

Presentation on Confucianism (20 minutes)

Instructions: Everyone circles up on the floor, with fabric underlay spread out in the center. Youth take turns being *READER* of the script, while two designated *ILLUSTRATORS* lay down corresponding cards about Confucianism. Card sets are identical.

Reader: We have already considered the works of other teachers in the 6th century BCE: Mahavira Jina (Jainism), Gautama Buddha (Buddhism), and Lao Tzu (Taoism). Confucius also lived and taught during that period.

Illustrator: *Put down 5 cards on the fabric underlay, each portraying Confucius*

Reader: And these are his dates...

Illustrator: *Put down cards with birth and death dates.*

Reader: The name commonly known as Confucius was actually known as Kung Fu Tzu, but Latinized by early Portuguese explorers/traders who brought Catholicism to Asia.

Illustrator: *Put down name card.*

Reader: Kung Fu Tzu lived at a time when China was divided up into warring feudal states (475BCE – 221BCE) and those ruling China were politically corrupt. He believed in the *Tao* but felt that Taoist teachings came across too easily as a **passive** acceptance of a corrupt world. So in contrast, he taught that the *Tao* was an **active** way of living, connecting the harmony of the cosmic order with his pursuit of social-political order. And for this, what was needed was standardized wisdom about everyday rules of conduct by which to live and by which nations should be ruled.

The *Analects of Confucius* is a collection of sayings and ideas attributed to Kung Fu Tzu and his contemporaries, and it remains one of the central texts of Confucianism.

Illustrator: *Put down Analects card.*

Reader: Here are some examples of wisdom that Kung Fu Tzu made conventional for everyday conduct:

Illustrator: *Put down 7 wisdom saying cards, one at a time, reading each saying.*

[Take a moment and invite any comments from class.]

Reader: Confucianism – known also as Ruism, or the “School of Scholars” – does not have a standard symbol or icon representing its belief system. Quite often, though, the Chinese ideogram for water is utilized, as water represents the “source of life” in Chinese philosophy.

Illustrator: *Put down card with Chinese character 水 (shuǐ /water).*

Reader: Confucianism does not contain all of the elements of major religions, as it represents primarily an ethical code of behavior and a way of life. (It is for this reason that a Buddhist can also be a Confucianist in the way that a Christian could be a “gentleman” or Girl Scout or Rotarian or member of the Lion’s Club.) But Confucianism has sacred rituals at important times during a person’s lifetime, including: birth, proposal, engagement, dowry, wedding procession, marriage and reception, morning after wedding, death and burial, and ancestor worship. Here is a Confucian ritual at a shrine, honoring Kung Fu Tzu and royal ancestors:

Illustrator: *Put down Confucian Ritual card.*

Reader: Here is also the *Temple of Confucius* in Qufu, Shandong Province of China. It is the “original,” largest, and most renowned temples of Confucius in East Asia.

Illustrator: *Put down Temple of Qufu card.*

Reader: During his lifetime, Kung Fu Tzu was a public official, scholar-teacher, traveling sage, and an advisor to government officials. Confucianism spread and almost served like the state religion of China, Taiwan, Korea, and Vietnam, largely because its immense (!) historical influence on their culture and government.

Illustrator: *Put down Spread of Confucianism card.*

Reader: But at the core of Confucianism are five central *human* ideals or virtues, which go beyond religious beliefs to pervade the history of Chinese thought, culture, and the character of its people. In many ways, Kung Fu Tzu was the most Unitarian Universalist of all the 6th century Asian teachers because of his *humanist* ideals. Let’s take a look at the five central human ideals:

(*Note: translating Chinese, with its use of ideograms as opposed to translating Sanskrit Hindu words, is not a simple matter. Each ideogram contains a rich family of ideas and meanings that are not narrowly defined.)

The first major human ideal: **Rén**, or benevolence/human-heartedness is the ideal virtuous relationship among people. As people have the capacity for both good and evil, they must always strive to be the most benevolent, generous human beings they can be.

Illustrator: *Put down Rén card.*

Reader: The second major human ideal: **Yì**, or righteousness/justice, is about being morally right, of being true and honest in relations with others. It includes values such as loyalty and reciprocity in treating others as you would have them treat you.

Illustrator: *Put down Yì card, along with cards for Reciprocity and Duties/Rights. (Note on the scale that one's Duties to others weigh more than one's Rights.)*

Reader: The third major human ideal: **Lǐ** refers to proper rites/decorum or customs/good manners that help maintain order in both the social and natural world. Lǐ promoted important ideals such as filial piety. There are many, hundreds, even thousands of prescribed rituals in Confucian practice, including: how to drink tea, what to wear to burials, and (really important!) how to govern.

Illustrator: *Put down Lǐ card, along with the card for Family Loyalty.*

Reader: The fourth major human ideal: **Zhì** (ji) is knowledge/wisdom not simply about rational abilities but about a person's moral sense of right and wrong. Such wisdom defines the ideal sage-ruler who knows how to bring about social well-being.

Illustrator: *Put down Zhì card.*

Reader: The fifth major human ideal: **Xìn** (shēn) refers to integrity/sincerity or faithfulness in one's words and actions. Confucius held that only persons of integrity should be appointed to some task, and that only such integrity could be the basis for building and administering a country. Only when rulers keep their word would the governed trust and follow.

Illustrator: *Put down Xìn card.*

[Take a moment and invite any comments from class.]