



PRIMARY SOURCE READING 7

Thoughts of Confucius

About the Selection

Confucius, born in 551 B.C., was China's first great thinker and teacher. He taught that people needed to have a sense of duty to others. He also encouraged people to be good and to learn. He believed this would improve society. Confucius traveled through China sharing his teachings. His followers recorded many of his sayings, which are much like proverbs or simple rules for living. In the proverbs below, Confucius talks about duty, family, and growing older.



Reader's Dictionary

aspirations: hopes or ambitions
veered: changed direction
attuned: aware of your relationship with your surroundings
filial: obedient or faithful

The Analects

1.11 The Master said: "When the father is alive, watch the son's aspirations. When the father is dead, watch the son's actions. If three years later, the son has not veered from the father's way, he may be called a dutiful son indeed."

2.4 The Master said: "At fifteen, I set my mind upon learning. At thirty, I took my stand. At forty, I had no doubts. At fifty, I knew the will of Heaven. At sixty, my ear was attuned. At seventy, I follow all the desires of my heart without breaking any rule."

2.7 Ziyu asked about filial piety. The Master said: "Nowadays people think they are dutiful sons when they feed their parents. Yet they also feed their dogs and horses. Unless there is respect, where is the difference?"

Source: Confucius. *The Analects of Confucius*. Tr. by Simon Leys. W.W. Norton & Co. 1997.

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Thoughts of Confucius (continued)

Directions: Answer the questions below in the spaces provided.

1. According to Confucius, what is the sign of a faithful child?

2. How should children treat their parents, according to Confucius?

3. What was Confucius like when he was 15?

4. **Critical Thinking** Based on this reading, how do you think Confucius felt about getting older?
