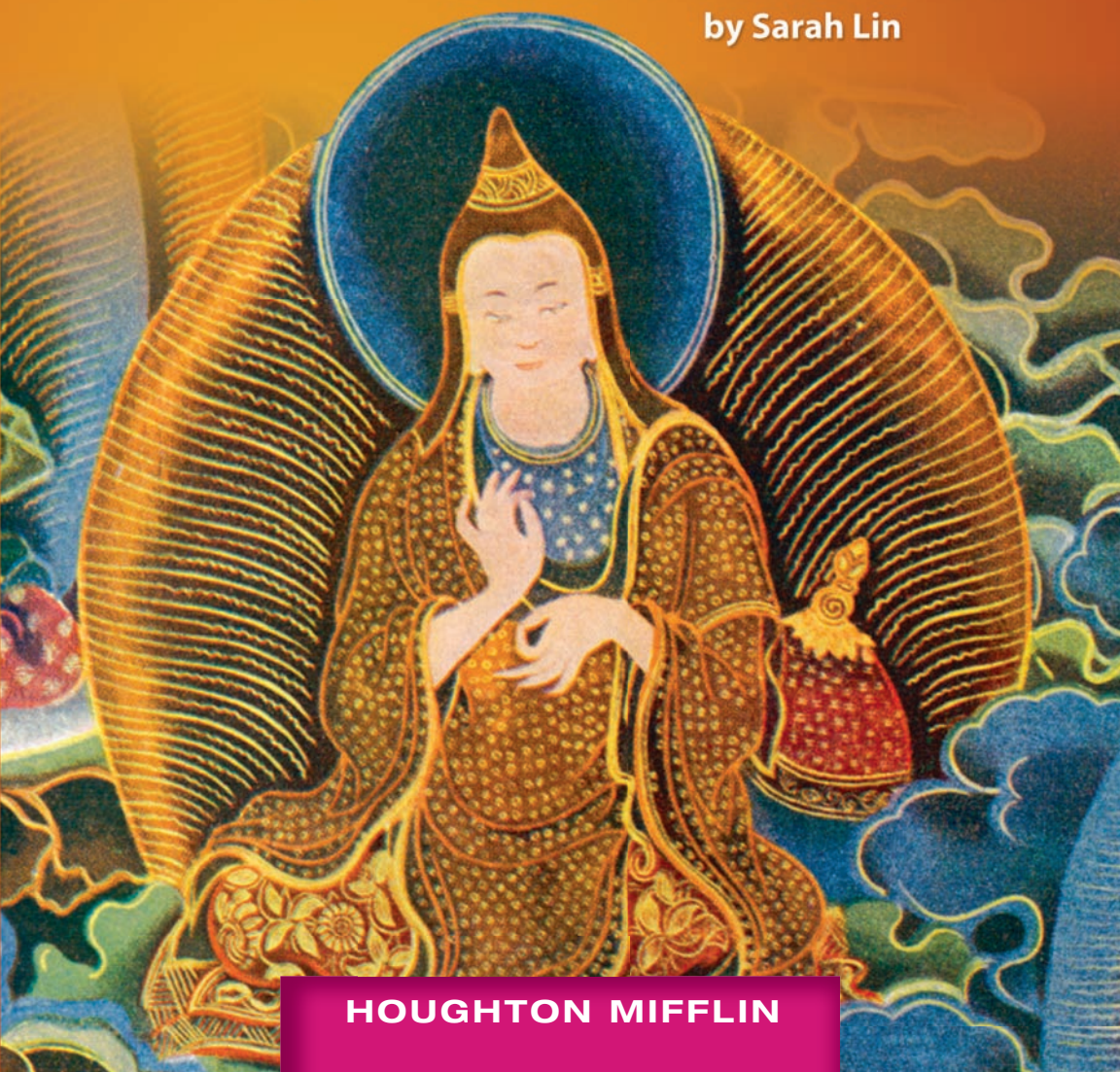




From Raider to Peacemaker

by Sarah Lin



HOUGHTON MIFFLIN

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 King Asoka

 *Have you ever heard of a king who banned hunting? How about a king who promised not to use his military might? Or tried to teach peace to all of his subjects? Such a ruler lived over 2,000 years ago in India.*

