

Literacy Standard R 1 – Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

### **Ancestor Worship (Veneration) in Ancient China – Shang Dynasty**

Ancestor worship is still an important part of the belief system of Chinese people. It is based on relationships between the living and the dead. The living have to help the spirits of the ancestors feel comfortable and must protect their graves. The dead can bring success and good fortune to their living relatives. If the living relatives don't take care of their ancestors, the ancestor can become a 'hungry ghost'. A 'hungry ghost' wanders in the spirit world and can be bitter and dangerous.

#### **Sacrifice and ritual in the Shang Dynasty**

The Shang believed there were many gods who had power over different things and had the ability to bring gifts. The people were not able to contact these gods directly. The ancestors, however, were able to ask the gods to bring good fortune to their living relatives.

Sacrifices were held regularly for dead kings, and sometimes queens. Oxen, sheep, pigs and dogs were all sacrificed in large numbers. Human sacrifices were also a common method of satisfying and showing respect to the spirits of the ancestors. Food and drink served in bronze vessels would be offered to the royal ancestors at sacrificing ceremonies.

Sacrifice was also a feature of royal funerals. The royal coffin would lie above a pit in which a dog had been sacrificed. On the ramps to the tomb many soldiers were sacrificed and buried. Often the royal person's closest servants would be killed in order to be buried in the tomb so that they could join them in the spirit world. The living Shang king was able to use prophecy or foresight (through oracle bones) to find out when would be the best day to offer sacrifices to their royal ancestors.

*Directions: Answer the following questions and underline and label with the question number the text where you found your answer.*

1. What is the relationship between the ancestors and the living relatives? What do Shang Dynasty Chinese believe they both get?
2. What do the Chinese in the Shang Dynasty believe will happen if living relatives don't take care of their ancestors? Describe it.
3. Who did the Shang Chinese believe was “in between” the communication between the gods and the living people? If the living people wanted to ask the gods for something, how would they do it?
4. Why did Shang Dynasty Chinese sacrifice humans?