

Explore More—Political and Cultural Problems in the Time of Confucius

Directions: Listen to your teacher talk about the political and cultural problems in China that were occurring during the time of Confucius. You will learn how Confucius tried to solve these problems. Refer to the maps in your Explore Geography Picture Dictionary to locate the places your teacher mentions. Circle any words you don't understand. Underline or highlight important ideas in the text. Write notes in the margins to help you understand key points. Then answer the questions in your own words.

Political and Cultural Problems

Political and cultural chaos began to threaten the stability of China as victorious generals replaced the Zhou kings.

Look at the map in the textbook that shows how the borders of China were drawn after the Zhou kings lost much of their power.

Alliances between states did not mean anything because they were easily broken. Warfare among states was constant. Rulers only held power for a little while before someone else defeated them and took over leadership of the regions. Some of the bigger states conquered smaller states and ruled the people of those areas. The central states of China wanted to return to the traditions of earlier times. The states on the borders of China wanted to fight and gain more control and influence in the region. People began to desire a return to order and stability. They turned to philosophers for ideas on how to improve their lives.

Confucius's Ideas

Confucius (551-479 B.C.) was one of these philosophers. He had many ideas about how to change Chinese society for the better.

Point to these dates on the class time line.

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Confucius thought that by following the traditions valued by the very first kings of the Zhou Dynasty, once again there would be order in society. He thought that the best way to live was to be tolerant of others and to have self-discipline. The “gentleman,” Confucius’s ideal man, was educated, loyal, and fair, concerned about other people, and had integrity and good manners. According to his followers, Confucius said, “Never do to others what you would not like them to do to you.” He thought another way to keep order in society was to have defined roles for people. Some people were superior to other people: rulers were superior to subjects, fathers were superior to sons, husbands were superior to wives, and so forth. He believed it was important for the higher ranking person to take proper care of the lower ranking person. At the same time, he believed the lower ranking person should obey the higher ranking person. In this way, the order of society could be maintained. Confucius believed that family was central to the stability of society. Confucius taught his ideas to many people.

As a result of Confucius’s teachings, Chinese society started to change. More value was placed on education. Rulers established schools to teach Confucian ideas. Instead of government offices being filled by nobles who had family connections, men took civil service examinations to gain government positions. ❖

YOUR TURN!

Write your answers to the following questions.

1. What were the political and cultural problems in China during the time of Confucius?

2. What were Confucius's ideas about how to solve these problems?

Questions for further discussion:

- What would you like to know more about in terms of the political and cultural problems during the time of Confucius? Frame questions that you can answer by historical study and research. Conduct this research and discuss your findings.
- Why were the people of China receptive to the ideas of philosophers like Confucius? Explore the causes, effects, sequences, and correlations of historical events as the Zhou kings lost power to determine what made the people open to Confucius's ideas, including the long- and short-term causal relations.
- What sort of new information about the political and cultural state of ancient China during Confucius's time would change your interpretation of historical events?