



Class 12

THE AXIAL AGE OF EAST AND WEST

Title:

Class 12: The Axial Age of East and West

Topics (CHAPTERS – Video lectures):

Class 12. [Introduction Video](#)

Chapter 1 Video. [Confucianism – Temple of Confucius – China](#)

Chapter 2 Video. [The Philosophers – The Athens Academy – Greece](#)

Chapter 3 Video. [Hinduism – Vishnu Temple – India](#)

Chapter 4 Video. [Buddhism – Sarnath – India](#)

Subject/Course: Civics, History, Geography, Religion, Ethics, Social Studies

Grade: Secondary School Level

The Ages of Globalization book reference chapters: Chapter 5. The Classical Age

Download your free copy of the AOG book [here](#).

[Timeline of Historical Events](#)

Stage 1 – Desired Results



In this section, you will find a detailed framework that outlines the overall learning goals, the enduring understandings, attitudes and values students will develop, essential questions students should be able to formulate and/or to provoke deep thinking and discussion, and specific learning outcomes that emphasize both knowledge and skills.

Established Goals:

Summary/Overarching:

Learners will understand the great philosophical traditions of the Axial Age, becoming acquainted with their origins and significance, and gaining insight into how this transformative era emerged. They will also explore the role and impact of technological advancements, such as the alphabet and written language, in facilitating the transmission and preservation of ideas across civilizations.

Enduring Understandings:

Students will

- ▶ Understand that a common thread of human virtue connects the great philosophical traditions across the world, highlighting shared values and ethical principles despite cultural differences.

Essential Questions:

- ▶ Which ancient traditions are most relevant for your own society?

Students will know...

- ▶ The concept of the Axial Age and its significance as a period of profound philosophical and religious development across Eurasia.



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- ▶ Key philosophies and religions that emerged during this era, including Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and Greek philosophy, and their foundational figures like Confucius, Buddha, Zarathustra, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.
- ▶ The role of technological advancements, such as the development of the alphabet and written scripts, in preserving and transmitting philosophical and religious ideas.
- ▶ The lasting influence of Axial Age traditions on subsequent civilizations and their relevance in today's global and cultural context.
- ▶ Compare and contrast key traditions from the Axial Age across different regions, examining shared themes such as human virtue, ethics, and transcendence.
- ▶ Analyze the role of written language in the dissemination of philosophical and religious ideas during the Axial Age.
- ▶ Relate the ideas of the Axial Age to their own society, exploring their relevance in addressing contemporary issues.
- ▶ Reflect on how the philosophical and religious traditions of the Axial Age influence modern cultural, ethical, and societal frameworks.

Students will be able to:

- ▶ Explain the significance of the Axial Age and identify its major philosophical and religious contributions.

Stage 2 – Assessment Evidence



In this section, you'll find key concepts and definitions essential for understanding the course material as well as activities, such as Vocabulary Flashcards, Check-Your-Facts and Fill-in-the-Blank to enhance your students' comprehension and retention. You can adapt these activities to suit various subjects and grade levels.

Concepts & Definition

Familiarize yourself with the provided terms, such as "Axial Age," "Hinduism," and others. Understanding these definitions will help you effectively teach the material and connect it to your lessons.

Vocabulary Activity

Create physical flashcards for each term. This hands-on approach helps reinforce terminology and aids in building a solid foundation of knowledge. Encourage students to use these flashcards for review and practice.

- ▶ **Karl Jaspers** (born Feb. 23, 1883, Oldenburg, Ger.—died Feb. 26, 1969, [Basel](#), Switz.) was a German

philosopher, one of the most important [Existentialists](#) in [Germany](#), who approached the subject from man's direct concern with his own existence. In his later work, as a reaction to the disruptions of Nazi rule in Germany and [World War II](#), he searched for a new [unity](#) of thinking that he called world [philosophy](#). (Britannica)

- ▶ **Axial Age:** The Axial Age (also called Axis Age) is the period when, roughly at the same time around most of the inhabited world, the great intellectual, philosophical, and religious systems that came to shape subsequent human society and culture emerged—with the ancient Greek philosophers, Indian metaphysicians and logicians (who articulated the great traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism), Persian Zoroastrianism, the Hebrew Prophets, the "Hundred Schools" (most notably Confucianism and Daoism) of ancient China....These are only some of the representative Axial traditions that emerged and took root during that time. The phrase originated with the German psychiatrist and philosopher Karl Jaspers, who noted that during this period there was a shift—or a turn, as if on an axis—away from more predominantly localized



