

Buddha - Buddhism

Overview

This lesson presents basic information about Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha) and Buddhism. It also provides various activities that allow students to apply and extend the information presented in this lesson. This lesson may be used in connection with a study of any of the countries of southern or eastern Asia (i.e., India, Tibet, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Korea, Japan, China, etc.) If students have visited the Texas State Museum of Asian Cultures & Education Center, the lesson activities can be used to reinforce previous learning.

Goals

1. Students will expand their knowledge of world religions.
2. Students will explore and the use of symbolism through art.

Objectives

3. The student will identify significant events in the life of Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha).
4. The student will identify and explain the symbolism of various characteristics seen on a statue of Buddha.
5. The student will use information provided in the lesson to discuss various elements of Buddhist beliefs.
6. The student will practice a meditation technique.

Prerequisites

This lesson has no prerequisites. It is appropriate for students in grades 3 and above.

Resources

- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddha>
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanskrit>
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meditation>
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dhamma>
- <http://www.buddhanet.net/ans6.htm>
- <http://www.thebigview.com/buddhism/buddhasresume.html>
- <http://thebuddhistblog.blogspot.com/2005/05/buddhism-and-violence.html>
- <http://www.onmarkproductions.com/html/nyorai.shtml>

Vocabulary

- Buddha**, a word from the Sanskrit language meaning "one who has supreme knowledge"
- Dharma**, truth; the teachings of the Buddha which lead to enlightenment
- Karma**, the law that every cause has an effect; our actions have results
- meditate**, to focus all thought and attention on a single idea or to clear the mind of all thoughts
- Nirvana**, the most enlightened, and blissful state that one can achieve; a state without suffering
- sadhu**, a penniless holy man who lives alone
- Sangha**, The community that leads an individual to Enlightenment (including monks and nuns)

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Introduction

Discuss the idea that, for many people, religion helps determine their attitudes toward life, death, and their dealings with other people (moral values). It may even influence various activities they perform each day.

Display a picture of Buddha, and ask students if they can identify who/what this statue represents. Ask them to identify what they know (or think they know) about Buddha and Buddhism. Write down their responses.

Explain that many of the people in the country or region being studied follow the Buddhist religion. In order to learn more about these people and their lifestyle, it is important to learn about their religion.

Today, the students will learn about the history and beliefs of a religion, Buddhism, which is practiced by approximately 350 million people world-wide.

Overview

Buddhism began in northeastern India and is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama. The religion is about 2,500 years old and is followed by approximately 350 million Buddhists worldwide.

Buddhism is the main religion in many Asian countries. It is a religion about suffering and the need to get rid of it. A key concept of Buddhism is **Nirvana**, the most enlightened, and blissful state that one can achieve; a state without suffering.

The Buddha

Siddhartha Gautama is known as the **Buddha**. The term Buddha, a word from the Sanskrit language, means “one who has supreme knowledge.” Siddhartha was born some time around the year 580 BCE in the village of Lumbini in Nepal. There are many legends about the life of Siddhartha Gautama, and it is sometimes difficult to know fact from legend. The following information is based on stories that have been handed down for generations.

It is believed that he was born into a royal family. Even when he was just a baby, many “seers” (men who believed they could predict the future) predicted that young Siddhartha would, one day, become a Buddha. Siddhartha grew up within the palace walls where he never saw sufferings such as sickness, age, and death. He did not know what these were!

One day, after growing-up, marrying and having a child, Siddhartha went outside the royal palace. For the first time, he saw an old man, a sick man, and a corpse. He was worried by what he saw. He learned that sickness, age, and death were the inevitable fate of human beings; a fate no-one could avoid.

However, he also saw a **sadhu** (a penniless holy man who lives alone). It is believed that it was this fourth sight that inspired him to change his life. He decided this was a sign that he should leave his protected royal life and live as a homeless sadhu.

