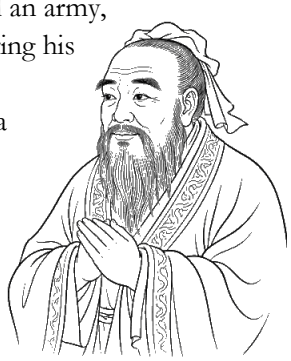
Name: _____

Date: _____

Confucius

He never ruled a country, led an army, or was even listened to much during his lifetime. Yet for more than 2,500 years, people across much of Asia have turned to Confucius for guidance on how to live, learn, and govern. At the heart of his philosophy was a simple belief: people should strive to improve themselves and treat others with respect.



A Time of Disorder

Confucius worked as a minor official and diplomat during the declining years of the Zhou Dynasty. The growing disorder of his time would eventually lead to the Age of Warring States. He believed this disorder was caused by poor leadership and a decline in moral values. His life's work was devoted to finding a better way to govern society. He traveled among the competing states of China, offering advice to rulers. Although many leaders respected his wisdom, few were willing to put his ideas into practice.

When Confucius died in 479 BCE, he was respected as a teacher and advisor, but he was not yet the legendary figure he would later become. He attracted a devoted group of followers who preserved his teachings and passed them to future generations. After his death, they compiled many of his sayings in a book known as The Analects. Centuries later, its teachings would become the model for official and personal behavior for many Chinese people.

Becoming a Better Person

Confucius believed leaders should be knowledgeable, conscientious, and ethical. He taught that people were more likely to act honorably when their rulers set a good example. He concentrated on creating junzi—superior individuals—through education. A junzi was not born noble. Instead, anyone could become a junzi by cultivating wisdom, good character, and a sense of responsibility toward others.

Confucius focused on everyday behavior. He believed that small acts of kindness, honesty, and respect built stronger families and more stable communities. He stressed the importance of ren, often translated as kindness, compassion, or humaneness. The great sage said, "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others."

Kindness, Family, and Duty

Confucius taught that we are all part of something bigger than ourselves. Our actions reflect on our families, just as the actions of earlier generations helped shape our heritage. Respect for family was a core virtue.

Confucius believed society functioned best when everyone fulfilled the duties of their position. Rulers owed care to subjects, parents held responsibilities to children, and subordinates owed obedience in return. Confucius explained, "Let the ruler rule as he should and the minister be a minister as he should. Let the father act as the father should, and the son act as the son should."

The Legacy of Confucius

After the fall of the Qin Dynasty, the rulers of the Han Dynasty embraced many of Confucius's ideas and helped spread his teachings throughout China. Over time, his philosophy became so influential that students seeking government positions were required to pass rigorous examinations based on Confucian teachings.

The examination system is no longer in place, but more than 2,500 years after he lived, people around the world still find inspiration in Confucius's teachings about kindness, respect, and personal responsibility.

©Mike Dowling. All Rights Reserved.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Fill in the Blanks

Confucius lived during the final years of the Z__ou Dynasty, a time of growing d__s__r__er and w__r__a__e. He believed that poor l__a__e__s__ip and a decline in m__r__l values were causing suffering. Rather than relying on stronger armies or harsher laws, Confucius taught that society would improve when p__o__le improved t__e__s__l__es. He believed leaders should be k__o__l__d__e__b__e, ethical, and set a good e__a__p__e for others. Confucius stressed the importance of k__n__n__ss, honesty, r__s__e__t, and r__s__o__s__b__l__ty. He taught that people should t__e__t others as they would like to be treated t__e__s__l__es. Respect for f__m__ly and fulfilling one's d__t__es were also central parts of his philosophy. Although many rulers respected Confucius' w__s__om, few adopted his i__e__s during his lifetime. After his d__a__h, his followers preserved Confucius' teachings in a book called the A__a__e__ts, which later influenced Chinese g__v__r__me__t, education, and c__l__u__e for more than two t__o__s__nd years.

Answer in Complete Sentences

1. Who compiled The Analects? What is the book about?

*2. Name someone in your life who you consider to be a wise. Explain why you chose this person.

3. Define *junzu*. What would you need to accomplish in order to become *junzu*?

*4. What is your opinion of Confucius? Do you think his ideas are still relevant today? Explain your answer.

*A higher order learning question. Any reasonable answer will be accepted.

©Mike Dowling. All Rights Reserved.