

History
UNFOLDING

ANCIENT CHINA



MindSparks
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

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Introduction

China's Unique Civilization

Many of the world's first civilizations arose along the banks of major river systems. This was true of ancient Egypt, Sumer, and the other civilizations of Mesopotamia, as well as the civilization that developed along the Indus River. China also developed in the broad plain surrounding the lower reaches of the Huang He in northern China. But unlike the other civilizations, Chinese civilization also emerged in nearly total isolation from any other. For this reason, China was distinct and unusual in many ways. Today, it still seems to many to have a somewhat mysterious quality.

Of course, it also does exhibit many patterns similar to other civilizations. The same key features of ancient civilization seen elsewhere were also present in China—agriculture, roads, canals, bronze and iron, early forms of religion, kingship, writing, and literature. Yet in China, each of these had its unique qualities. We hope this set will help you give students a sense both of the commonalities and the unique characteristics of ancient China.

The 12 visual displays making up this set tell the story of ancient China through the Shang, Chou, Qin, and Han dynasties. The illustrations are presented in four lessons. Each lesson uses three visual displays to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

The Land and the People

The isolated nature of China and the rugged Chinese landscape are the focus of the illustrations here, along with a consideration of the key role of the peasantry in the rise of ancient Chinese civilization.

Gods, Ancestors, Ethics

The ancient Chinese did worship gods of streams, mountains, rain, wind, and fertility, as did peoples in many other parts of the world. But respect for one's ancestors was also an especially strong component of their religion and rituals—as was an interest in divination and the future. On this basis, a flowering of philosophy and literature occurred in the sixth century BCE. It produced what are still seen as the great classics of Chinese culture.

The Qin Unification

The long Shang and Chou dynasties came to an end in 221 BCE, when a powerful and tyrannical ruler, Shi Huangdi, came to power. The Qin dynasty he founded lasted only a few years beyond his death, but it unified China and changed it in very significant ways. The illustrations here focus on those changes.

The Han Empire

The Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE) maintained the centralization that took place during the Qin dynasty. The Han rulers expanded China into a mighty empire—one that rivaled in size, power, and achievement that of Rome in the same centuries.

Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

DIGITAL IMAGES The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will better understand how the natural environment affected the growth of ancient civilizations.
2. Students will better understand the unique impact of the natural setting on the rise of ancient Chinese civilization.

The Land and the People

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustration 1**

“Civilization” is not an easy word to define, but most historians agree that the earliest of the world’s great civilizations first appeared along the banks of major rivers. This map shows four great river systems that birthed early civilizations. Three of these civilizations were close enough to one another to be in contact at an early stage. Those three are ancient Egypt, the Mesopotamian civilizations that grew up along the Tigris and Euphrates, and the civilization that developed along the Indus River in what is today India and Pakistan. But one civilization seems to have developed in almost complete isolation from these others—ancient China. This map suggests some of the reasons for the isolation that long protected China while also cutting it off from many outside influences.

