

Confucianism and Daoism Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question:

What did ancient Chinese philosophers think was the ideal form of government?

Note: This lesson can either be a two-document lesson or a four-document lesson. We encourage you to choose and adapt materials based on the needs of your students.

Materials:

- Copies of Documents A & B
- Copies of Documents C & D (optional)
- Copies of Confucianism and Daoism Overview
- Copies of Close Reading Questions
- Copies of Sourcing Questions

Plan of Instruction:

1. Use the PowerPoint to review or establish background information on Confucianism and Daoism.
 - a. Slide 2: The Zhou Dynasty. *The 6th-5th centuries BCE were a time of extreme political and social instability in China.*

In the mid-11th century BCE, the Zhou, a ruling family, fought and defeated the Shang dynasty. This brought most of China under a single government for the first time in history. Within this empire were many smaller territories ruled by nobles. During the 8th-6th centuries, these relatively small territories fought many battles against one another. As a result, by the 6th century, these many small territories were consolidated into just seven states.

Around the same time, the Zhou emperors had lost most of their political and military authority over the nobles and territories they once ruled.

- b. Slide 3: The Warring States Period. *In the 5th century BCE, an era known as the Warring States Period began. This was a period of intense warfare between the Zhou Dynasty and rival states that were competing against them for control. The constant conflict created a strong need for new, innovative political and social models to solve the crisis affecting China.*

As a result, the Warring States Period was also an intellectual golden age that led to the development of many new philosophies known as the Hundred Schools of Thought.

- c. Slides 4 & 5: Confucianism and Daoism. *The most influential of these philosophies were Confucianism, developed from the teachings of the*

philosopher Confucius, and Daoism, developed by the philosopher Laozi. Although these two philosophers lived at the same time, they came up with very different ideas for what China needed to do to fix its society. Today, we are going to investigate those ideas.

2. Hand out Confucianism and Daoism Overview. Spend time going over this with students as a class. The handout will be a useful reference for students when they start looking through the documents.

Note: If students have spent time studying Confucianism and Daoism or have significant background knowledge of these topics, we encourage you to modify the Overview based on students' knowledge.

In pairs, have students discuss and then share out responses to the following questions:

- a. *What are the main ideas of Confucianism?* Possible answers might include: an intense focus on good behavior, maintaining traditional social relationships, and behaving in a moral, loving, obedient, and upstanding way.
 - b. *What are the main ideas of Daoism?* Possible answers might include: a major focus on living in peace and harmony, simplicity, people being themselves, and letting things take their natural course without interference.
 - c. *How are these philosophies different from each other?* Possible answer: Confucianism is very concerned with setting a positive example and behaving in a morally correct way. Daoism is less concerned with proper action and more focused on maintaining peace and harmony
3. Remind students that both Confucianism and Daoism were developed in response to the political disorder going on in China. Thus, the main focus of today's lesson is going to be what these philosophies had to say about government. We'll also practice sourcing, close reading, and contextualization skills. Introduce Central Historical Question: *What did ancient Chinese philosophers think was the ideal form of government?*
 4. Hand out Document A, Document B, and Guiding Questions. Explain to students that they are going to closely read the two documents to identify the claims each document makes about the ideal type of government and to determine which document is from a Confucian perspective and which is from a Daoist perspective.
 - a. In pairs, students read Documents A and B, answer the Guiding Questions, and complete the sourcing exercise in the Graphic Organizer.

- i. Document A: These are modified excerpts from the *Analects of Confucius* (c. 476-221 BCE). Students should be able to recognize this through the strong emphasis on promoting moral men to leadership positions. According to the document, people will submit to men who are wise, serious, and love all people. It says society can only be healed by having these men rule.
 - ii. Document B: These are modified excerpts from the *Dao De Jing (Classic of the Way and the Virtue)*, written by the Daoist founder Laozi in the sixth century BCE. Students should be able to recognize this based on the strong emphasis on individual freedom and leaving people alone to solve their own problems. Actions such as desire, ambition, and the creation of laws are destructive as they create negative actions and should be avoided.
- b. Students share out responses to the questions and the sourcing activity.

Note: If you've chosen to teach this lesson with two documents, skip to the final discussion described in #6. If you plan to use four documents, continue with #5 below.

5. Hand out Document C, Document D, and the Guiding Questions. Explain to students that they are going to closely read another pair of documents and complete a similar process as they did with the first two documents: identifying the claims each document makes about the ideal type of government and determining which document represents a Confucian perspective and which represents a Daoist perspective.
 - a. In pairs, students read Documents C and D, answer the Guiding Questions, and complete the sourcing exercise in the Graphic Organizer.
 - i. Document C: These are modified excerpts from one of the foundational texts of Daoism, The *Zhuangzi*, written by Zhuang Zhou in the third century BCE. In them, Zhuang Zhou rejects the idea of a ruler who sets many laws and standards and instead argues that people should be left alone in order to “do what they are supposed to do.” An ideal ruler, then, must find a balance between caring for people and letting them be independent, while ensuring that they do not grow dependent on government.
 - ii. Document D: These are modified excerpts from *Mencius*, which was written by a scholar of the same name in the third century BCE. Historians consider Mencius to be an extremely important Confucian scholar. In these passages, Mencius argues that people will love and respect their ruler if he is humane and ensures that their needs (physical, educational, etc.) are met. Mencius also puts great importance on the power of the people, arguing that ordinary citizens should have the final say in government decisions.

6. Final discussion: After identifying the source of Documents C and D, ask students:
 - a. *Do both sources from Confucian scholars describe exactly the same vision of an ideal government? Do both sources from Daoist scholars describe exactly the same vision of an ideal government?*
 - b. *What are some of the differences between the scholars representing the same philosophies? Why might these differences exist?*

Depending on the amount of time you have to devote to this discussion, comparisons may be extremely detailed or relatively broad. Encourage students to think about how difficult it is to translate philosophy into government practice—even people who believe in and practice the same philosophy or religion might have very different ideas about what a government should look like.

- c. *What are the strengths and weaknesses of each philosophy?*
 7. Share out and discuss responses.
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Sources

Document A

Confucius. *The Chinese Classics*. Translated by James Legge. Project Gutenberg, 2003. Retrieved from <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4094>.

Document B

Translations consulted:

Laozi. *The Sacred Books of China: The Texts of Taoism*. Translated by James Legge. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/sacredbookschin00legggooq>.

Note: Document B in the Original Documents file comes from this translation.

Laozi. "Daode Jing." Resources for East Asian Language and Thought. July 27, 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.acmuller.net/con-dao/daodejing.html>.

Laozi. *Dao De Jing: The Book of the Way*. Translated by Moss Roberts. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

Document C

Zhou, Zhuang. *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*. Translated by Burton Watson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1968.

Document D

Mencius. *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*. Translated & compiled by Wing-tsit Chan. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963.