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concerns and toward transcendence*. (Britannica)

- ***transcendence:** The term literally means “to go beyond.” In the case of the Axial Age “revolution” in human thought about the world, “going beyond” has several meanings, according to the Canadian philosopher and sociologist Charles Taylor. Among them are a shift to thinking about the cosmos and the way it works rather than taking for granted that it works, the rise of second-order thinking about the ways that human beings even think about the universe in the first place and come to know it, and a turn away from merely propitiating tribal or civic deities (which Taylor characterized as “feeding the gods”) and toward speculation about the fate of humanity, about human beings’ relationship with the cosmos, and about “The Good” and how human beings can be “good.” (Britannica)
- ▶ **Confucius:** Confucius was a philosopher and teacher who lived from 551 to 479 B.C.E. His thoughts on ethics, good behavior, and moral character were written down by his disciples in several books, the most important being the Lunyu. (National Geographic)
- ▶ **Confucianism:** Confucianism, one of the most influential philosophies in Chinese history, has shaped Chinese culture and society for over 2,500 years. Rooted in inner virtue, morality, and respect for community values, it emphasizes personal ethics and a harmonious social order. While its classification as a religion or philosophy remains debated, Confucianism promotes ancestor worship and human-centered virtues as the path to a peaceful life. Its guiding principle, the golden rule, is: “Do not do unto others what you would not want others to do unto you.” This belief system continues to be a cornerstone of Chinese thought and cultural identity. (National Geographic)
- ▶ **Aristotle:** ancient Greek philosopher and scientist, one of the greatest [intellectual](#) figures of [Classical antiquity](#) and Western history. He was the author of a [philosophical](#) and scientific system that became the framework and vehicle for both [Christian Scholasticism](#) and [medieval Islamic philosophy](#). Even after the intellectual revolutions of the [Renaissance](#), the [Reformation](#), and the [Enlightenment](#), Aristotelian concepts remained embedded in Western [thinking](#). Aristotle’s intellectual range was vast, covering most of the sciences and many of the arts, including [biology](#), [botany](#), [chemistry](#), [ethics](#), [history](#), [logic](#), [metaphysics](#), [rhetoric](#), [philosophy of mind](#), [philosophy of science](#), [physics](#), poetics, political theory, [psychology](#), and [zoology](#). (Britannica)
- ▶ **Zarathustra** (born 2nd [millennium](#) BCE, probably eastern Iran) [Iranian religious](#) reformer and prophet, traditionally regarded as the founder of [Zoroastrianism](#). A major figure in the history of world religions, Zarathushtra has been the object of much scholarly attention, in large part because of his apparent [monotheism](#) (his concept of one god, whom he referred to as [Ahura Mazdā](#), or the “Wise Lord”), his purported [dualism](#) (indicated in the stark distinction drawn in some Zoroastrian texts between the forces of good and the forces of evil), and the possible influence of his teachings on subsequently emerging [Middle Eastern religions](#) (e.g., [Judaism](#)). (Britannica)
- ▶ **Hinduism:** Hinduism is unique in that it’s not a single religion but a compilation of many traditions and philosophies. Hindus worship a number of different gods and minor deities, honor a range of symbols, respect several different holy books and celebrate with a wide variety of traditions, holidays and customs. Though the development of the caste system in India was influenced by Hindu concepts, it has been shaped throughout history by political as well as religious movements, and today is much less rigidly enforced. Today there are four major sects of Hinduism: Shaivism, Vaishnava, Shaktism and Smarta, as well as a number of smaller sects with their own religious practices.
 - Some basic Hindu concepts include:
 - Hinduism embraces many religious ideas. For this reason, it’s sometimes referred to as a “way of life” or a “family of religions,” as opposed to a single, organized religion.
 - Most forms of Hinduism are henotheistic, which means they worship a single deity, known as “Brahman,” but still recognize other gods and goddesses. Followers believe there are multiple paths to reaching their god.
 - Hindus believe in the doctrines of samsara (the continuous cycle of life, death, and reincarnation) and karma (the universal law of cause and effect).
 - One of the key thoughts of Hinduism is “atman,” or the belief in soul. This philosophy holds that living



