

TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR THE *BUDDHACARITA**

This is the second text from South Asia that comes roughly 100-150 years after our first text in Heritage: *The Ramayana*. The South Asian philosopher-poet Ashvaghosha wrote this legendary biography of the Buddha in Sanskrit during the second century C.E. Prior to this period, there was no uniform biography penned. In correlation to this, much of the art and iconography was *amiconic*, since it was viewed as counter-intuitive to remember the person instead of the message (*dharma*).

According to this biography and most accounts of the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, he was born a prince of the Shakya-clan. It was foretold that the prince would one day become either a world conqueror or world renouncer. Being a king vested in his kingdom, Siddhartha's father did his best to hide the tragedies of life that might stir thoughts of asceticism, but eventually fails. The section we are reading captures the pivotal moment in Siddhartha's life when he turns his back on the "world conqueror track" and begins his *journey* to a new sense of purpose, identity, and *truth*.

TRANSLATION NOTES

- ✚ *Buddhacarita* – the story of the Buddha (awakened one)
- ✚ *dharma* - throughout the translation the words "religion" or "irreligious" or "religious" are translated from the Sanskrit word *dharma*. In this context, *dharma* is best translated as "law" or "doctrine," depending upon the context. Buddhists use the term *dharma* slightly differently than Hindus, who often use *dharma* as "duty."
- ✚ *householder* – in the Hindu context, it is a person's *dharma* to fulfill their householder duties. For a man, this includes the duty to procreate and produce offspring. (p.65)
- ✚ *panava* – means small cymbals and drums (p.69)
- ✚ *lotus* – a very common metaphor in Buddhist philosophy for awakening (p.70)
- ✚ *Indra* – king of the Gods (p.85)
- ✚ *Iksvaku* – a mythical dynasty, often referred to as the solar dynasty, of very early Vedic times (p.85)

DAY 1 SUGGESTIONS:

- Assign an anticipatory set
 - Have students bring in a list of five initial thoughts/associations they have of Buddhism, prior to doing the reading.
 - Spend time discussing the popular or more common associations and have students connect these associations to ideals.
- Review the characters and their depictions
 - the son, the prince (Siddhartha)
 - the princess (Yashodhara)
 - he has wives, but Yashodhara is the primary princess
 - the king (Shuddhodana)
 - the mother (Mahamaya, who dies shortly after childbirth—p.81)
 - mistresses/courtesans
 - his charioteer (Chamdaka)
- Compare the depiction of these characters and those from an earlier text
 - E.g.: *The Odyssey*
- Discuss the tension and role of filial piety within this section

- contrast this with other texts we have read
- Discuss the ways in which gender are highlighted in this story
 - E.g.: the prince leaves his wife and newborn son, the depiction of the sexual, wanton, temptresses
 - E.g.: the way masculinity is depicted through the descriptions of the prince and other males
 - Are these depictions different than others from the texts we have read?
- Discuss the role of the divine in the story
 - How do the gods assist the prince in his journey?
 - his four famous sights that trigger desire to renounce
 - his leaving of the women
 - the donning of ascetic garbs
- I would initiate but not strongly push comparisons on the first day. One way to begin their thinking of comparisons is to ask them how this story of the Buddha has captured the imagination of people throughout the world.
 - For instance, what aspects of the story would resonate with those who also read
 - the *Dao De Jing*?
 - the *Gospel of Mark*?
 - the *Ramayana*?
- Revisit the initial thoughts/associations
 - How similar are the initial thoughts/associations to the text?

DAY 2 SUGGESTIONS

- Have the students revisit the storyline from the day before
- Discuss the power of social relevance of a text
 - to denote an audience
 - Who is the probable audience for this text? Ashvaghosha uses some very provocative words and is quite playful in his descriptions.
 - to denote a writer(s)
 - What can we make of Ashvaghosa from this text?
 - and to indicate a need (polemics)*
 - What is the purpose for such a text?
 - Are there any principles/values that are promoted/devalued?
 - *The ascetics in this text practice the Hindu aspirations to truth
- Discuss the “truth” that the prince is ultimately after
 - How is this truth relayed in comparison to others we have read
 - Storyline + Socrates’ sarcasm and bluntness in the *The Apology*
 - Storyline + Jesus’ parables and caution in *The Gospel of Mark*
 - Poetry of *The Dao De Jing*’s aphorisms
- Do some comparisons between
 - *Antigone* – state/divine tension
 - *The Ramayana* – sacred duty, filial piety
 - *Dao De Jing* – critique of extreme materialism
 - *Mencius* – filial piety, benevolence
- Have the students break into groups and construct a memory matrix
 - once they finish, ask them to write them on the board and discuss the different answers

MEMORY MATRIX PURPOSE:

A memory matrix is a Classroom Assessment Technique (CAT) designed to test students' retention of important material, how they have categorized the material in their memory, and lastly how quickly they can conceptualize and articulate it.

BENEFITS:

Conducting this CAT can reveal common problems students have with classifying information. Students may demonstrate tendencies to incorrectly associate information with certain categories or may reveal an inability to recall information when done through association. This CAT also demonstrates how students are connecting course content.

APPLICABILITY:

This CAT can be performed individually, in groups, or together as a class.

Below is an example memory matrix. In this third part of Heritage, we have covered subjects such as filial piety (which can include *dharmā*), the divine, and truth. In an effort to check student comprehension of the material and reinforce these dimensions, apply the Memory Matrix with whichever reoccurring motifs/tropes you have emphasized throughout the semester. Students are given the vertical and horizontal categories (seen below) and are asked to fill in the corresponding blank squares. As with any CAT, it is extremely beneficial to give students a time limit.

	BUDDHACARITA	MENCIUS	RAMAYANA	GOSPEL OF MARK	ANTIGONE
Filial Piety					
Divine					
Truth					