Confucianism, Taoism, and Legalism

Standard/Objective

• Students will explain how information and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference. (NCSS)
• Students will identify various teachings of Confucianism and Taoism, and then illustrate one of the teachings.

Materials

Copy of the facsimile *The Three Ways*; Copies of the historical background information (page 56); Copies of the activity sheet, *The Teachings of Confucius* (page 57); Copies of *The Three Ways* (page 58); Paper, paint, and paintbrushes; Copies of the *Pronunciation Guide* (guide.pdf)

Discussion Questions

• What do you see in the picture?
• What do you think is going on in the picture?
• What culture or religion do you think is represented here?
• Who might these people be or what do they represent?

Using the Primary Source

Distribute copies of the primary source *The Three Ways* (page 58) to students. Give them a few minutes to study the picture carefully. Ask the discussion questions above. Tell students to imagine what these three men would say if the picture could talk. Have students draw conversation bubbles on their pages and fill in the conversation. Let a few students share their conversations with the class.

Tell students that this is a painting that shows a Confucian (left), a Buddhist (center), and a Taoist (right) having a peaceful discussion. Distribute copies of the historical background information (page 56) and read it aloud as a class. Have your students read the background information on Buddhism (page 32). Tell students that legalism is not represented in the painting. Take time to clarify or answer any questions.

Now, have students meet with partners. Distribute the activity sheet *The Teachings of Confucius* (page 57). Students will review several Confucian sayings, explain their meanings, and draw a picture to represent it. Students can also complete one or more of the additional sayings below the chart.

Then, have each student select one of the sayings to illustrate in the form of a painting. Provide each student with paper, paint, and brushes to paint a picture of one of these teachings. Display the paintings around the room with their corresponding Confucian quotes and explanations.

Note: Remember to distribute copies of the *Pronunciation Guide* to students.

Extension Idea

Have students research the meaning behind *yin and yang* and find its application in everyday life.
Confucianism, Taoism, and Legalism (cont.)

Historical Background Information

Confucianism and Taoism began around 500 BCE in China. Together, they have shaped almost all of Chinese culture. Both Confucianism and Taoism are different philosophies. But the two philosophies do not conflict with each other. Confucianism is a philosophy focusing more on the moral, social, and political part of living. Taoism is a philosophy that believes human nature, living a long life, and being spontaneous are important. Confucianism and Taoism overlap in some beliefs, too. People can follow both philosophies at the same time.

K’ung fu-tzu, also known as Confucius, was born in China in about 551 BCE. China was being torn apart by wars. People seemed to be forgetting how to treat others with kindness. Confucius reminded people what the ancient wise men had believed. He taught a system of respect and courtesy. People in higher positions deserved respect from those in lower positions. Those in higher positions should be kind to those in lower positions.

Confucius’ wise sayings were written down by his followers. One of his teachings is what we call the Golden Rule: “Never do to others what you would not like them to do to you.”

Taoism was started by a man named Laozi. He was an old man when Confucius was young. While the teachings of Confucius were practical, Laozi’s teachings were more spiritual. His philosophy is known as the Tao. The word Tao means “way” or “path.” Tao is like a stream that is constantly moving and changing. It is the flow of life. People should strive for harmony with the Tao. A life in harmony with the Tao is usually simple and quiet, marked by humility and compassion. Laozi’s beliefs are written in a book called Tao Te Ching.

Taoism also taught about yin and yang. These are two opposite forces in the universe. The yin is cold, dark, and mysterious, like the moon. The yang is bright, warm, and clear, like the sun. It is the balance between these two forces that brings changes and harmony in the world and within people.

Legalism was another philosophy taught in China. Legalism taught that people were bad and selfish. The only way to have order was to enforce strict laws. These laws came from the ruler. The ruler disciplined anyone who broke the laws. While Confucius taught that the government should serve the people, legalism taught that the people should serve the government. Rulers from the Qin Dynasty adopted legalism. In 213 BCE, Qin leaders burned any book that did not agree with their philosophy. When Confucian followers tried to save their books, the Qin put them to death.

A philosophy is different from a religion. A philosophy is a person’s search for wisdom. A religion is an organized system of beliefs and rituals centering on a supernatural being or beings. Neither Confucianism nor Taoism began as a religion. They were philosophies, or belief systems. Later, people started building temples and shrines to honor these ideas as if they were religions.
The Teachings of Confucius

Background Information
Confucius was born in northeastern China around 551 BCE. He lived during a difficult time in China, with war and civil disorder. He was concerned about people forgetting the old ways of treating one another with respect. He taught people through sayings that reminded them how to be good. His followers wrote down the sayings for people to read and learn.

Directions: Below are several of the teachings of Confucius. Work with your partner to fill out the chart below. Figure out what the saying means and then describe, in words, how you would illustrate this saying.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confucian Saying</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Describe Illustration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our greatest glory is not in ever falling, but in getting up every time we do.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When anger rises, think of the consequences.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A man who commits a mistake and does not correct it is committing another mistake.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Challenge
Confucius believed that education was very important. Research what he thought was important for students to learn. Do you think these things have value today? Explain your answer.