

Historian tip # 17: Historians analyze stories and paintings to see how they reflect important ideas of a certain time period.

Today's investigation: **Daoism**

Outcome of the investigation: Our historians will be able to

1. summarize the major features of Daoism
2. examine texts for Daoist concepts, listing ways in which the concepts are reflected in the writings.
3. analyze a landscape painting for Daoist influence.
4. create a piece of art which reflects Daoist principles.

Vocabulary: Daoism
landscape painting

Materials: brief quote from the Dao De Jing (classic Daoist text)
excerpts from The Tao of Pooh by Benjamin Hoff
landscape painting

Introduction: The following brief quote from the Dao De Jing can be used as a “warm-up.” Students can respond to it in their notebook while class begins.

This quote is about anyone who has mastered the secret of life:

**The more he does for others, the happier he is.
The more he gives to others, the wealthier he is.**

Mini lesson: We talked about the “Period of a Hundred Philosophies” which came during a time when China was not united and different groups were struggling for power. We learned about one of the philosophies, Confucianism. Today we are going to look at another philosophy, called Daoism, which also has had a large impact on China in the past and present. This is interesting, because in some ways Daoism is very different that Confucianism, although there are some similarities.

Daoists believed that the world was in perfect harmony. The flow of the ocean tides, movements of the stars, the life cycles of animals and plants...everything in the world worked together. Daoists thought that humans needed to go with the flow of nature and not against it. The closer to the earth that people could live, the better. People do not need to “own” much...they can be happy eating

the food that grows in the forest and bathing in the rivers. When humans start to want more, they become unhappy until they get it. If people live in harmony with nature they are moving toward “the Dao.” If they live out of harmony with nature, they are going against “the Dao.”

Daoists believed that rulers should make themselves invisible. They believed that any actions or laws would interfere with the natural order. They should allow nature to run its course, and do absolutely nothing. A ruler should not order people around, but should leave them alone to let them live their lives. In an ideal country, Daoists believed, people would know nothing and want nothing, besides food and clothes. People should just be happy with who they are and what they have, and want for nothing else.

Activities: Students should read the excerpt from The Tao of Pooh, identifying and listing ways in which a Taoist ideal is being reflected in the text. They should do this in pairs. Students should then look at a landscape painting and analyze it for features of Daoism. They will do this individually, in their historian’s notebooks. They should explain why they do or do not feel the painting reflects Daoist thinking, and give concrete reasons to support their answers. Students can then meet in groups to share their ideas.

Connecting past to present: Think about a place where you like to go to have the peace and quiet to just think. Maybe this is a place which is close to nature, or maybe it isn’t. Create a piece of art which shows you in this place. (When these works are completed, they can be presented in an artist’s gallery--for example, hung from clotheslines in the room. Historians can then walk through the gallery, writing commentary about different pieces in their notebooks.)