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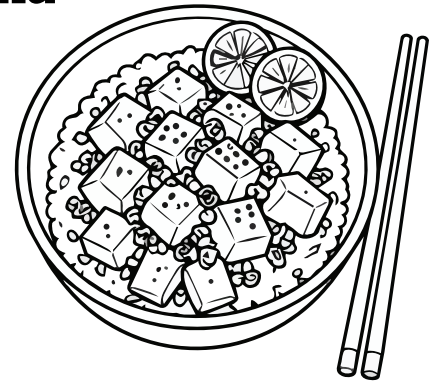
Key Vocabulary

belief	an idea that people think is true, especially about what is right and wrong
vegan	someone who does not use animals as food or clothing or harm them in any other way
harmony	living peacefully together, especially with nature or other people
influence	the power to affect or change how someone thinks or acts
compassion	a feeling of care and concern for others, especially when they're hurt or suffering

This lesson is intended to supplement the Ancient China unit and should be taught after students have studied Ancient Chinese rulers, Buddhism, and Chinese philosophy.

More Than a Meal: Food in Ancient China

In Ancient China, food was more than a way to satisfy hunger. What people ate was often shaped by where they lived, what foods were available, and their **beliefs**. In some parts of China, people ate little meat. Some chose **vegan** foods because they believed in kindness toward living beings, living in **harmony** with nature, or avoiding harm.



Ancient Chinese Weather and Diet

In Ancient China, the foods people ate depended in part on the climate and the natural resources of their region.

In **Northern China**, the dry, mild climate was good for growing millet. People also ate soybeans and foods made from wheat, such as noodles. Porridge was another common meal.

In **Southern China**, the warm, humid climate was well-suited for growing rice, which became an important part of the local diet. People also ate vegetables that were steamed or stir-fried.

In **Eastern China**, a warm, rainy climate and the fertile Yangtze River Basin supported farming. People ate fruits and vegetables prepared with ingredients such as sugar, vinegar, and rice wine.

People in **Western China** were influenced by trade along the Silk Road. Traders brought spices and other foods from different regions. Cumin and peppercorns became part of some local dishes.

Soybeans were grown in Central China as early as 7,000 BCE. Over time, people in other regions of China began using soybeans in their meals, including tofu.

Beliefs and Daily Life

In Ancient China, food was also connected with beliefs about how to live. Some Chinese philosophers taught people to live peacefully, make wise choices, and avoid causing harm.

Two important belief systems, Daoism and Buddhism, taught respect for nature and living beings. These ideas **influenced** the ways people thought about food.

Laozi (c. sixth century BCE)

Laozi was an early teacher of Daoism, which teaches that people should live in harmony with nature instead of trying to control it. He taught the value of living simply and respecting the natural world. Because of these ideas, some people chose to eat less meat.

Zhuang Zhou (c. fourth century BCE)

Zhuang Zhou, also known as Zhuangzi, was a Daoist thinker. He taught that no living being was naturally more important than another. Zhuang Zhou also believed that people should not interfere with nature or force animals to serve human needs. His ideas encouraged some people to think more carefully about eating animals and to choose a simpler way of life.

Buddhist Influence (after the first century CE)

Buddhist teachings emphasized **compassion** and nonviolence, or avoiding harm to living beings. Many Buddhist monks and nuns ate simple meals that included rice, vegetables, and tofu. Over time, Buddhist teachings influenced some people to avoid eating animals.



Emperor Wu of Liang (r. 502–549 CE)

Emperor Wu of Liang was a devoted Buddhist ruler who supported Buddhist teachings and practices. He encouraged people to avoid eating animals and supported practices that reduced animal killing. Some accounts say that he replaced animal offerings with vegan offerings during certain ceremonies.

Conclusion

In Ancient China, what people ate was shaped by many things. Climate and farming determined which foods were available. Trade brought new ingredients to different regions. Philosophers and religious teachers also influenced the way some people thought about food and living beings.

