

from the Tao Te Ching by Lao Tzu
from The Analects by Confucius
Literary Analysis: Aphorisms

Aphorisms are brief passages that express someone's beliefs. They may express an insight into the meaning of life, or they may offer advice about wise or good behavior. Aphorisms that share philosophical ideas usually do not explain a philosophy completely; instead, they present key points in a way that encourages the audience to think further.

DIRECTIONS: Answer the questions about each aphorism.

The sage [wise ruler] empties [the people's] minds but fills their bellies, weakens their wills but strengthens their bones.

—Lao Tzu, from the *Tao Te Ching*, Section III

1. According to this aphorism, what contrast will mark a wise ruler's government?

2. Why might a ruler want to follow this advice?

3. How might people who live in a democracy respond to this aphorism?

A gentleman covets the reputation of being slow in word but prompt in deed.

—Confucius, from *The Analects*

4. Restate this aphorism in your own words.

5. Without naming names, describe someone who fits this definition of "a gentleman."

6. What thoughts about getting along with people at school does this aphorism suggest?