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creatures have a soul, and they're all part of the supreme soul. (History Channel)

- ▶ **Buddhism:** is one of the world's largest religions and originated 2,500 years ago in India. Buddhists believe that human life is one of suffering, and that meditation, spiritual and physical labor, and good behavior are the ways to achieve enlightenment, or nirvana. (National Geographic)
- ▶ **Siddhartha:** Born on the Nepali side of the present day Nepal-India border, Siddhartha Gautama was a prince around the fifth century B.C.E. who, upon seeing people poor and dying, realized that human life is suffering. He renounced his wealth and spent time as a poor beggar, meditating and traveling but ultimately, remaining unsatisfied, settling on something called "the Middle Way." This idea meant that neither extreme asceticism nor extreme wealth was the path to enlightenment, but rather, a way of life between the two extremes was. Eventually, in a state of deep meditation, he achieved enlightenment, or nirvana, underneath the Bodhi tree (the tree of awakening). The Mahabodhi Temple in Bihar, India—the site of his enlightenment—is now a major Buddhist pilgrimage site. (National Geographic)
 - The Buddha taught about Four Noble Truths. The first truth is called "Suffering (dukkha)," which teaches that everyone in life is suffering in some way. The second truth is "Origin of suffering (samudāya)." This states that all suffering comes from desire (tanhā). The third truth is "Cessation of suffering (nirodha)," and it says that it is possible to stop suffering and achieve enlightenment. The fourth truth, "Path to the cessation of suffering (magga)" is about the Middle Way, which is the steps to achieve enlightenment.
 - Buddhists believe in a wheel of rebirth into different bodies. This is connected to "karma," which refers to how a person's good or bad actions in the past or in their past lives can impact them in the future.
 - There are three main schools of Buddhism: Mahayana, Theravada, and Vajrayana. Mahayana Buddhism is common in China, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea. It emphasizes the role models of bodhisattvas (beings that have achieved enlightenment but return to teach humans). Theravada Buddhism is common in Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, and Burma (Myanmar). It emphasizes a monastic lifestyle and meditation as the way to enlightenment. Vajrayana is the major school of Buddhism in the region of Tibet and in Nepal, Bhutan, and Mongolia. It offers followers a faster path to enlightenment than Mahayana or Theravada. (National Geographic)
- ▶ **Democritus** (born c. 460—died c. 370 BC) is a Greek philosopher. Though only a few fragments of his work survive, he was apparently the first to describe invisible "atoms" as the basis of all matter. His atoms—indestructible, indivisible, incompressible, uniform, and differing only in size, shape, and motion—anticipated with surprising accuracy those discovered by 20th-century scientists. For his amusement at human foibles, he has been called "the Laughing Philosopher." (Britannica)
- ▶ **Socrates** (born c. 470 BCE, [Athens](#) [Greece]—died 399 BCE, Athens) is an [ancient Greek philosopher](#) whose way of life, character, and thought exerted a profound influence on [Classical antiquity](#) and [Western philosophy](#). Although Socrates himself wrote nothing, he is depicted in conversation in [compositions](#) by a small circle of his admirers—[Plato](#) and [Xenophon](#) first among them. He is portrayed in these works as a man of great insight, [integrity](#), self-mastery, and argumentative skill. Plato's [Apology of Socrates](#) purports to be the speech Socrates gave at his trial in response to the accusations made against him (Greek apologia means "defense"). Its powerful [advocacy](#) of the examined life and its condemnation of Athenian [democracy](#) have made it one of the central documents of Western thought and [culture](#). (Britannica)
- ▶ **Plato** (born 428/427 BCE, [Athens](#), Greece—died 348/347, Athens) is an ancient [Greek philosopher](#), student of [Socrates](#) (c. 470–399 BCE), teacher of [Aristotle](#) (384–322 BCE), and founder of the [Academy](#), best known as the author of philosophical works of unparalleled influence. He is one of the major figures of [Classical antiquity](#). Building on the demonstration by Socrates that those regarded as experts in [ethical](#) matters did not have the understanding necessary for a good human life, Plato introduced the [idea](#) that their mistakes were due to their not engaging properly with a class of entities he called [forms](#), chief examples of which were [Justice](#), Beauty, and Equality.



