975.65

Head of a Male Shinto Deity, 10th century, CMA 1985.30

Shinto deity: Izu-san Gongen, 12th century, CMA 1954.373

Hartz, Paula. *Shinto (World Religions)*. New York: Facts on File. 1997

Meredith, Susan, et al. *The Usborne Internet-linked Encyclopedia of World Religions*.
Tulsa, E.D.C. Publishing, 2002.

Osborne, Mary Pope. *One World, Many Religions: the Ways We Worship*. New York:
Knopf Books for Young Readers, 1996.

Wilkinson, Philip. *Buddhism*. New York: DK Publishing, 2003.

Graphic Organizer

Colored pencils and markers

Procedure

1. Copy the Graphic Organizer as a two-sided document and pass one to each student.
2. Share Key Ideas with students. Have the students take notes on the discussion in their organizer; suggest that they use a different color pencil for each religion.
3. As you discuss each of the religions, show slides of the CMA images or pass out reproductions. Ask students to consider how these images highlight the key ideas of origins, deities, ritual, and worship.
4. After all the religions are discussed, guide the students to show the similarities and differences between the religions.
5. Have students choose either a similarity or a difference between any two of the religions and research the topic further. Have them present their findings either in writing or as a comparison of artworks, or a combination of the two.
6. Supply students with books on the religions and provide access to the computer to locate information and images.
7. Some students may choose to do a word sort using the italicized words from the Concepts and Key Ideas above. Have students put each word on a 3x5 index card. Shuffle the cards and have students sort the words by religion. Words that stump them will need to be checked in a dictionary or reference book.

Enrichment

- A. Compare Shinto or Buddhist traditions to student's own religion.
- B. Focus on houses of worship and create a replica of a Shinto shrine or Buddhist temple.
- C. Research the road that Buddhism took from India to China to Korea to Japan. Make a time line.
- D. Students can investigate Buddhist and Shinto festivals and make comparisons with other world religions that students have studied.

- E. Have students research the Buddha's main teachings of The Four Noble Truths and The Eightfold Path. Compare these teachings or ideas to their own religious beliefs.

Ohio State Standards

People in Societies Standard

1. Students use knowledge of perspectives, practices and products of cultural, ethnic and social groups to analyze the impact of their commonality and diversity within local, national, regional and global settings.

Geography Standard

1. Students use knowledge of geographic locations, patterns and processes to show the interrelationship between the physical environment and human activity, and to explain the interactions that occur in an increasingly interdependent world.

**This lesson plan developed by Jackie Crandall, Beachwood High School,
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