For some people, eating less meat or choosing plant foods was connected to their beliefs about compassion, harmony, and living simply. Their meals were not only about food. They could also reflect the kind of life and world they wanted to create.

Text-Dependent Questions

1. What types of foods made up most meals in Ancient China?

2. How did the foods people ate in Western China differ from those in the rest of the country?

3. What actions did Emperor Wu of Liang take to promote being vegan?

4. What did Daoism and Buddhism teach about how people should treat living beings?

5. Which sentence best summarizes the main message of the article?

- a. Ancient China's history shows that trade routes were the most important influence on the foods people ate.
- b. Ancient China studies reveal that food choices were shaped by both what people could grow and what they believed was right.
- c. The main purpose of food in Ancient China was to reflect religious beliefs, rather than satisfying hunger.
- d. Ancient Chinese philosophers and rulers created strict laws that required everyone to follow a vegan diet."

Analysis Questions

1. How did the availability of food affect what people ate in Ancient China?

2. How did beliefs influence the daily lives of some people in Ancient China?

3. What did Laozi teach about how people should live?

4. If Zhuang Zhou and Emperor Wu of Liang talked to each other, what similar ideas would they share about not eating animals?

Critical Thinking Questions

1. How do beliefs about kindness and nonviolence influence food choices?

2. How did belief systems like Daoism and Buddhism shape society in Ancient China?

3. In what ways are the food choices of people today similar to or different from those in Ancient China?

4. What does this article suggest about the connection between beliefs and everyday actions?

Class Discussion Prompts

1. Should people's beliefs influence what they eat? Why or why not?
2. Which of the following would you be most likely to agree with—Laozi's Daoist ideas, Zhuang Zhou's teachings, Buddhist teachings, or Emperor Wu of Liang's actions—and why?
3. Do you think it would be difficult to eat a vegan diet? Why or why not?"
4. How does where people live affect what foods they eat?
5. Can a whole society change its diet based on shared beliefs? What challenges might that create?
6. How do culture and tradition influence what people eat today?
7. How might kindness toward animals influence other parts of a person's life and how they treat the environment?
8. Which idea from Daoism or Buddhism do you find most interesting? Why?

Common Core Standards Addressed: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2, CCSS. ELALITERACY.RI.6.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.4, CCSS. ELALITERACY.RI.6.5, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.6, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.2

Answer Sheet: 'More Than a Meal: Food in Ancient China'

Text-Dependent Questions

1. What types of foods made up most meals in Ancient China?

Possible answer: Most meals were made from vegan foods such as grains, beans, fruits, and vegetables. These foods were easy to grow and widely available.

2. How did the foods people ate in Western China differ from the rest of the country?

Possible answer: Western Chinese cuisine was influenced by the Silk Road trade route, so it included unique spices, such as cumin and peppercorns.

3. What actions did Emperor Wu of Liang take to promote being vegan?

Possible answer: Emperor Wu of Liang promoted being vegan by encouraging people to avoid eating animals and supporting laws and practices that reduced killing animals. He also replaced traditional animal offerings with vegan foods in some rituals.

4. What did Daoism and Buddhism teach about how people should treat living beings?

Possible answer: These belief systems taught that people should treat living beings with kindness and respect. They encouraged people to avoid causing harm and to live in balance with nature.

5. Which sentence best summarizes the main message of the article?

Answer: b. Ancient China studies reveal that food choices were shaped by both what people could grow and what they believed was right.

Analysis Questions

1. How did the availability of food affect what people ate in Ancient China?

Possible answer: Available food sources strongly influenced diet because grains, vegetables, beans, and rice were easy to grow and widely available. Since meat was expensive and harder to get, most people ate mostly vegan foods instead.

2. How did beliefs influence the daily lives of some people in Ancient China?

Possible answer: Beliefs influenced daily life by shaping what people ate and how they treated living beings. Some people followed teachings that encouraged kindness, balance, and respect for nature, which led them to avoid harming animals and choose simpler, vegan meals.