Asoka's Empire



Asoka, King of India

Around 270 B.C.E., a young man named Asoka became king of India. He was now ruler of the Mauryan Dynasty. This ruling family set up the first Indian Empire. Asoka was the third ruler of this dynasty. The first was his grandfather. The second had been his father. Now, it was Asoka's time to rule.


The Cost of War

As king, Asoka's main duty was to gain more land. In the beginning, that is just what he did. In fact, he was very good at it. He waged war on other kingdoms. Soon his empire grew.

Many feared Asoka and his powerful army. He was known as a great and fierce ruler.

Then, one terrible day, everything changed.

Asoka's army crushed a great kingdom in east India. He had made India into a huge empire. This was a great victory for the king! But something was wrong. Asoka did not seem happy.

 When the battle ended, he stood looking at the bloody scene. He was horrified. For the first time, Asoka saw the true price of war. Thousands of people were killed. Thousands more still lay dying.

Filled with regret, Asoka vowed to make a change. He would never wage another war. He would never kill to gain land. His **destiny** was clear. He would not be known as a **ruthless** raider. He would become a peaceful leader.

Asoka decided to follow the ways of Buddhism. From now on, he would live a life that showed respect for all living things. He would spread peace, not war.

Asoka wanted to share his beliefs with his subjects. He began to write edicts. These were laws that he wanted his subjects to follow.



Buddhism

Buddhism is one of the world's oldest religions. It started in India, based on the teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha said that suffering is caused by worldly desires. He also talked about the Eightfold Path. This path — or way of life — could help people reach a peaceful state.

A statue of the Buddha


Asoka's Edicts

Asoka used the edicts to **embody** his beliefs. He had them chiseled onto rocks and huge stone pillars. Asoka had the edicts placed all over his kingdom. He wanted as many people as possible to see them. Sometimes the pillars had to be dragged a few miles. Other times they had to be dragged hundreds of miles.


Where a pillar was placed depended on its message. For example, a pillar was placed where the Buddha was born. The words on the pillar describe Asoka's visit to the site.

The Edicts

Asoka's edicts were written in different languages. In eastern India, the language Asoka spoke was used. In western India, Sanskrit was used. Sanskrit is an ancient language of India. Many of India's most famous **sagas** are written in this language.

 One of Asoka's edicts






Asoka went to many places where the Buddha had been. He put pillars at these sites. The words on the pillar told why each site was important.


Asoka also used one pillar to show how sorry he was for the war. Asoka wanted people to see how awful war was. To him, no war was worth fighting. He hoped his subjects would feel the same way.

Asoka's Laws

Asoka used his edicts to spread his laws. So, the pillars were built with great care and **artistry**. Carved animals, such as lions, bulls, and horses, decorated the pillars.


Only ten of Asoka's pillars have been found. They show us how advanced the artists of his time were.

 One of Asoka's pillars

 Asoka's edicts were not like those of the kings before him. They were not written in a fancy way. They were written in his own words and style. He wanted everyone to be able to read and understand them. He wanted to make sure people understood why he made the laws.

Asoka thought that if he asked his people to follow a law, he should follow it, too. In fact, he changed many traditions within his own royal family.



 Lions decorate the top of this pillar.



Protecting Animals

One change Asoka made took place in the royal kitchen. In the past, the cook killed one peacock each day. Asoka ended this practice.

Asoka believed in the value of all life. If there was not a good reason to kill a creature, then he would not allow it. He felt so strongly about not hurting living things that he banned most hunting. He even made laws against cruelty to animals.




