

CONFUCIANISM

Understanding and Applying *The Analects of Confucius*

By Rachel McDevitt

RATIONALE

Examination of the world's most influential scholars and philosophers helps students to understand the values, ethics, and lessons considered important at given times throughout history. The understanding of these elements also helps students realize how the legacy of these scholars and philosophers continues to impact and influence modern society.

Any study of the world's most influential and important philosophers includes Confucius. While his ideas resonate throughout all aspects of life in many Asian countries today, the study of his life and ideas is of particular relevance for high school students. As his thoughts and ideas focused on human interaction, moral behavior, and education, many students are challenged to examine the same topics in the classroom, the community, and with their families and peers.

The activities in this lesson plan rely on the interpretation and analysis of primary documents. Students have the opportunity to read passages from *The Analects of Confucius*, analyze the information contained therein, and then apply the analysis to make conclusions about a hypothetical situation.

Grade Level/Subject Area

High School: World Geography, World Cultures, World History, World Literature

Objectives

Students will gain exposure to the life of Confucius and the basic elements of Confucianism.

Students will analyze and identify key components of Confucian teaching.

Students will apply the concepts from *The Analects of Confucius* as they consider contemporary ethical or social dilemmas.

Time Allotment

Approximately three class periods (each period: 45 minutes to one hour).

Classroom Arrangement

Day One: Students sit in a manner that facilitates direct instruction and whole class discussion.

Day Two: Students gather into groups of four.

Resources Needed

Handout 1: *Introduction to Confucius, Confucianism, and The Analects*. One copy per student.

Handout 2: Passages 2.3, 4.16, 7.22, and 15.21 from *The Analects of Confucius*, reproduced and cut into strips, one passage per group.

Handout 3: Hypothetical situations photocopied and cut into strips, one hypothetical situation per group.

Primary Source/Book: *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* by Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr.

Visuals: overhead transparencies, posters, or other images of Confucius to familiarize students with topic. (optional)

PROCEDURE

Day One

Begin the lesson by introducing students to the life of Confucius, his philosophy, and subsequent Confucian teachings. Distribute **Handout 1** to each student. Read over section one, the biographical information about Confucius, and the elements of Confucianism.

Next, direct the students' attention to Handout 1, Page 2 of 2, with passages 1.6, 2.3, 4.16, 7.22, and 15.21, from *The Analects*. The first passage provides a model for analyzing the passages. Read over the model and then ask students to choose a few passages to analyze using the same model. Ask the students to attempt this individually. During day two, the students will have an opportunity to approach a similar task using the same passages in a group setting.

Close the lesson by reviewing the key characteristics of Confucianism.

Days Two and Three

(Day Three continuation and completion of activity described below)

Using Handout 1 from Day one, begin with a review of the key characteristics of Confucianism.

Next, divide students into groups of four.

Give each group a strip of paper with a passage from *The Analects* (**Handout 2**). Using **Handout 1**, the first objective for each group is to uncover the meaning of their passage using the *analysis model* demonstrated for the students using passage 7.22. The second objective is to distill the meaning of the passage into a one or two sentence phrase written in language they can readily understand and apply. To ensure individual participation, each student will write this on his or her own paper.

Next, each group will be given one slip of paper with a description of a hypothetical situation based on a contemporary school/social problem or complex situation involving interpersonal relationships (**Handout 3**).

Give each group time to read and become familiar with the situation described on the strip of paper.

Then explain to each group that they will be asked to act as "Confucius." It will be their responsibility to analyze the hypothetical situation from the perspective of Confucius. Using the specific lesson or message conveyed in the passage from *The Analects* that they have read and re-written, it will be their job to discuss a solution or approach to the problem while using the teachings of Confucius. During this stage, the teacher must monitor each group to make sure that the groups are adhering to the teachings set out in their particular passage.