Siddhartha’s travels as a sadhu showed him much more of the suffering of the world. He searched for a way to escape the inevitability of death, old age, and pain. His studies with religious men didn’t provide an answer, and he became very disillusioned.

However, Siddhartha continued **meditating** (focusing all thought and attention on a single idea). One day, while meditating under a Bodhi tree, Siddhartha experienced the Great Enlightenment. In that moment, the way of salvation from and freedom from suffering was revealed to him. He stayed near the Bodhi tree for seven more weeks, and (at the age of 35) became fully a Buddha, awakened to the truth, or **Dharma**.

For the next 45 years, the Buddha traveled throughout Northern India teaching about what has been revealed to him. Over the years, hundreds of thousands of people (from all walks of life) voluntarily decided to follow his teachings.

The Buddha died as a result of food poisoning at the age of 80, in a forest near Kusinagara, Nepal. It is believed that he then passed into the state of Nirvana.

It is interesting to note that Buddhists do not believe that Siddhartha Gautama was the only Buddha or even the last Buddha. For some Buddhists, the term 'buddha' refers to someone who has become enlightened (i.e., awakened to the truth, or Dharma) on their own, without a teacher to point out the Dharma. Many Buddhists believe that there will be a new Buddha and that this one will be named Maitreya.

Buddhist Worship

Buddhists may worship at home or at a temple. Worshippers may sit on the floor barefoot facing an image of Buddha and chanting. It is very important that their feet face away from the image of Buddha. They listen to monks chanting from religious texts and take part in prayers.

Buddhists try to reach Nirvana by following the Buddha’s teaching and by meditating. Meditation means training the mind to be empty of all thoughts. When this happens what is important becomes clear.

Buddhists believe that the Buddha saw the truth about what the world is like. They believe that nothing in the world is perfect, and that the Buddha found the answer to why it is like this.

However, Buddhists do not believe that the Buddha was a god. He was a human being just like them. Some may ask, “If the Buddha is not a god, why do people worship him?”

There are two basic kinds of worship. When a person worships a god, they give praise to the god, make offerings, ask favors, and believe that the god will hear their praise, accept their offerings, and answer their prayers. This is not the way that Buddhists worship.

In the other type of worship, the type practiced by Buddhists, the person shows respect to someone or something he or she admires. For example, we stand up when an important person walks into a room; we shake hands when we meet someone; and we put our hand over our heart when we hear the national anthem. When Buddhists bow to a statue of Buddha, they are expressing gratitude to the Buddha for what his teachings have given them.

Elements Important in Buddhist Worship

Typically, a Buddhist worship area (which may be a room or corner of the home) will include:

A statue of the Buddha: With its hands rested gently in its lap and its compassionate smile, the statue reminds Buddhists to strive to develop peace and love within themselves.

Incense: The sweet smell of incense reminds Buddhists to keep virtue in every part of their life.

Candles: Candles, or a lamp, remind Buddhists of the light of knowledge

Flowers: Flowers may also be included. Because they soon fade and die, flowers are a reminder that nothing lasts for ever.

Buddhist Beliefs

Non-violence is central to Buddhist teachings. In fact, one of the Buddha's sermons says flat out that violence is wrong:

Even if thieves carve you limb from limb with a double-handed saw, if you make your mind hostile you are not following my teaching.

Kamcupamasutta, Majjhima-Nikkaya I ~ 28-29

The Buddha was quite clear in his renunciation of violence:

- Victory creates hatred.
- Defeat creates suffering.
- The wise ones desire neither victory nor defeat.
- Anger creates anger.
- He who kills will be killed.
- He who wins will be defeated.
- Revenge can only be overcome by abandoning revenge.
- The wise seek neither victory nor defeat.

The Three Jewels

There are aspects central to Buddhist beliefs. Because they are felt to be so precious, these are known as the three jewels.

Buddha: The Buddha is the prime source of inspiration and authority for Buddhists.

