

**Lesson Title: Daoism in the Period of the Hundred Schools**

**Class and Grade level(s):** 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade Philosophy, as part of a unit on Society and Government

**Goals and Objectives** - The student will be able to:

- Critically analyze and interpret primary sources from the *Dao de Jing* (Tao te ching) and *Zhuang Zi* (Chuang tzu)
- Describe the basic philosophical tenets of Taoism.
- Apply their knowledge of Taoism to issues in the philosophy of government as a whole.

**Time required/class periods needed:** 1-2

**Primary source bibliography:**

<http://www.yellowbridge.com/onlinelit/daodejing.php> Dao de Jing

Notes on Daoism <http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/cosmos/ort/daoism.htm#top>

Selections from the Zhuang zi [http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/cup/zhuangzi\\_carina\\_for\\_life.pdf](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/cup/zhuangzi_carina_for_life.pdf)

**Other resources used: --**

<http://asiasociety.org/countries/religions-philosophies/daoism>

<http://asiasociety.org/countries/religions-philosophies/confucius>

<http://asiasociety.org/countries/religions-philosophies/confucianism>

**Vocabulary: --**

*Dao* – The way

*Wu wei*: Daoist principle of non-action

*de*: virtue or power received from the Dao

## Procedure:

1. Students will have read "Daoism" on the East Asia website before class begins.
2. Lead a discussion on that material, checking for comprehension and helping students expand on the ideas.  
Possible questions:
  - A. What criticisms of Confucianism do Daoists make?
  - B. What should guide a Daoist's actions?
  - C. In what ways might we learn from nature? What are some truths or maxims for living that you can extract from nature?
  - D. What problems, if any, might we have with drawing principles from nature?
  - E. What is the *de*? Why is power from the *de* more useful than other forms of knowledge (such as Confucius's teachings)?
  - F. Why do Daoists distrust language?
  - G. Why might Daoists be suspicious of ritual, culture, reason, etc.? Are their misgivings legitimate?
  - H. Should any ethical system or theory of government necessarily be free of cultural or human inclination? How might this be achieved?
  - I. What is *wu wei*? What does this concept tell us about how a Daoist should live?
3. Exercise: Each student should individually write out insights that s/he has gleaned from the Dao. What does nature tell us about the way the world works/should work? What does nature tell us about the way people are? About the way they interact? What does nature tell us about how one should act? What does nature tell us about the way a leader should lead?  
Students should then describe a government based on the principles they come up with. What responsibilities would such a government have to its citizens? What responsibilities would a citizen have toward the government? Other citizens? What functions would this government perform? How else would the government and people interact?
4. When all students have compiled a list, lead the class in a discussion comparing the insights each has recorded. Possible questions:
  - A. What truths of nature did everyone agree on?
  - B. On what was there much divergence of opinion?
  - C. What might explain any differences?
  - D. Is there any truth of nature that could be agreed upon? Can we explain and reconcile any differences we had?
  - E. What can observations of nature tell us about the way things *should* be? Are there any limitations on what we can infer from observation?
  - F. What other ways might we learn nature's truths besides observation? How might the Dao reveal itself to us?
  - G. How should one go about development of the *te*?
  - H. How diverse were the governments you created?
  - I. How might Lao Zi, or another Daoist envision a proper government?
  - J. What problems might exist with a Daoist government? What strengths would it have?
  - K. How similar or dissimilar would a government based on Daoist principles be from a government based on Confucian principles?
5. Read excerpts from the *Dao de Jing* and *Zhuang Zi* as a class. As you read, help the class wrestle with these issues:
  - A. How would the writer address the problems we encountered in determining the Dao?
  - B. How does the author define the Dao?
  - C. How does the author believe government should operate?
  - D. How does the author refute Confucian principles?
  - E. How does the work embody the idea of *wu-wei*?

**Assessment/Evaluation:** -- Students will write an essay detailing how the principles of Daoism might be applied in today's material culture.