Lesson Plan
Confucianism in a Changing Society

OVERVIEW
In this lesson, students will explore how China’s rapid rise as a force in the global economy has affected Chinese culture, society and the individual. Students will first discuss the influential Confucian teaching of filial piety (respect for parents) and its importance in Chinese culture. Students will then watch film clips that show how traditional family values in China are being challenged by the circumstances of Chinese migrant workers. Finally, students will consider how filial piety applies in modern China.

The video clips used in this lesson are from the film Last Train Home, a documentary that shows the challenges shared by more than 130 million migrant workers in China. Please note that this film is in Chinese with English subtitles.

For more information on China and Confucian teachings, please see the Resources sections of this lesson.

POV documentaries can be recorded off-the-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from their initial broadcasts. In addition, POV offers a lending library of DVDs and VHS tapes that you can borrow anytime during the school year — FOR FREE! Get started by joining our Community Network.

OBJECTIVES
By the end of this lesson, students will:
- Define the term “filial piety.”
- Interpret the meanings of several Confucian teachings.
- Discuss the importance of filial piety in Chinese culture and how traditional Chinese family life is being challenged by the circumstances of migrant workers.
- Explain how filial piety applies in China today.

GRADE LEVELS
9-12

SUBJECT AREAS
Sociology, Geography, International Studies, Social Studies, World History, Current Events, Economics

MATERIALS
- Internet access and equipment to show the class online video and maps and to display a chart
- A world map and a political map of China (http://www.china-mike.com/china-travel-tips/tourist-maps/china-provinces-map/)
- Chart: “Confucianism and Filial Piety” (PDF file)
- Teacher’s version: “Confucianism and Filial Piety” (PDF file)
ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED
One 50-minute class period, plus time outside of class to complete a short essay

FILM CLIPS
Clip 1: “The World’s Largest Human Migration” (length 7:38)
This clip begins at 1:00 with people running through a tunnel and on-screen text that reads, “There are over 130 million migrant workers in China.” It ends at 8:38 with the statement “We don’t even know what to say to the kids.”

Clip 2: “We Work Far Away From Home” (length :40)
This clip begins at 55:40 when a man on the train says, “The train is just too slow.” It ends at 56:20 with the line “Life would be pointless.”

Clip 3: “A Mother Leaves Her Child For Work in the City” (length 1:10)
The clip begins at 14:40 with the statement “We were very poor when we left home in the 90’s.” It ends at 15:50 with the line “Otherwise, I couldn't eat anything.”

Clip 4: “How Can There Be Any Feelings?” (length :31)
This clip begins at 34:15 with a close-up shot of Qin, the daughter. It ends at 34:46 after Qin says, “All they care about is money.”

ACTIVITY
1. Give students a few minutes to respond in writing to the prompt “What do you think it means to respect one’s parents?” Ask students to discuss their ideas with partners and then invite a few pairs to share their thinking with the class. Student responses will vary, but might include listening to and obeying one’s parents, talking politely to one’s parents, supporting family traditions, caring for elderly family members and living in a way that brings honor to the family name.

2. Tell the class that respect for parents — also called “filial piety” — is a cherished virtue in Confucianism, a philosophy in China that has been a chief cultural influence for centuries. In Confucian teaching, filial piety should guide the thoughts and actions of children toward their parents throughout their lives and help individuals to understand their place in society as they demonstrate respect to all elders.

3. Display the chart “Confucianism and Filial Piety.” Explain that it quotes a few examples of Confucian teachings related to filial piety. Read through the quotes one by one and ask students to interpret their meanings. Record student ideas to the right of each quote. Then discuss:
   - How might defining family roles and responsibilities contribute to the Confucian goal of social harmony?
   - Why do students think the belief in filial piety has been so important in Chinese culture over time?
   - How do Confucian teachings compare with student ideas about filial piety?

4. Use a world map to point out where China is located. Explain that the traditional family in China is changing with the country’s rapid industrialization. Today, China has more than 130 million workers who migrate to jobs in urban areas so they can support their
families back home. Tell students that they are going to watch a series of video clips that show the circumstances of the Zhang family, whose story is representative of millions of others.

5. Set up the clips by explaining that the Zhangs have two children, who have been raised in the family’s home village in Sichuan province while the parents work together in a garment factory in Guangzhou, a city in Guangdong province. Use a political map of China (http://www.china-mike.com/china-travel-tips/tourist-maps/china-provinces-map/) to show the class where these areas are located. Point out that there are about 1,300 miles between where the parents live and where the children live. Explain that children are unable to migrate with their parents because in China access to public benefits, such as education and health care, is tied to one’s place of birth. Then, show Clip 1.

6. Tell students that the Zhang parents, Changhua (father) and Suqin (mother), were finally able to get train tickets to travel home for the Chinese New Year celebration. During the trip, a man on the train talked about going home to see his family. Play Clip 2.

7. Discuss:
   • What roles do poverty and family relationships play in the willingness of workers to endure long separations from family?
   • How do you think traditional Chinese culture will be affected over time by the circumstances of China’s migrant workers?
   • How can China better balance economic development with the needs of its people?

8. Show Clips 3 and 4 to explain further how living apart has affected the Zhang family. In Clip 3, Suqin explains why she left her one-year old daughter Qin at home 16 years earlier. Clip 4 shows how Qin has resented her parents’ absence.

9. After watching the clips, point out that Qin feels that her parents abandoned her and that they only care about money, but her mother believes that her sacrifice demonstrates her love for her children because she is working to give them a more economically secure life. Ask students to describe how these divergent perspectives have affected the family bond between mother and daughter.

10. Have students consider the Confucian teachings they studied at the beginning of the lesson and write short essays that use observations from the film to support their ideas in response to this question: “How do Confucian teachings about filial piety and family as the foundation of society apply in a country where hundreds of millions of people are separated from their families for most of the year?”

EXTENSIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

1. Explore the online video and educator resources for other PBS and POV films related to China, labor issues, and the relationship between work and family life:
   • China Blue (http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/chinablue/): Reveals labor conditions in a blue jeans factory in China, where 17-year-old Jasmine and her friends work around the clock for pennies a day.
   • Up the Yangtze (http://www.pbs.org/pov/uptheyangtze/): Explores lives transformed by the construction of the Three Gorges Dam — the biggest hydroelectric dam in history — along China’s Yangtze River.
• **Maquilapolis: City of Factories** ([http://www.pbs.org/pov/maquilapolis/](http://www.pbs.org/pov/maquilapolis/)): Shows female factory workers organizing to change labor conditions in Mexico near the U.S. border.


• **The Learning** ([http://www.pbs.org/pov/learning/](http://www.pbs.org/pov/learning/)): Tells the stories of four women who migrate from the Philippines to Baltimore, Maryland to teach school so that they can improve the financial situations of family members back home.

2. Investigate further how the separations and hardships experienced by Chinese migrant workers and their families will affect Chinese society over time. Have small student groups read the article “Endless Road in China: From Country to City and Back” ([http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb6669/is_4_27/ai_n56577388/?tag=content;col1](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb6669/is_4_27/ai_n56577388/?tag=content;col1)) and analyze the statistics provided about family life. Groups should then use these statistics to support conclusions about what Chinese society will look like in 25 years if conditions for families with migrant workers remain the same. Ask each group to share its thinking with the rest of the class and then discuss the similarities and differences in how students interpreted the statistics.

3. Evaluate whether the influential teachings of Confucius could help someone to be successful in business. First, have students read the paper “Confusing Confucianism With Capitalism: Culture as Impediment and/or Stimulus to Chinese Economic Development” ([http://www2.lse.ac.uk/economicHistory/Research/GEHN/GEHNPDF/Conf3_HZurndorfer.pdf](http://www2.lse.ac.uk/economicHistory/Research/GEHN/GEHNPDF/Conf3_HZurndorfer.pdf)) and outline the contrasting viewpoints of scholars who argue that Confucianism is incompatible with real economic growth and those who posit that the values taught by Confucius are a force for business success. Then, instruct students to study the teachings of Confucius ([http://ctext.org/analects](http://ctext.org/analects)) themselves and explain their own conclusions in persuasive essays.

4. Compare how rapid industrialization has affected families in the United States and China. Have the class study resources on the subject, such as **Labor in Progressive Era Politics** ([http://www.shmoop.com/progressive-era-politics/labor.html](http://www.shmoop.com/progressive-era-politics/labor.html)) and **Child Labor in U.S. History** ([http://www.continuetolearn.uiowa.edu/laborcr/child_labor/about/us_history.html](http://www.continuetolearn.uiowa.edu/laborcr/child_labor/about/us_history.html)). Talk about the impact that labor conditions in the United States at the turn of the century had on families. Then ask students to conduct further research to determine how these circumstances compare with those in China today. Should governments regulate how business practices affect the stability of families? Ask students to write and present speeches that explain their ideas on this topic and incorporate details from their research.

5. Examine the role that American companies play in the plight of Chinese migrant workers. Show the class the first 8:38 of the film **Last Train Home** and have students describe the working and living conditions that they see at the Chinese garment factory. Explain that many American companies, such as Walmart, Apple, Nike, Mattel and others, outsource their manufacturing to Chinese factories. Human rights organizations say that many Chinese factories offer low costs for labor and production at the expense of Chinese workers, who often face wages below the legal minimum, unpaid overtime, unsafe working conditions and other labor issues. Have students research and debate
the question “When U.S. companies outsource their manufacturing, do they have a responsibility to use factories that provide safe and fair environments for their workers?”

RESOURCES

http://ctext.org/analects
This website provides the writings of Confucius and his pupils in both English and Chinese.

CIA. “World Factbook: China.”
http://cia.worldfactbook.us/asia/china
This profile of China includes information on its economy, geography, people and more.

Columbia University. “Three Confucian Values: Filial Piety (Xiao).”
http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/at/conf_teaching/cf02.html
This video clip with transcript provides a concise explanation of filial piety and its role in Confucian teaching.

POV. “Last Train Home.”
http://www.pbs.org/pov/lasttrainhome/
POV provides historical information about China’s economy, details on Chinese policies that make life difficult for migrants and analysis of how Confucian values are evolving in modern China.

ReligionFacts. “Confucianism.”
http://www.religionfacts.com/a-z-religion-index/confucianism.htm
This article outlines the history and beliefs of Confucianism and discusses a number of its important texts.

STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects
(http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf)

WHST. 9-10, 11-12.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

SL, 9-10, 11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on [grade-appropriate] topics, text and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Content Knowledge: (http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/) a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning).

Economics, Standard 1: Understands that scarcity of productive resources requires choices that generate opportunity costs.
Economics, Standard 2: Understands characteristics of different economic systems, economic institutions and economic incentives.

Geography, Standard 9: Understands the nature, distribution and migration of human populations on Earth’s surface.

Geography, Standard 10: Understands the nature and complexity of Earth’s cultural mosaics.

Language Arts, Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.

Language Arts, Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

World History, Standard 44: Understands the search for community, stability and peace in an interdependent world.

World History, Standard 45: Understands major global trends since World War II.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Cari Ladd, M.Ed., is an educational writer with a background in secondary education and media development. Previously, she served as PBS Interactive’s director of education, overseeing the development of curricular resources tied to PBS programs, the PBS TeacherSource website (now PBS Teachers) and online teacher professional development services. She has also taught in Maryland and northern Virginia.