The Teachings of Confucius and Laozi

As you read think about how the writings of these two teachers are similar and different.

Confucius

These excerpts are from a collection of the teachings of Confucius called the Analects.

The Master said: “Riches and rank are what every man [wants]; yet if the only way to [get] them goes against his principles, he should desist from such a pursuit. Poverty and obscurity are what every man hates; yet if the only escape from them goes against his principles, he should accept his lot. If a gentleman forsakes humanity, how can he make a name for himself? Never for a moment does a gentleman part from humanity; he clings to it through trials, he clings to it through tribulations.”

The Master said: “I have never seen a man who truly loved goodness and hated evil. Whoever truly loves goodness would put nothing above it; whoever truly hates evil would practice goodness in such a way that no evil could enter him. Has anyone ever [given] all his strength to goodness just for one day? No one ever has, and yet it is not for want of

strength—there may be people who do not have even the small amount of strength it takes, but I have never seen any.”

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. In your own words, describe what Confucius says everyone wants and everyone hates.

2. Do you agree with Confucius that everyone has the strength to be good? Why or why not?

Laozi

This excerpt is from the book The Way and Its Power. Some people believe that Laozi was not the only writer of this collection.

On True Happiness. Is there such a thing as true happiness, or is there not? . . . What should I do and what should I believe? What should I avoid and what should I follow? What should I accept and what should I reject? What should I love and what should I hate? What the world [thinks important] are wealth, rank, a long life and goodness. What people enjoy are good health, rich food, fine clothing, beauty and music. What they hate are poverty, a low position, dying young, and ugly disease . . . Such attendance to the externals is indeed foolish. The rich hustle and bustle and hoard up wealth which they cannot use. Their method of attending to external comforts is superficial . . .

The Teachings of Confucius and Laozi, continued

As to what the world does and the way people seek happiness now, I do not know if such happiness be real happiness or unhappiness. I watch the world rushing about with the crowd to seek happiness, and see [that] something seems to drive them along. Yet they all say they are happy . . . It has been said, “Perfect happiness is the absence of (the striving for) happiness.”

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. What four things does Laozi say that the world thinks are important?

2. Name the four things that Laozi says people hate.

MAKE A COMPARISON

1. Choose one belief by Confucius and one belief by Laozi. Do you agree or disagree with each belief? Explain why.

2. In your own words, compare what Confucius says about money with what Laozi says about money.
Vocabulary Builder

Section 5

1. wheelbarrow
2. Silk Road
3. diffusion
4. silk
5. diffusion
6. Silk Road
7. silk
8. true
9. false—The Silk Road was a 4,000-mile-long network of routes that stretched westward from China across Asia’s deserts and mountain ranges, through the Middle East until it reached the Mediterranean Sea.

Biography Liu Bang

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?
1. He made peace with tribes that were trying to invade China, and he eliminated many harsh laws.
2. Liu Bang was a police officer, then became a rebel. Pang became king, then emperor of China. He made many important decisions and influenced many leaders to come.

ACTIVITY
Answers will vary.

Biography Wudi

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?
1. Possible response: They had to pay the price for all of the wars. Wudi was gaining control, but they only gained higher taxes.
2. Possible response: I would have liked to have lived in ancient China because I think it would be interesting to practice Confucianism.

ACTIVITY
Answers will vary.

Literature

ANALYZING LITERATURE
1. The song praises the Duke of Chou for coming to help the people of this region.
2. The poems reflect the thoughts and feelings of people in ancient China.

Primary Source

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?
Confucius
1. Everyone wants to be rich and important, and everyone hates to be poor and unknown.
2. Accept any reasonable response.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?
Laozi
1. The world loves money/wealth; position/rank; a long life; goodness.
2. The world hates being poor, not being important, not living a long life, and illness that takes away a person’s good looks.

MAKE A COMPARISON
1. Accept any reasonable response.
2. Answers will vary. Examples: Confucius: Do not try to get rich if you have to give up good behavior. Laozi: Some people have more money than they can use. Both: Everyone wants to be rich.

History and Geography

MAP ACTIVITY
1. Colors will vary.
2. Gobi Desert
3. Colors will vary.
4. Yellow Sea