

Historian Tip # 15: Historians sometimes analyze situations with “different eyes,” to understand how others may view them.

Today’s investigation: **Karma**

Outcome of the investigation: Our historians will be able to

1. describe the Buddhist life and rebirth cycle.
2. summarize how karma affects the life and rebirth cycle.
3. adapt “Buddhist eyes” analyze the type of karma generated by characters in two jataka stories (stories of the Buddha’s past lives).
4. draw conclusions about how the characters’ karma may affect its rebirth.

Vocabulary: rebirth
karma
nirvana

Materials: “The Deceitful Heron” and “Three Friends in a Forest,”
(stories of Buddha’s rebirths in I Once Was a
Monkey: Stories Buddha Told by Jeanne M. Lee)

Mini lesson: Buddha believed that when humans die, they are reborn again. They can be reborn as a different type of creature on the earth (plant or animal, not necessarily a human being). He believed that everyone went through an endless cycle of birth and death. The type of life you were born into depended on how you acted in your previous life.

The way that you acted in your previous life generated karma. If you acted positively, you had positive karma. If you acted negatively, you had negative karma. The type of karma you had influence your rebirth. This has some similarity to the idea “what goes around comes around.” How you treat others will affect how you are treated.

Remember, also, that Buddha considered all life to be suffering. Therefore, the idea of being born over and over again, just to suffer over and over again, was not very appealing. The way to escape this cycle was to follow the Eightfold Path, and reach nirvana. nirvana is the “blowing out” of all desire, and the end of all suffering. Once you have reached nirvana, you are no longer reborn or have karma.

Today we are going to look at two stories Buddha told about his past lives...in one he was a willow tree, and in the other he was an antelope.

Activities: Students receive handouts of two stories. They read each story, and evaluate the characters on the type of karma each generated. Based on this positive or negative karma, students can predict what that character may have been reborn as in his or her next life. All thoughts should be logged in their Historian’s notebook.

Group share: a debriefing of analysis and conclusions

Connecting past to present: Survey people as to whether or not they believe “what goes around comes around.” Ask people to share examples of when they have seen this occur.