The Ideas of Confucius

One of China’s most important thinkers, Confucius, lived during the Warring Kingdoms Period. Confucius is often called China’s first philosopher. A philosopher is a person who studies the meaning of life. Confucius spent much of his time thinking about ways to improve society and restore order in China.

Confucius is also remembered as China’s first teacher. Many people sought Confucius so that they could study the ancient traditions with him. Often he used short sayings to teach his ideas. After Confucius died, his students grouped all his sayings into a huge collection. Many later followers argued that some of the sayings were not from Confucius. A book was then made containing the sayings most people agreed were really spoken by Confucius. This book is called Lunyu in Chinese and the Analects in English. Both titles mean “Selected Sayings.”

The Analects tell much about the philosopher’s ideas. He opposed the new forms of government that the Shu, Zheng, and other kingdoms were practicing. Confucius did not agree with the idea of bureaucracy. He also thought that the use of written laws and punishments was not the best way to bring back order. Instead, Confucius supported the old Zhou dynasty idea that a ruler and its leaders should set a good example for his people.

Many of Confucius’ thoughts about government seem to be based on his views about families. In ancient China children were expected to be obedient to their parents, and treat them with great honor and respect. The ancient Chinese called this kind treatment of parents xiao, or filial piety. Confucius told his followers that by studying filial piety they could learn how to become loyal subjects. Confucius also taught that rulers could gain loyalty only by treating their subjects with the same love that parents show to their children. He called such love ren, or kindness. He also believed the government should be run by the most moral, educated and qualified people.

For the most part, the teachings of Confucius were ignored during his lifetime. In time, however, his ideas, which came to be called Confucianism, spread throughout eastern Asia.


Biography

Confucius is believed to have been born in 551 B.C. The name Confucius is a Latin form of the philosopher’s name—Kung Fu-tzu, which means Master Kong. Confucius’ father was a minor noble and a government official. By the time Confucius was 25 years old, he had studied for and received a position in the Lu government. Perhaps because he had offended powerful noble families, Confucius was exiled from Lu. According to legend, Confucius wandered for 25 years. During this time, he formed his ideas about government and society, and taught them to others. Many of his ideas are still respected and used today.
Confucius Says

Answer the following questions about Confucius.

1. In 551 B.C. Confucius was born. His real name was ____________

2. Confucius was born into a family of minor ________ ________ and grew to be a respectful son.

3. He lived during a time of constant ________ ________ ________ in China, uncertain whether the fighting would reach his family.

4. Instead of joining the military as a soldier, he studied for a ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ ________ 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Confucius Says (cont.)

Use the clues from page 12 to decode a famous saying of Confucius.

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1  6  3  12  2  7  3
9  10  4  13  5  6  5  8
3  12  10  1  6  14  10
15  10  16  2  17  10
11  2  2  9  6  14  12
15  18
9  10  4  13  5  6  5  8
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11  2  2  9  6  14  12
15  10  16  2  17  10
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