

Historian tip # 11 Historians look at folktales to see how important ideas were explained to everyday people.

Today's investigation: **Chinese Folktales and Confucius**

Outcomes of the investigation: Our historians will be able to

1. define the Confucian characteristics of ren and junzi
2. examine folktale characters for the possession of “ren” and the spirit of a “junzi”
3. explain the role of folktales in transmitting scholarly ideas to people who could not read (most of the population of ancient China!).

Vocabulary: ren (the spirit of always placing others before yourself, a real sense of feeling for others)
junzi (a superior man, one who is a man of ren)

Materials: The Fourth Question: A Chinese Tale, retold by Rosalind C. Wang (a story about a man who puts everyone's needs before his own, and is rewarded in the end.)

Mini lesson: Yesterday we talked about the five relationships of Confucianism. Confucius thought that these five relationships were really important for keeping order in society. Confucius believed that beyond following these relationships, a man should strive to be a superior human being. This superior being is called a **junzi**. A junzi had to be filled with good qualities, and be an excellent example for all others to follow. (According to Confucius, a junzi could only be a man, not a woman! It was common at his time for people to consider men superior to women). The most important quality a junzi could have is **ren**. Ren is the spirit of always placing others before yourself, and having more feelings for others than you do for yourself. These ideas were very important to Confucius. We are about to read a folktale which helps show these ideas in a way that is easy for us to understand.

Read-aloud: Read The Fourth Question: A Chinese Tale. At two to three points in the story, pause and have the students “stop and talk” with a partner about any ideas or predictions they have, and/or “stop and jot” such ideas in their Historian's notebook.

Activities: Following the read-aloud, have students discuss with a partner, and jot in their historian notebooks, examples of “ren” which they saw in any of the characters (note that not only the main

character shows evidence of this quality). They can also discuss whether or not they feel Yee-Lee is approaching becoming a junzi, and why.

Group share: Students should share the ideas they discussed in partnerships. They should jot in their notebooks what role folktales had in educating people. Point out that folktales are usually transmitted orally, and are therefore very “friendly” for people who can not read. Very few people in ancient China could read, so folktales were an important way of spreading big ideas.

Connecting past to present: Ask family members or neighbors if they know any folk tales from their own country. Try to see if you can figure out the lesson the folktale is trying to teach.