



Curriculum Connections

The Analects: *An Illustrated Edition*

By Confucius

Adapted and Illustrated by C.C. Tsai Translated by Brian Bruya
Princeton University Press, 2018 Non-Fiction, Set in China
2018 of Note, Freeman Book Award for Young Adult / High School Literature



CONFUCIUS
THE ANALECTS

ILLUSTRATED BY
C. C. TSAI

FOREWORD BY
MICHAEL PUETT
AUTHOR OF *THE PATH*

"Isn't it a pleasure to study and then put into practice what you learn?"
Analects 1:1

C.C. Tsai's graphic novel interpretation of Confucius' *The Analects* is far from a mere reduction or simplification of this ancient philosophy. If I wanted to introduce high school students to Chinese philosophy, I would favor this edition of the text. According to the Forward by Harvard professor Michael Puett, C.C. Tsai's illustrations add important context to the teaching. As an educator, I believe the illustrations will not only capture the attention of students but will also help them to remember the sayings and build important connections between this reading and their study of history, literature, philosophy, and language. While the text includes a variety of themes, *The Analects* fundamentally addresses moral and civic education as well as presenting some foundational values in East Asian culture. In his 2003 book *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently...and Why* social psychologist Richard Nisbett suggests that Asian culture has an acute sense of social duty while Western culture devoutly uplifts the individual. This Western individualism is represented throughout Western literature from the rugged individualist of James Fenimore Cooper's Hawkeye to Ayn Rand's Howard Roark of *The Fountainhead*. In contrast,



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Confucian thought privileges propriety, appropriateness, ritual, and filial piety - virtues which are understood and practiced within the context of our relationships with others. While *The Analects* is not the last word on East Asian culture, it can help students to better understand the core values of Confucianism that remain significant in most East Asian societies.

While the philosophy is packaged as a graphic novel, the text is still philosophical and would be intellectually challenging to many young readers. I would recommend this book for upper high school grades 11-12. There are a variety of curricular entry points for this book including **World History** and **World Literature** as well as **Philosophy** and **Civic Education**.

If you are teaching Confucianism in the context of the Warring States Period and Ancient Chinese History, a common strategy is to present Confucianism in comparison with other contemporary schools of thought, especially Daoism and Legalism. For example, a lesson plan created by The Field Museum in Chicago compares Confucianism to Daoism and Buddhism. Students are asked to consider "how do these belief systems fit together?" and "who are the central figures?" Students will also identify common themes in all three traditions and those beliefs and practices that make each one unique. The Stanford History Education Group (SHEG) also has a lesson plan on Confucianism that compares Confucian writings and Daoist writing, asking students to read for clues and identify which system the primary source represents. Finally, in a 2002 lesson plan on Ming China written by Marco deMartino, Ping Wang, and Jaye Zola, students identify principles of Confucianism and Legalism in a primary source, the proclamation of the Ming Dynasty's Hongwu Emperor. In all of these cases, Confucianism is presented in contrast to another philosophical system, helping students to learn through comparison and contrast.

Considering the new AP **World History** curriculum unveiled in 2019-20, there is very little coverage of Ancient China or the time period in which Confucius and his school of thought emerges. However, to focus on the time period only misses the significance of Confucianism to East Asian culture and history. Confucianism plays a role in Chinese culture and politics up to the present. Along with C.C. Tsai's book, teachers



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of **World History** could assign primary sources of later Confucian texts. Within the new timeline of AP World History, it would be appropriate to read selections from Confucian scholars Zhu Xi (1130-1200 CE) who is a founder of Neo-Confucianism, which addresses the competing philosophical system of Buddhism. Zhu Xi's "Preface to the Great Learning by Chapter and Phrase" is available on the *Asia for Educators* site. For one's coverage of the Ming Dynasty, read selections by Wang Yangming (1472-1529 CE) such as "On the Unity of Knowing and Acting," also edited with questions by *Asia for Educators*. Finally, for the unit on China's Revolution, consider reading Liu Shaoqi's (1898-1969 CE) "How to Be a Good Communist." In short, *Asia for Educators* includes a full list of primary sources in pdf format along with document-based discussion questions - such as the 8th century "Analects for Women" by Song Ruozhao (761-828 CE) - to supplement the study of **World History**.

For both **World History** and **Word Literature**, classes that often emphasize breadth over depth, we must be cautious that we do not present a written work or source like Confucius as the only source of a culture's literature. At the same time, *The Analects* presents certain foundational language and traditional moral teaching within foundational history context for China that may help students interpret other works of East Asian literature and film. For example, in **World Literature** one may assign Ba Jin's *The Family*, a story of an extended family in 1920s China.

