

Summary of Concepts Within the *Star Wars* Films

Religion and philosophy are often difficult topics to discuss within a world history course. The traditions and beliefs of a faith often can be complex, leading to many questions and misunderstandings within class. One method that can overcome many of these misunderstandings is the employment of modern films to provide visuals for religious and philosophical practices. Specifically, the *Star Wars* films provide multiple examples of these concepts within their frameworks. George Lucas' *Star Wars* franchise reflects numerous examples of Eastern Hemisphere cultural philosophies. By using *Star Wars* in the classroom, students are provided examples of the religious ideas and concepts in practice and realize that religious and philosophical motifs surround us.

Buddhism

Star Wars can be used to reflect Buddhism through both character representations and religious ideas. One of the first connections that students identify between Buddhism and *Star Wars* is the character of Yoda, who is the visual representation of Buddha in a "galaxy far, far away." Additionally, scenes focusing upon Luke Skywalker's training with both Obi-wan and Yoda display multiple aspects of the foundational ideas of the Buddhist faith.

Many of these training scenes provide insight into the ideas of the Eight Fold Path and Four Noble Truths of the Buddhist faith. Yoda/Buddha is the representation of

an individual who has journeyed far along the Eight Fold path. Yoda also can be the viewed as the living embodiment of the exquisite lotus flower. The lotus grows in environments such as swamps, which are not known for producing beauty. Yoda represents this beauty in the form of his knowledge and assistance in a swampy and dangerous location.

As opposed to Yoda, Luke is an individual who has just begun the journey on the Eight Fold Path. Through his meeting with Obi-Wan, his training with Yoda and the handling of his parental situation, Luke advances along his path to be a Jedi and thus represents the journey along the Eight Fold Path.

It is Obi-wan Kenobi who initially provides the visual for the ultimate goal of Buddhism. Obi-Wan is the representative of the idea of nirvana, or the state of being of someone who has reached eternal enlightenment and completed his journey on the Eight Fold Path. As Kenobi states to Darth Vader "If you strike me down, I will become more powerful than you can ever imagine." This quote is Kenobi realizing that he is entering another level of the path and reflects the concept of reincarnation.

Confucianism

The philosophy of Confucianism is strongly represented within the *Star Wars* films. Central among this representation is the concept of "harmony" leading to success and balance in life. Confucius stated that good relationships, or harmony, with

parents, family and teachers would provide an individual with greater success in life. Within the framework of *Star Wars*, the galaxy is not safe until Luke and his father, Darth Vader, form a harmonious relationship. Also, Luke's discovery of an unknown sister, Princess Leia, reflects the strengthening of a family bond and helps create more harmony within the *Star Wars*'s galaxy. Finally, the teacher/student relationship is shown in Luke's interactions with both Yoda and Obi-Wan. Luke does not flourish as a Jedi until he formulates solid and respectful relationships with his educators, Obi-Wan Kenobi and Yoda.

Taoism

Taoism is centered on the concept of Tao or "the way." Within the *Star Wars*'s universe this philosophy is shown in the concept of the Force. Both the Tao and the Force are based in nature and Yoda makes a clear connection between the two concepts by stating: "For my ally is the Force, and a powerful ally it is. Life creates it, makes it grow. Its energy surrounds us and binds us. Luminous beings are we, not this crude matter. You must feel the Force around you; here, between you, me, the tree, the rock, everywhere, yes. Even between the land and the ship." This quote outlines the nature-based ideas of both the Tao and the Force.

Taoism is shown within the *Star Wars* films by the Jedi stressing of a constant balance in nature and life. Taoism reflects the idea of balance with the theory of Yin and Yang. Within the *Star Wars* films, the Force is centered on the idea of a dark and light side to the Force, with Luke representing the light and Darth Vader the dark.

Additionally, the overriding theme of the *Star Wars* series is Luke's goal of bringing balance to the galaxy. In order to accomplish this goal of balance, Luke has to return to a natural surrounding, which is Yoda's home, to understand the philosophy of the Force. This idea of nature as the teacher is a central theme within the Taoist faith.