Dharma: The teachings of Buddha; the essential doctrines of Buddhism.

The Sangha: The community that leads an individual to Enlightenment. This community includes all Enlightened ones and monks and nuns (who demonstrate the "best" of Buddhist live and provide example, guidance, and inspiration.)

Reincarnation and Nirvana

One important belief involves reincarnation, the concept that one must go through many cycles of birth, living, and death. After many such cycles, if a person releases their attachment to desire and the self, they can attain **Nirvana** - a state of liberation and freedom from suffering.

Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path

At the heart of the Buddha's teaching lie **The Four Noble Truths** and **The Eightfold Path** which lead the Buddhist towards the path of Enlightenment.

The Four Noble Truths

The First Noble Truth

Dukkha: Suffering exists.

The first truth is that life is suffering. Life includes pain, getting old, disease, and ultimately death. We also endure psychological suffering like loneliness frustration, boredom, fear, embarrassment, disappointment and anger.

The Second Noble Truth

Samudaya: There is a cause for suffering.

The second truth is that suffering is caused by craving and the need to control things. It can take many forms: the desire for fame; the desire to avoid unpleasant sensations, like fear, anger or jealousy.

The Third Noble Truth

Nirodha: There is an end to suffering.

The third truth is that suffering can be overcome and happiness can be attained; that true happiness and contentment are possible. If we let go of our craving and learn to live each day at a time (not dwelling in the past or the imagined future) then we can become happy and free. We then have more time and energy to help others. This is Nirvana.

The Fourth Noble Truth

Magga: In order to end suffering, you must follow the Eightfold Path.

The fourth truth is that the Noble Eightfold Path is the path which leads to the end of suffering.

The Noble Eightfold Path

The Noble Eightfold Path focuses the mind on being fully aware of our thoughts and actions, and developing wisdom by understanding the Four Noble Truths. It is the way Buddhists should live their lives. The Buddha said that people should avoid extremes. They should not have or do too much, but neither should they have or do too little. The Middle Way is the best.

The path to Enlightenment (nirvana) is through the practice and development of wisdom, morality and meditation.

Three Qualities	Eightfold Path
Wisdom (<i>panna</i>)	Right View (understanding)
	Right Thought
Wisdom (<i>panna</i>)	Right Speech
	Right Action
	Right Livelihood
Meditation (<i>samadhi</i>)	Right Effort
	Right Mindfulness
	Right Contemplation (concentration)

Figure 1: Eightfold Path

The Five Moral Precepts of Buddhism

Buddhists follow five precepts (principles) as a guide for their lives. These precepts are not commandments. Instead, they are to be followed voluntarily. Buddhists believe that following these principles will help them live a life that is less complicated and will enable them to progress on the path to Nirvana.

1. **Do not take the life of anything living.** (Do not kill)
2. **Do not take anything not freely given.** (Do not steal)
3. **Abstain from sexual misconduct and sensual overindulgence.**
4. **Refrain from untrue speech.** (Do not lie)
5. **Do not consume alcohol or other drugs.** The main concern here is that intoxicants cloud the mind.

Karma

Karma is the law that every cause has an effect, i.e., our actions have results. This simple law explains a number of things: inequality in the world, why some are born handicapped and some gifted, why some live only a short life. Buddhists believe that our past actions have an effect on who or what we are in our next life.

Discussion Questions and Activities

Discussion Questions

1. The Four Noble Truths: Discuss the “Four Noble Truths.” Are they really true?
2. The Eightfold Path: Divide the class into eight groups. Have each group discuss one element of the Eightfold Path and report back about how they believe a person could live so as to reflect “rightness” in this area of life.
3. Five Moral Precepts: Look at the five moral precepts. Are they sufficient to live a good (moral) life? Why or why not? Are there any rules you would add? Subtract?

