

## China through the Arts Supplementary Lesson

### Modern Chinese Cinema: To Live

To Live profiles the life of a young Chinese family from the 1940's through the emergence of communism and the Cultural Revolution to old age. Fuqing, the main character, and his wife adjust to the varying temper of each decade, exemplifying the changes in traditional values with the advent of communism.

Director Zhang Yimou's world-renown results from his artistry behind the camera and dexterity with themes that comment on twentieth century transitions in China. Ironically, some of his films have been banned in China, officially due to their "suggestive" nature. Yet the Chinese government allows him to continue filming as long as he attracts his own funds, because he draws foreign investment into China. Therefore, his films often rely on foreign funding, primarily from Hong Kong and Taiwan, for production.

Zhang Yimou's films provide excellent fodder for student analysis of traditional and transitional themes. To Live, in its entirety would be more appropriate for high school audiences as the State framework for high school covers Chinese history to modernity. High school students watching the film will see anecdotal evidence of political and social changes in modern Chinese history. Also, more mature audiences will be better able to deconstruct events that occur outside the excerpted portion selected for sixth graders used in this lesson as well as the filmmaker's own political struggles with the government.

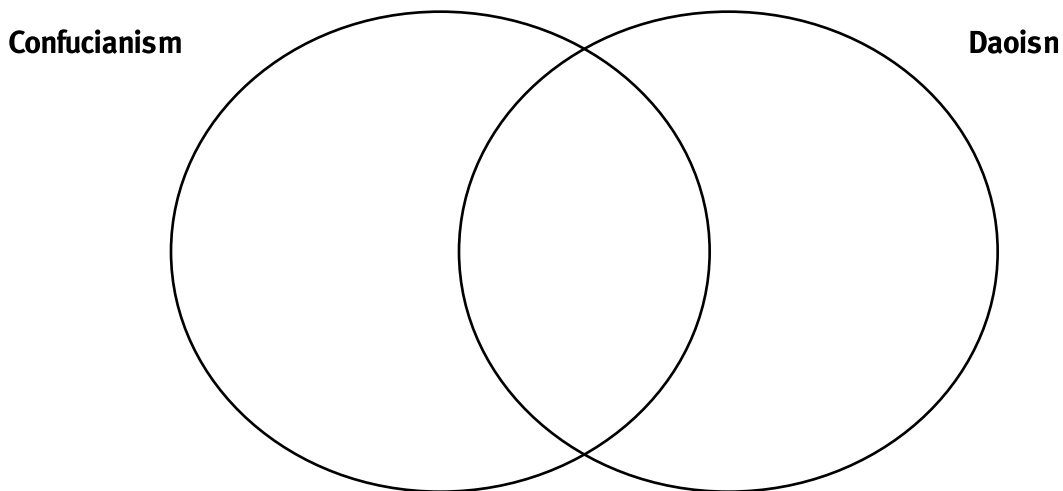
This 19 minute excerpt selected for sixth graders follows the young family through the years before communism. Because it portrays a largely traditional lifestyle, it provides students the opportunity to see traditional ideals and values in practice. Students will chart the behavior of Fuqing to determine how he adheres to or breaks Confucian and Daoist ideals.

**Materials:** To Live (film – Chinese with English subtitles) by Zhang Yimou  
◦ cue the film 6 minutes in from the credits to the scene where Fuqing arrives home from gambling. (Make sure to pass the use of the "shit.")  
Copies of "To Live: Confucian and Taoist Principles in Action"  
A transparency copy of the "To Live..." worksheet

**Vocabulary:** Confucianism, Daoism, xiao, dao

**(1) Preview Film**

- Brainstorm:
  - Draw a Venn diagram on the board, leaving a large space in the center. What major Chinese philosophies influenced daily life in ancient China?
    - Label one circle Confucianism and the other side Taoism.



- Ask students for simple definitions, or phrases which define each in their own words. Fill their ideas into the sides of the diagram.
- NOTE: These two philosophies seem so different, so opposed to each other, yet the Chinese integrated both into daily living. Ask students to predict how the two might fit together. How might these philosophies be combined into one lifestyle? (Be prepared for blank stares and allow time for the question to soak in and ideas to emerge.) Chart their suggestions in the middle.
- Before beginning the film, reinforce the unit theme: The Chinese seek to live in harmony. We will be viewing the film to see how harmony is maintained or lost through observing Confucian and Daoist principles in action.

**(2) Watching 19 minute excerpt from To Live**

- Pass out the worksheet “To Live.” Go over the instructions with the students.
- View the first 2 minutes of the excerpt, stopping to discuss the principles observed. Have students fill in their sheets. Answer any questions. Make sure to have students go over the key terms. Have them use marginalia, notes in the margins, to put the terms into their own words.
- Students view the next 17 minutes, taking notes. Or, if they are unable to fill in their charts as they watch, perhaps have the students observe and

take notes on a blank piece of paper and then organize their thoughts in the chart afterwards. Many students would be better off viewing the film excerpt first, then filling in their sheets together with their groups afterwards. Depending on the age and ability level of students, determine how best to fill in the chart.

- Stop the film after 19 minutes of play when the montage of happy scenes ends and before the puppet show begins.

### **(3) Discuss the Film**

- In their groups students should discuss the question. Circulate to assist.
- Using an overhead of the “To Live” worksheet, chart student ideas and observations.
- Discuss the questions on the reverse side of the worksheet, summarizing the quest for harmonious living.



M. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Period \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date \_\_\_\_\_

*To Live*

**Confucian and Daoist Principles in Action**

As you watch the excerpt from *To Live*, by Zhang Yimou, chart the ways in which the main character, Fuqing, lives by or breaks the standards for living in a harmonious society. What good or bad consequences result from his actions? Is harmony maintained?

 xiao	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Fuqing's behavior</b>	<b>Consequences</b>
	For the Confucianist this means <b>respect for elders.</b>		
 dao	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Fuqing's behavior</b>	<b>Consequences</b>
	For the Confucianist this means <b>correct behavior, following the rules.</b>		
	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Fuqing's behavior</b>	<b>Consequences</b>
	For the Daoist this means <b>living in harmony with nature.</b>		

## QUESTIONS:

1. Why was Fuqing's family not living in peace?
2. How was harmony restored or returned to the family?
3. How could Fuqing have used Confucian or Daoist ideals to solve his problem(s)?
4. Put a "D" next to the Daoist action, and a "C" next to the Confucian action:
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Fuqing is a talented puppet show artist.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Fuqing loses his family's home and possessions because of gambling debts.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Fuqing is given a box of puppets.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Fuqing returns to his family to be a responsible father.