Star Wars and Eastern Religion and Philosophy
Using the Star Wars Series as a Teaching Source

Jason Allen, PhD

Grades: 6th-8th grades

Duration: One Day (Teachers may select to teach lesson on International Star Wars Day, which is May 4 each year)

Subject: World History / World Cultures

Materials:

- Star Wars: A Legacy Revealed: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lUZyYxTA-jk
- Star Wars Trilogy (1977-1983)
- Star Wars and Eastern Philosophy / Religion (handout)

National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) Standards:

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<tr>
<th>NCSS STANDARD</th>
<th>HOW COVERED</th>
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<tr>
<td>I. Culture</td>
<td>Students will look at how ancient Asian culture influences the modern world.</td>
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<td>II. Time, Continuity and Change</td>
<td>Students will understand how ideas can be used for different purposes, but have similar meanings.</td>
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<td>III. People, Places and Environments</td>
<td>Students will examine the spread of religious ideas in the eastern region of Asia.</td>
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<td>IV. Individual Development and Identity</td>
<td>Students will study how religions can shape a person’s daily actions.</td>
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<td>V. Individuals, Groups and Institutions</td>
<td>Students will study the teachings of Buddha, Lao Tzu and Confucius</td>
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<td>VI. Power, Authority and Governance</td>
<td>Students will study how the political instability during the Warring States Period influenced Tzu and Confucius.</td>
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<td>VII. Production, Distribution and Consumption</td>
<td>Students will learn how the Monsoon Winds caused Buddhist Monks to move from India into the East Asia.</td>
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<td>VIII. Science, Technology and Society</td>
<td>Students will study how the Emperor Qin used the authority-based concept of Legalism in Ancient Chinese society.</td>
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<td>IX. Global Connections</td>
<td>Students will study how Eastern ideas spread throughout Asia and abroad.</td>
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<td>X. Civic Ideals and Practices</td>
<td>Students will reflect how Confucius used harmony to stress the concept of the public good.</td>
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**Rationale:**

The purpose of this lesson is to provide students a clear understanding of the basics of four major Eastern Hemisphere religions/philosophies: Buddhism, Confucianism, Legalism, and Taoism. By understanding Buddhism, Confucianism, Legalism, and Taoism, students will gain a better understanding of Asian culture and how these religious/philosophical practices influence both the ancient and modern world.

To accomplish the ultimate goal of connecting the Eastern Hemisphere content to the modern world, this lesson will use clips from the classic *Star Wars* films. The subject matter presented within the *Star Wars* films reflects a heavy influence of Asian thoughts and ideas. By incorporating these concepts and examples into the lesson, students will identify the effects of ancient Asia upon our modern-day world.

To generate excitement around the topic, this lesson is planned around the date of May the 4th. This day is recognized as International Star Wars Day (May the 4th be with you!). By connecting the lesson to *Star Wars*, students will be more open-minded to learning topics. While the materials presented in this lesson are centered on International *Star Wars* Day, they should be incorporated into a larger unit of East Asian cultures.

**Lesson Knowledge Objectives**

Students will be able to name the founders of Buddhism, Confucius and Taoism, and have some background on the man most associated with the Legalist movement, the Emperor Qin. Students will discuss the concepts of The Four Noble Truths, The Eight Fold Path, Yin-Yang, and Social Harmony. Students will identify the locations in Asia where each of these religious and philosophical concepts formed and what historical events contributed to their expansion.

**Unit Skill Objectives**

Students will discuss and compare the ideas of the different faiths/philosophies. Students will use critical thinking skills to connect the presented Eastern ideas to the modern day films of *Star Wars*. Students use context clues and prior knowledge to relate the Eastern themes and ideas presented in the selected clips.

**Unit attitudinal Objectives**

Students will enjoy their time spent in their social studies classroom by understanding that the content learned in social studies class surrounds us on a daily basis. From their experiences during International *Star Wars* Day, the students will then want to share what they have learned with others. With the information gained from this lesson, students will begin to examine the influence of history, cultures and philosophies on different aspects of modern life.

I. **Objectives:**
A. Students will analyze and explain the historical background and foundations of Buddhism, Taoism, Legalism and Confucianism.

B. Students will identify and recognize the importance of symbolism within Eastern religions (the lotus, the mentor, rebirth, etc.).

C. Students will compare and contrast how Eastern ideas are used within the framework of the Star Wars films.

II. Anticipatory Set:

A. Connection to students’ previous learning:
   - Q: What are the basic teachings of Confucius, Buddha, and Lao Tzu?

B. Connection to students’ lived experience:
   - Q: Can you think of things/places you have read, visited or watched where the ideas of Buddhism, Taoism, Legalism or Confucianism have been displayed?
   - Q: Are the ideas of the Eastern Hemisphere apparent in the Western Hemisphere?

III. Materials

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<th>Activity</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Estimated/Target time length</th>
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<tr>
<td>Review general concepts of Buddha, Confucius and Lao Tzu (Yin-Yang, Four Noble Truths, Eight Fold Path, Social Harmony, etc.)</td>
<td>Student notes, textbook</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>View pre-selected clips from the Star Wars series</td>
<td>Clips from the Star Wars movies</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Complete form related to identifying aspects of Buddhism, Taoism, Legalism, and Confucianism within Star Wars.</td>
<td>Handout- Star Wars and Eastern Philosophy / Religion (use Teacher Key for references and clip urls)</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conclusion of activity: Restate the Eastern concepts presented in Star Wars and establish why</td>
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<td>5 Minutes</td>
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it is important to understand the ideas of other cultures.

IV. Assessment:

1. What informal evaluation methods will you use to monitor the class and adjust your plans during instruction?
   - During and after the viewing portion activity the instructor will ask who, what, where, when and why questions that will show how much of the information the students retained.

2. How is information taught in this lesson going to be formally evaluated?
   - This lesson is part of the larger “Eastern Hemisphere” section of the curriculum. Thus, students will complete a formal testing of knowledge at the section’s conclusion.

3. How have you connected objectives, instruction and assessment?
   - All objectives are based on NCSS themes and State objectives.

4. How does the nature of the assessment for this information affect your selection of instructional method?
   - The main goal for my instructional method is to make sure that everything completed can be broken down into who, what, where, when and why questions so students will be able to competently answer questions posed on formal and informal assessments. Therefore, by viewing the Star War clips, students will identify important people (Buddha, Confucius, etc.), continue to discuss locations such as India and China, connect the use of ancient concepts in modern times, and discuss why these insights still prevail.

VI. Independent practice:

- Students will write a brief journal response explaining how a provided quote from Star War’s relates to Buddhism, Confucianism, Legalism or Taoism.

VII. Closure:

- Ask questions that deal with today’s topic to assess for basic understanding of major unit concepts.
VIII. Reflection:

- Were the vocabulary words understood?
  
  - Eight Fold Path
  - Four Noble Truths
  - Yin Yang
  - Confucianism / Harmony concepts
  - Legalism

- Did the activity help the student’s understanding?

- Will it still make sense with tomorrow’s lesson?