Activities

Siddhartha Gautama Encounters Suffering

Legend says that Siddhartha Gautama was nearly 30 years old (a grown man, with a wife and child) before he ever saw an old person, a sick person, or a dead person. In one day, his first day outside the palace, he saw all three. He also saw a penniless holy man. This experience had a very strong effect on Siddhartha.

Pretend that you are Siddhartha. You have now completed your first day outside the palace. Write a letter to your best friend back in the palace. Describe your thoughts and feelings as you encountered each of the four persons you saw today.

The Buddha Statue: Symbolism in Buddhist art

Review/Learn about the Symbolism of Buddha Statue

Students who have participated in the tour of the Texas State Museum of Asian Cultures will have viewed statues of the Buddha and will have noted common symbolic characteristics.

The accompanying annotated handout (Buddha Statue) can also be used to review (or learn about) these characteristics, including:

Nikkei: (Japanese) The bump of knowledge; the uppermost bump of the head, which symbolizes spiritual wisdom; also said to represent accumulated wisdom.

Nikkeishu: The Nikkei jewel, which radiates the light of wisdom, is located at the base of the Nikkei. In Buddhist statuary, a small circle is typically carved here, or a circular crystal is placed here.

Rahotsu: Hair on the head in small spiral curls supposedly represents stubble left on Prince Siddhartha’s head after he cut off his hair. According to one legend, he pulled his hair together into a top knot and chopped it off. It apparently went into fine curls (spiraling to the right), and never needed cutting again.

Byakugo: Boss, or all-seeing third eye, in the middle of the forehead; symbolic third (spiritual) eye which appears on all statues of the Buddha. Legend says the historical Buddha had one strand of white hair (which curled to the right) in the center of his forehead, from which emitted rays of light to enlighten the world.

Mudra: There are five basic hand positions, each corresponding to five defining episodes in the life of the Buddha. Each position is called a mudra. The TSMAC’s Buddha shows the Mida-no Jouin Amida’s Meditation Mudra, a mudra found almost exclusively in Japan.

Mandorla: Stylized representation of the magnificent light radiating from the Buddha.

Leg positioning: The cross-legged meditation pose is called the Lotus Position, one of three basic poses. Like the lotus, which grows out of the mud at the bottom of the pond, the Buddha is an enlightened being who “grew” out of the “mud” of the material world.

Identify Symbolic Characteristics Seen on Statue of Buddha

Using the Buddha Statue handout containing blank lines, have the students use the word bank (at the bottom of the handout) to identify the various symbolic characteristics of the statue.

[Beginning Sitting Meditation for Kids](#)

One of the key practices Buddha taught is meditation. One does not have to be a Buddhist to meditate. Here are some basic meditations to be used with children and youth:

Introduction:

Hi kids! When you are feeling stressed about school, or anything, take a short timeout for meditation. Meditation is a time for quiet thoughts, and can be done sitting, walking, or lying down.

Meditation gives you a chance to think about how to get your projects done the best way you can. And, it is a way to spend some time thinking about ways to solve problems. If you are having trouble getting along with someone, meditation is a time to think about a way to get along again.

Here's one way to meditate:

A Sitting Meditation (By Susan Kramer)

Time: 2 to 10 minutes.

Sit up straight, cross-legged if on the grass, or if you are indoors sit on a pillow on the floor, or on your bed, or in a chair. If you sit in a chair your feet can be on the floor in front of you. Hold your hands in your lap and close your eyes.

Begin to breathe easily and evenly, in and out. Silently count each breath in as one count, and each breath out as one count, till 20 counts, or another even number.

Count 1 breathe in.

Count 2 breathe out.

Count 3 breathe in.

Count 4 breathe out.

Finish counting to 20 and continue to breathe evenly.

Next, think with appreciation about the people in your life, such as your family, friends, and teachers. Thinking good thoughts feels good and rests your mind and body. It gives you more energy.

Feeling more rested after spending time in appreciation is a good time to work out, in your mind, any problems with family, friends, or school.