3. What did Laozi teach about how people should live?

Possible answer: Laozi taught that people should live in harmony with nature. He believed in simple living, balance, and avoiding actions that cause harm to others or the natural world.

4. If Zhuang Zhou and Emperor Wu of Liang talked to each other, what similar ideas would they share about not eating animals?

Possible answer: If Zhuang Zhou and Emperor Wu of Liang talked, they would likely agree that humans should avoid harming animals unnecessarily and consider simpler ways of living. Zhuang Zhou would base this on the idea that all living beings are equal and should not be interfered with, while Emperor Wu would emphasize compassion and religious duty to reduce animal suffering.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. How do beliefs about kindness and nonviolence influence food choices?

Possible answer: Answers will vary. Beliefs about kindness and nonviolence can influence food choices because people want their actions to match their values. If someone believes it is wrong to harm living beings, they may choose not to eat animals as a way to show respect and avoid causing harm.

2. How did belief systems like Daoism and Buddhism shape society in Ancient China?

Possible answer: These belief systems shaped society by influencing how people behaved in daily life. They encouraged people to live in balance, treat others with respect, and avoid harming living beings. These ideas affected customs, food choices, and ways of thinking about nature and society.

3. In what ways are the food choices of people today similar to or different from those in Ancient China?

Possible answer: Food choices today are similar because some people still choose vegetarian or vegan diets for ethical, health, ecological, or religious reasons. However, they are different because many people today have more access to a wider variety of foods, and fewer people depend on local crops the way people did in Ancient China.

4. What does this article suggest about the connection between beliefs and everyday actions?

Possible answer: The article suggests that beliefs can strongly influence everyday actions. In Ancient China, what people believed about nature, kindness, and balance affected what they ate and how they lived their daily lives.

Class Discussion Prompts

Consider dividing students into small groups or pairs and assigning one question to each group. Students can share their responses in writing, with a partner, or in a whole-class discussion.

1. Should people's beliefs influence what they eat? Why or why not?

Possible answer: Answers will vary. Students may say yes because beliefs about health, religion, or ethics often guide food choices. Others may say no because they think food should be based only on nutrition, availability, or personal preference.

2. Which of the following would you be most likely to agree with—Laozi's Daoist ideas, Zhuang Zhou's teachings, Buddhist teachings, or Emperor Wu of Liang's actions—and why?

Possible answer: Answers will vary. Students should choose one philosophy or thinker and explain the connection to their own beliefs or values. They should also support their response with at least one idea or example from the text.

3. Do you think it would be difficult to eat a vegan diet? Why or why not?

Possible answer: Answers will vary. Students should provide reasoning to support their opinions.

4. How does where people live affect what foods they eat?

Possible answer: Where people live affects what foods are available. Climate, soil, and geography determine which foods are grown. People usually eat what is easiest to produce in their region.

5. Can a whole society change its diet based on shared beliefs? What challenges might that create?

Possible answer: It is possible, but it would be challenging. People would need to agree on shared beliefs, and there could be issues with food availability, cost, and cultural traditions. Some people may resist changing long-standing habits.

6. How do culture and tradition influence what people eat today?

Possible answer: Culture and tradition influence food choices through family recipes, holidays, and religious practices. Many people eat certain foods because they grew up with them or because they are important in their culture.

7. How might kindness toward animals influence other parts of a person's life and how they treat the environment?

Possible answer: Kindness toward animals may lead people to be more caring and respectful toward other people as well. It can also influence choices about clothing, food, and how they treat the environment.

8. Which idea from Daoism or Buddhism do you find most interesting? Why?

Possible answer: Answers will vary. Students may choose Daoism for its idea of living in harmony with nature or Buddhism for its compassion and nonviolence. They should explain their choice.

Common Core Standards Addressed: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.4, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.5, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.6, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.2