Today, the peacock is the national bird of India.



Changing Royal Traditions

Asoka wanted to show his subjects that his family would follow the same laws as everyone else. So, he banned his own royal hunting party from their traditional hunt.

The hunt was for pleasure. All the royal family, court officials, and servants took part. For this event, parts of the forest were blocked off by ribbons. Only the king and his party could hunt inside the marked area. If strangers were found inside, they could be punished by death!

 Asoka stopped this practice and all others that did not represent his beliefs.

Even though Asoka held strong beliefs, he respected people of other religions. Unlike many other rulers, he did not force people to change their religions. He wanted people to treat each other fairly, kindly, and with respect.

In many of his edicts, Asoka told his subjects that he cared for them as if they were his own children. He told them he would try to ensure that they were treated fairly.

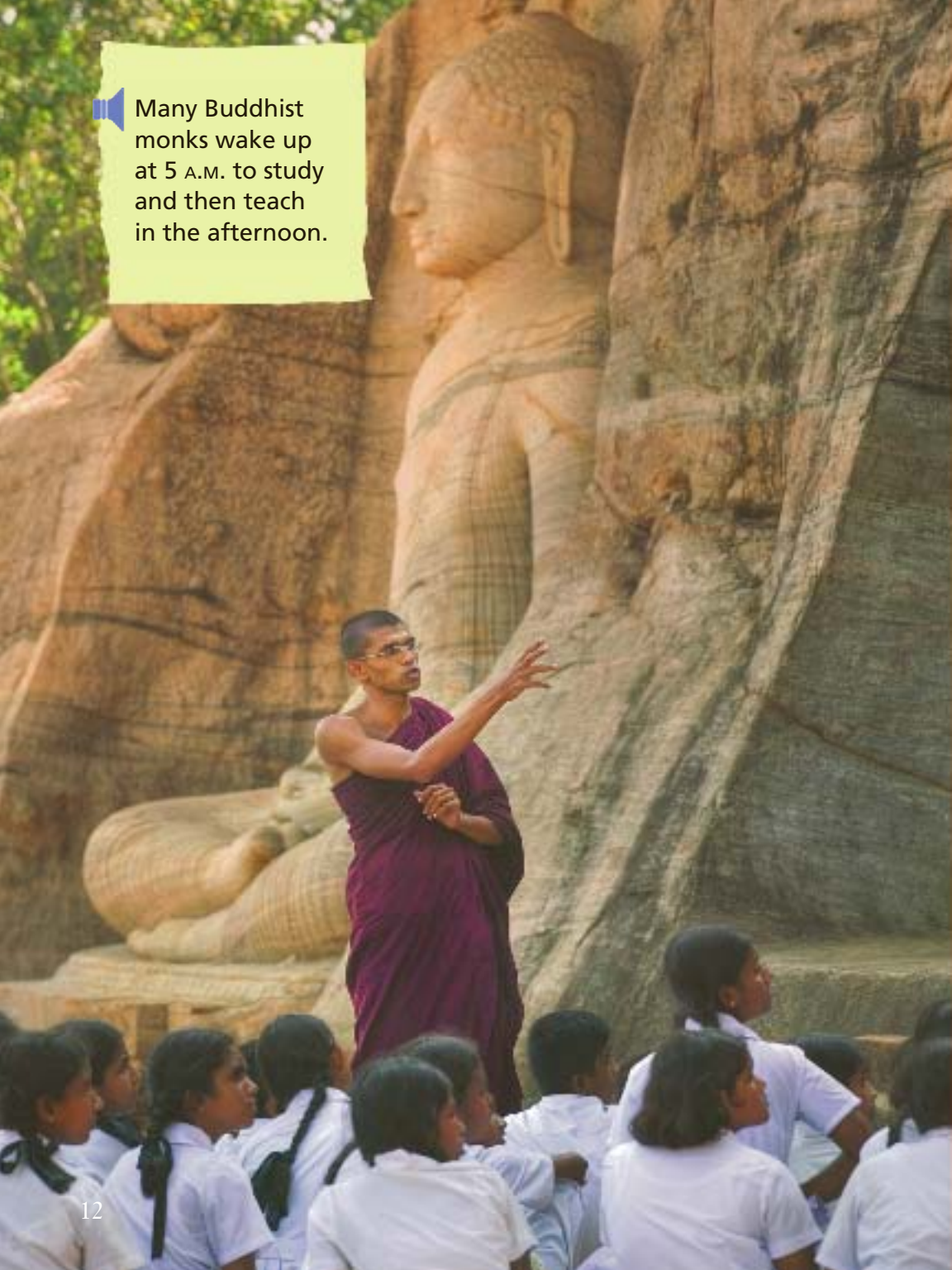


Today, India is trying to preserve as much of its forests as possible.





Many Buddhist monks wake up at 5 A.M. to study and then teach in the afternoon.






The Law of Piety

Asoka visited many parts of India. He retraced the steps of the Buddha. He visited many holy places.

All this time, Asoka talked to people about his beliefs. He sent monks, or religious teachers, around the country as well. He even sent them as far away as Greece and China. Many experts credit Asoka for the growth of Buddhism.

Asoka did not change India's system of government. Instead, he introduced a new way of thinking about ruling. He believed that there was a way of life that all people could follow. People just needed to be kind and good to one another. He called this way of life the Law of Piety.

