

Empathizing (Taoism)

The Tao of Pooh and Meow

While there are Taoists and Taoist temples and groups in the United States, it may be difficult to find them anywhere except in larger West-coast cities with a substantial East Asian population. If you teach in such a city, you may be able to find a guest speaker for your class or a Taoist temple for a possible visit. If not, it would be interesting to have the students read Benjamin Hoff's *The Tao of Pooh* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), Benjamin Hoff's *The Te of Piglet* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), or Waldo Japussy's *The Tao of Meow* (Bronx, NY: Ariel Press, 1990) and reflect on how accurately either portrays Taoism in terms of how it is presented in the student book. Ask the students if they feel they have a more personal understanding of Taoism after reading one of these popular treatments of it.

A Life in Balance

Taoism focuses on balance in our lives and going with the way the universe operates so as not to expend effort in fighting against something that ultimately will win out. It is instructive for the students to pay attention to how their lives seem to be in balance and how they seem out of balance. Ask them to consider the following questions: What helps to keep you in balance? What tends to work against balance? Does life seem to go better when it is in balance? What might it mean to live a balanced life? Is doing so realistic in today's world? Is it realistic in terms of how you actually live today?

Noncompetition

Most of us are taught from an early age that competition is important and that the willingness and ability to compete is a desirable trait. Students compete for grades, and sports teams compete for position and honor. Summer camps and after-school programs have competitive events. As the students get older, they learn the need to compete for admission to "better" colleges and universities, or to compete for a desirable job. The normalcy of competitiveness is woven into our culture so subtly that it becomes invisible. Ask the students how their lives might be different if they were not so competitive, or if it were not so necessary to compete. Encourage them to discuss what they think it would be like if there were not "winners" and "losers" and whether they think this is even possible.