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Whereas other thinkers—and Plato himself in certain passages—used the term without any precise technical force, Plato in the course of his career came to devote specialized attention to these entities. As he conceived them, they were accessible not to the senses but to the [mind](#) alone, and they were the most important [constituents](#) of reality, underlying the [existence](#) of the sensible world and giving it what intelligibility it has. In [metaphysics](#) Plato [envisioned](#) a systematic, rational treatment of the forms and their interrelations, starting with the most fundamental among them ([the Good](#), or the One); in [ethics](#) and [moral psychology](#) he developed the view that the good life requires not just a certain kind of knowledge (as Socrates had suggested) but also habituation to healthy emotional responses and therefore harmony between the three parts of the [soul](#) (according to Plato, [reason](#), spirit, and appetite). His works also contain discussions in [aesthetics](#), [political philosophy](#), [theology](#), [cosmology](#), [epistemology](#), and the [philosophy of language](#). His school fostered research not just in [philosophy](#) narrowly [conceived](#) but in a wide range of endeavours that today would be called mathematical or scientific. (Britannica)

- ▲ **Aristotle:** ancient Greek philosopher and scientist, one of the greatest [intellectual](#) figures of [Classical antiquity](#) and Western history. He was the author of a [philosophical](#) and scientific system that became the framework and vehicle for both [Christian Scholasticism](#) and [medieval Islamic philosophy](#). Even after the intellectual revolutions of the [Renaissance](#), the [Reformation](#), and the [Enlightenment](#), Aristotelian concepts remained embedded in Western [thinking](#). Aristotle's intellectual range was vast, covering most of the sciences and many of the arts, including [biology](#), [botany](#), [chemistry](#), [ethics](#), [history](#), [logic](#), [metaphysics](#), [rhetoric](#), [philosophy of mind](#), [philosophy of science](#), [physics](#), poetics, political theory, [psychology](#), and [zoology](#). (Britannica)

Check-Your-Facts / Review Questions

Utilize this activity to promote critical thinking by having students verify and analyze information related to the concepts and definitions.

1. **What is the significance of the Axial Age?** (The Axial Age is marked by a simultaneous emergence of profound philosophical and religious insights in 4

major civilizations of Eurasia in which remarkable and foundational breakthroughs in thinking occurred about the meaning and purpose of life.)

2. **What might be a common cause that was at play in all 4 regions of the Axial Age?** (A common cause that was at play in all four regions of the Axial Age was the advancement of written scripts around 800 BCE. This development enabled the recording and transmission of foundational texts and philosophies, facilitating the preservation and spread of transformative ideas across Western, Persian, Indian, and Chinese civilizations).

Fill-In-The-Blank

Incorporate this activity to assess students' understanding of key concepts and historical periods. Provide a word bank to support their learning and check their grasp of the material.

1. Matching: 4 major civilizations of Eurasia around 800 - 300 BCE:
 - a. Greco-Roman : Mediterranean Sea
 - b. Persian : Western Asia
 - c. Aryan : Northern India
 - d. Han : East Asia
2. Matching:
 - Zoroastrianism - Persian
 - Hinduism - India
 - Buddhism - India
 - Confucius - China
 - Mencius - China
 - Plato - Greco-Roman
 - Aristotle - Greco-Roman
3. Matching: Influences of thought from Axial Age to subsequent periods into today:
 - a. Greek philosophy : adopted by Hellenistic empires and then the Roman Empire and later Christian theology
 - b. Confucianism : remained a core doctrine of Chinese dynasties throughout history into today
 - c. Buddhism : practiced today by 500 million people



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- d. Zoroastrianism: of Persian empires had lasting influences on Abrahamic faiths (**Judaism, Christianity and Islam**) - beliefs in monotheism, battle of good versus evil in the universe and the free will of individuals to choose good or evil.
- e. The Eurasian world In 100 CE was comprised of

3 major empires along the west-east (axis) of the **(lucky latitudes)**: 1) **(Roman Empire)** in the Mediterranean basin; the 2) **(Parthian Empire)** of western Asia, which is today's Iraq and Iran; and 3) **(Han Empire)** of China

Stage 3 – Learning Activities



In this section, you will find the different learning activities associated with this specific Class. We recommend that you begin by watching the lecture videos as a basis for the course and as a primary element for the course content. Interactive reference maps are mentioned in the lectures and activities.