Another work of **world literature** dealing with Confucian hierarchy is *Raise the Red Lantern* by Su Tong. There are also popular films about East Asian culture that also demonstrate the importance of relationships and filial piety in Confucian culture. Two of my favorites are the 2004 Korean film *Tae Guk Gi* about the filial love of two brothers drafted into the Korean War and the 2019 American film *The Farewell*, in which a Chinese American millennial travels to China to say farewell to her dying *nǎi nai* 奶奶 (grandmother) (pronounced: "nye nye"). Both films emphasize the individual's place in and duties to their family.

Like **World Literature**, a **Philosophy** or **Religious Studies** class may also appreciate reading this edition of *The Analects*. C.C. Tsai preserves the essential philosophical teachings so this text could be used as a source in an introductory



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philosophy class. However, beyond learning about the tradition of Confucianism, I would like to suggest that students may be asked to ponder some of Confucius' teaching for their own lives. C.C. Tsai's *The Analects* may also be used as a powerful source in the teaching of moral and civic education.

The following quotes are most well-known because they are used in writing, conversation, textbooks, and examinations for K-16 students in China today. Ask students to think about these quotes in contrast to selections from Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack*.

Pleasure and Dignity

Isn't it a pleasure to study and then put into practice what you learn? Isn't it a delight to have friends come from far? Isn't he a gentleman who remains dignified though he goes unrecognized?

-P. 46 (1:1)

Benjamin Franklin:

"Well done is better than well said."

- *Poor Richard's Almanack, 1737*

"A true Friend is the best Possession."

- *Poor Richard's Almanack, 1744*

Seeing Yourself in Others

"When you see someone who is capable and virtuous, think about trying to be like him. When you see someone who is neither capable nor virtuous, look at yourself and see if you share any qualities with him."

-P.78 (4:17) Analects

Benjamin Franklin

"Search others for their virtues, thyself for thy vices."

- *Poor Richard's Almanack, 1738*



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The Wise and the Benevolent

Wise people enjoy the water. They understand the happenings of the world and so take pleasure in the smooth flowing of the water. Benevolent people enjoy the Mountains. They are unwavering in their virtue and so take pleasure in the steadfastness of the mountains. Wise people enjoy being active; Benevolent people enjoy keeping still. Wise people find their own joys; Benevolent people live long in tranquility.

-P.96 (6:23)

Ben Franklin: "What more valuable than Gold? Diamonds. Than Diamonds? Virtue."

- *Poor Richard's Almanack, 1751*

Harmonize

A Gentleman harmonizes with others but does not conform; A lesser man conforms with others but does not harmonize.

-P.138 (13:23)

Benjamin Franklin:

"A right Heart exceeds all."

- *Poor Richard's Almanack, 1739*

"He that lies down with Dogs, shall rise up with fleas."

- *Poor Richard's Almanack, 1733*

Thinking Ahead

Confucius said: "Failing to think far into the future, leads to trouble near at hand."

-P.155 Analects (15:12)

Benjamin Franklin: "Look before, or you'll find yourself behind."

- *Poor Richard's Almanack, 1735*



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Be thoughtful

Zigong asked Confucius: Is there one word that can act as a standard of conduct for one's whole life? Confucius said: Perhaps it would be "thoughtfulness." What you do not like, do not impose on others.

-P.158 (15:24)

Benjamin Franklin: "When you're good to others, you're best to yourself."
- *Poor Richard's Almanack, 1748*

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References

Nisbett, Richard E. *The geography of thought: How Asians and Westerners think differently ... and why.* New York: Free Press, 2003.

Recommended Teaching Resources

Books and Films:

Ba Jin (Li Feigan). *The Family.* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1953)

Kang, Je-gyu, dir. Taegukgi: The Brotherhood of War. 2004; South Korea: Showbox, 2005. DVD.

Tong, Su. *Raise the Red Lantern: Three Novellas.* (W. Morrow and Company, 1993)

Wang, Lulu, dir. *The Farewell.* 2019; New York: A24, 2019. DVD



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Online Resources:

Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism lesson from The Field Museum Learning Center:
<https://www.fieldmuseum.org/sites/default/files/lifeways.pdf>

Confucianism and Daoism lesson from the Stanford History Education Group:
<https://sheg.stanford.edu/history-lessons/confucianism-and-daoism>

List of Chinese primary sources and document-based questions from Asia for Educators:
http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/main_pop/ps/ps_china.htm