 The Law of Piety said that you must treat others with respect. It also meant respecting animal life, in addition to human life. Many experts think that this law was a great turning point for civilization in the East.



The dove is a symbol of peace in many countries throughout the world.



Asoka's Place in History

Asoka was unlike most kings in history. His main goal was to create fair laws. He wanted *all* people to live morally, by knowing right from wrong. He hoped these laws would bring lasting peace.

Asoka is thought of as one of the greatest rulers in history. After his death, other leaders viewed him as a model to follow.

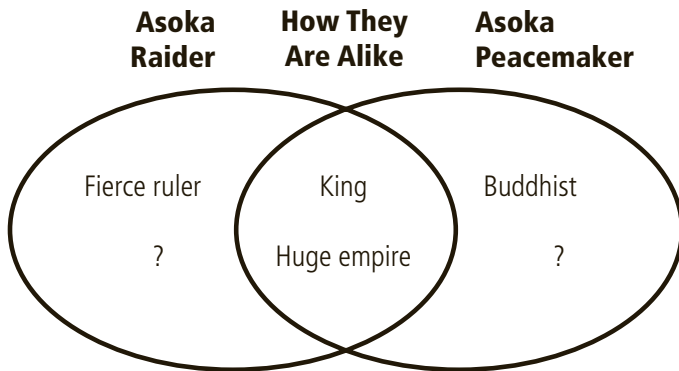
Today, many scholars look back at his way of governing. They wonder what would happen if it were used in modern governments. Would the world be a more peaceful place, as Asoka had hoped?

Responding



TARGET SKILL Compare and Contrast

What was Asoka's rule like before he decided to become a peaceful leader? Copy and complete the diagram below.



Write About It

Text to Self Asoka is considered one of the great leaders in history. If you were a leader of a group project, what would be three rules you would make? Write instructions for how the group should work. List them in order.



TARGET VOCABULARY

ancestral

artistry

destiny

embodied

forge

majestic

recreational

ruthless

sagas

unearthed



TARGET SKILL

Compare and Contrast

Examine how two or more details or ideas are alike and different.



TARGET STRATEGY

Summarize Briefly tell the important parts of the text in your own words.



GENRE Informational Text gives facts and examples about a topic.

Level: U

DRA: 44

Genre:

Informational Text

Strategy:

Summarize

Skill:

Compare and Contrast

Word Count: 1,307

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