After meditation write your new ideas. A notebook or journal just for your thoughts is handy.

To finish the meditation, take a deep breath in, and out. Stand up and stretch.

Instant Meditation for Teens to Do Anywhere (By Susan Kramer)

Have you ever suddenly felt stressed? Has a teacher's question put you on the spot? Have you looked at test questions and drawn a blank?

Here is a very short meditation to help out in those stressful moments, so you can feel relaxed and calm again.

Do some regular breathing like this:

Breathe in counts 1, 2.

Breathe out counts 3, 4.

Breathe in counts 1, 2.

Breathe out counts 3, 4.

Continue on in this even breathing pattern.

Just a few moments of even breathing gives you a chance to relax and get back in control of the situation again.

Especially with a test, taking half a minute or more just to concentrate on breathing evenly stops those racing thoughts of “Oh no, I've forgotten everything!”

Taking this short time out for counted breathing calms both your body and mind. It is a short but sweet way to gain control on a moment's notice.

When you don't have time for a longer sitting or walking meditation during the day, you can still use this brief 'meditation on the breath' to get going on a positive track again!

[Geography component](#)

Siddhartha Gautama grew up in India, in the foothills of the Himalayas. Find India on a map. Find the Himalayas.



**Texas State Museum of Asian Cultures
& Education Center
17th Century Japanese Bronze Buddha**

Symbolic Elements of Buddha Statue

Nikkeishu: **The Nikkei jewel**, which radiates the light of wisdom, is located at the base of the Nikkei. In Buddhist statuary, a small circle is typically carved here, or a circular crystal is placed here.

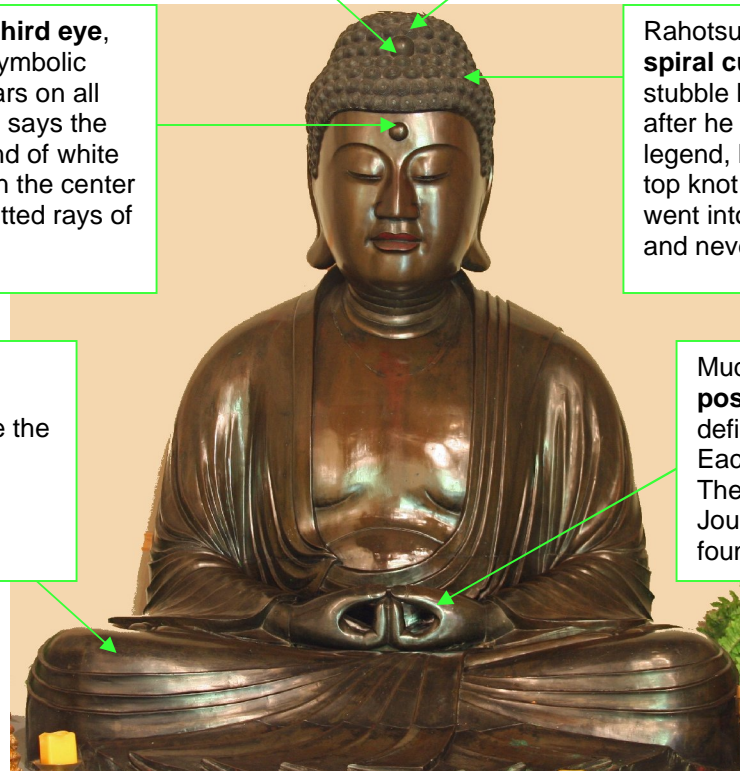
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Symbolic Elements of Buddha Statue

1. Meditation mudra, one of five basic hand positions
2. Cross-legged meditation pose called the Lotus Position
3. All-seeing third eye (spiritual eye)
4. The Nikkei jewel, which radiates the light of wisdom
5. The bump of knowledge, which symbolizes spiritual wisdom
6. Small spiral curls representing stubble left on Prince Siddhartha's head after he cut off his hair