Lecture Videos

Class 9. [Introduction Video](#)

Chapter 1 Video. [Confucianism – Temple of Confucius – China](#)

Chapter 2 Video. [The Philosophers – The Athens Academy – Greece](#)

Chapter 3 Video. [Hinduism – Vishnu Temple – India](#)

Chapter 4 Video. [Buddhism – Sarnath – India](#)

Reference Maps

<https://sdgstoday-sdsn.hub.arcgis.com/pages/aog-class-12>

5.4 Han Dynasty, 73 CE (AOG Book)

Summary



In this section, you can find a summary of this Class for your reference. Chapter summaries provide insight into the era discussed in each class period. Should you have issues watching the videos, e.g. due to internet bandwidth, the summaries provide some of the key insight you can build on.

- ▶ The Classical Age spanned from 1000 BCE to 1500 CE, witnessing the rise of major religions and philosophies, including Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, as well as the teachings of Plato, Aristotle, Confucius, and the Buddha.
- ▶ Powerful empires such as Assyria, Persia, Greece, Rome, India, China, and later the Ottoman and Mongol empires thrived during this time, actively engaging in globalization efforts.
- ▶ These empires disseminated ideas, technologies, and institutions on a continental scale, aided by

technological advancements in agriculture, transportation, and warfare.

- ▶ The Axial Age, from 800 to 300 BCE, marked a period of simultaneous philosophical and religious insights across civilizations.
- ▶ Written scripts facilitated the preservation of foundational texts and philosophies, while civilizations diversified into thalassocracy and tellurocracy.
- ▶ Phoenicians exemplified thalassocracy, establishing trade networks and developing alphabets.
- ▶ The Achaemenid Persian Empire, founded by Cyrus the Great, expanded its territories, while Greek city-states engaged in conflicts like the Persian-Greek and Peloponnesian Wars.
- ▶ Alexander the Great's conquests spread Greek culture, influencing subsequent civilizations like Rome.
- ▶ Islamic scholars preserved and translated Greek texts,



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contributing to the revival of Greek wisdom in the Islamic world.

- ▶ China, under the Han Dynasty, focused on agriculture and experienced significant population growth.
- ▶ The Roman and Han empires dominated the Eurasian world, characterized by high population densities and

long-distance trade routes like the Silk Road.

- ▶ Despite political instability, the Classical Age saw significant advancements and interactions, shaping modern civilizations and inspiring entities like the European Union, China, and the Islamic world.

Activities



Journal Activity

Journal Prompt

- ▶ Which of the ancient traditions is most relevant for your own society? Why?

Community Engagement & Student Action Considerations & Capstone Project

Capstone Project

- ▶ Look back at your 3 chosen SDGs. Considering what you have learned up till now, choose the one SDG that interests you and applies to your community the most.
- ▶ Once you have chosen your SDG, research a few facts, movements, initiatives, and ideas associated with it.

Readings

Karl Jaspers

Plato, and D. F. Nevill. The Apology of Socrates. London: F.E. Robinson & Co., 1901.

Plato's *Apology of Socrates*:

<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044004712444#27-33> (p.20-26)

Confucius, Miles Menander Dawson, and American institute for scientific research. The Ethics of Confucius. New York: G. P. Putnam's sons, 1915.

The Ethics of Confucius. Chapter 1. What constitutes the superior man. p.6-43

<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/ia.ark:/13960/t4vh5n684>

Hinduism: Lal, Behari. *The Thesaurus of Knowledge, Divine & Temporal, Or, The Vedas And Their Angas & Upangas*. Lahore: Union Steam Printing Works, 1910. p.xvii

Buddhism: British Museum. Department of Oriental Printed Books and Manuscripts, Ernst Anton Max Haas, Lionel D. (Lionel David) Barnett, and Cecil Bendall. *Catalogue of Sanskrit And Pali Books In the British Museum*. London: Trübner & co., 1876.

Aristotle, and F. H. (Frank Hesketh) Peters. Nicomachean Ethics. 12th ed., London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & co., Ltd., 1916.

Book 1. The End. #21 - 53 (p.1 - 33)

<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hn3mj3>

*Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2005) *Understanding by design* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development ASCD