Illustrations 2A & 2B

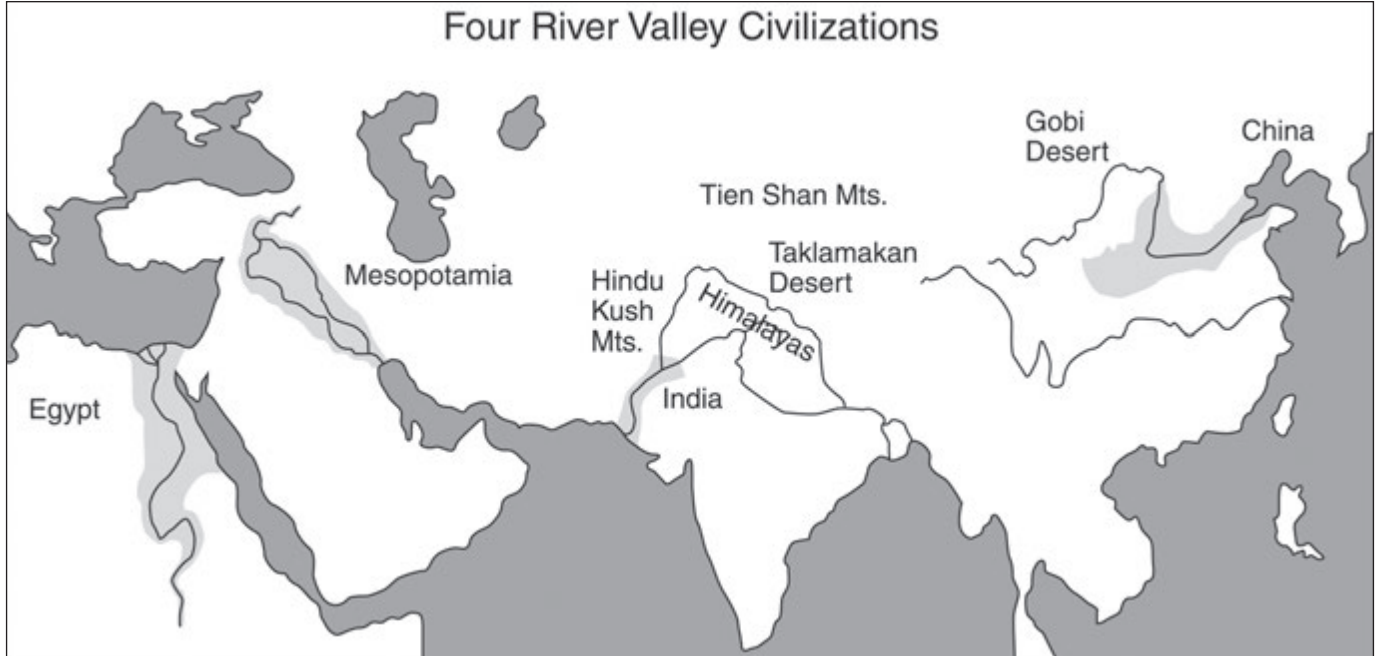
Civilization means cities, monuments, roads and canals, writing and literature, kings and armies. But first and foremost, it means agriculture. Without the shift from hunting and gathering to farming, a society cannot produce the extra food needed to feed the people doing all the non-agricultural tasks required in any civilized society. Farming villages began to appear in China more than 7000 years ago. Over the centuries, millions of peasants in China farmed small plots of land using simple tools of wood or stone. These 1908 photos of a man standing by a threshing machine and a farmer plowing a field show that well into the modern era, China’s peasants still used many of the same tools and methods as their ancient ancestors.

Illustrations 3A & 3B

Civilization was born along great river systems for several reasons: First, the flooding of these rivers regularly covered the land with new, fertile soil brought down from the mountains. Secondly, such rivers acted as highways, helping to link one village with another. And finally, the very destructiveness of the floods encouraged villages to work together to build the levees, dams, and canals needed to control the flood waters and channel water to crops. In China, flooding could be very serious, especially along the Yangtze (Illustration 3B). China’s response was a system of canals, levees, and dams that has withstood the test of time, as is proved by Illustration 3A showing an ancient canal still in use today.

Lesson 1—The Land and the People

Illustration 1



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Discussing the Illustration

1. The gray areas on this map show the locations of four ancient civilizations. Each civilization grew up along one or two major river systems. Can you name the civilizations and the rivers along which they grew?
2. Historians say it is no accident that the world's first civilizations would develop along major rivers. Why do you think they believe this?
3. Of these four civilizations, evidence exists that three were able to make contact with one another from an early stage through trade and travel. Which three do you suppose these are? Why?
4. China may well have had some indirect contact with these other civilizations. But most historians think that ancient China grew up largely cut off from them. From this map alone, can you explain what some of the causes of this isolation might be?

Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** Use this map as the centerpiece of a bulletin-board display entitled "Ancient China: A World Unto Itself." Look through old illustrated history books or travel books on China for illustrations or photos of the various natural settings in China and in the lands just to the north and west of it. You might try contacting Chinese government agencies or other sources to ask for photographs of such scenes. Try to at least find illustrations of the Himalayas, the Tien Shan and Kunlun mountains, and the Taklamakan, Ala Shan, and Gobi deserts. Write descriptive paragraphs for all the illustrations you use. Connect each illustration to its correct location on the map.
2. It is not clear from the above map what barriers (if any) along China's southern borders helped to keep it isolated. Using atlases in the library, draw your own topographical map of southern China and Southeast Asia. Use the map in a brief talk in class about how the geography of this region might or might not have added to China's isolation from the rest of the world.

Lesson 1 — The Land and the People

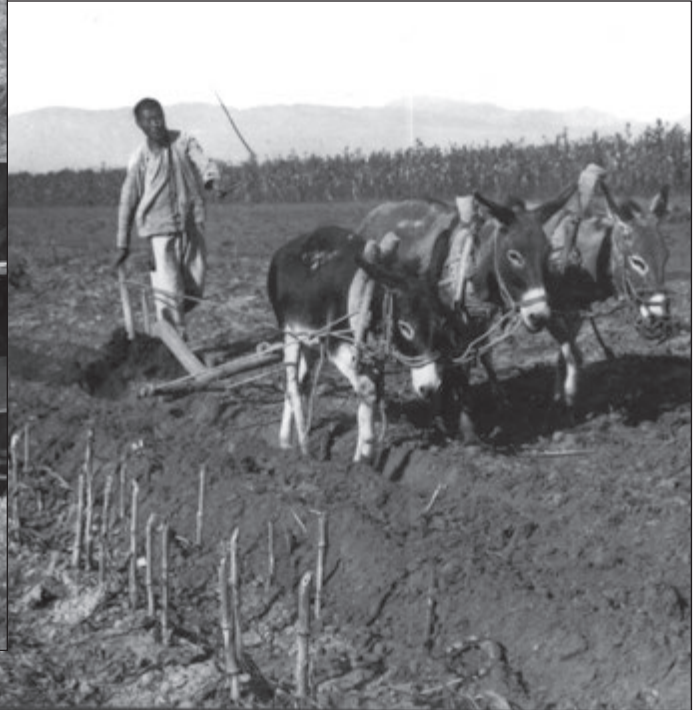
Illustrations 2A & 2B

2A



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2B



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

Discussing the Illustrations

1. Like all ancient civilizations, China could never have developed without the huge change historians call the “Neolithic Revolution.” Can you explain what that was?
2. These two photos show Chinese peasants in the early 1900s. Can you tell what they are doing? What do you notice about the tools they are using, the materials those tools are made of, their sources of energy, etc.? Does it surprise you to see farming at this technological level in 20th-century China?
3. Rice was first raised mainly in southeast China, but China’s earliest civilization actually developed in the north along the Huang He River. And there, the main crop was millet. What do you know about the growing of millet and rice? From what you know about these crops, and about China’s various regions and climates, can you think of reasons why China’s first complex civilization arose in the north along the Huang He river and not in the southeast?

Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** Find out more about the way millet and rice were grown in China in the centuries before the first complex civilization arose there. In each case, describe the crop itself and its ideal growing conditions. Then outline the main steps to follow in raising this crop and using it as food. Now pretend your group is a small community in China around 4000 years ago. You are trying to decide which part of China to settle in. In making this decision, take what you have learned about millet and rice into account. Explain your group’s decision to the entire class.
2. Illustrations 2A and 2B suggests that many peasants in China still farmed in a primitive way as early as the beginning of the 20th century. What about today? Do some research about this in encyclopedias and other sources in the library and on the Web. Then write a brief essay answering this question: “How similar are the farming methods shown in these photos to the way typical Chinese farmers raise crops today?”

Lesson 1—The Land and the People

Illustrations 3A & 3B

3B



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3A



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

Discussing the Illustrations

1. Farming in China first appeared as far back as 7000 years ago or more. But for about 3000 years after that, simple village life was all that existed in China. In part, that's because of the big problems China's main rivers can cause. From what you know of these rivers, and from Illustration 3B, can you explain what problems these rivers often cause?
2. Illustration 3B is of the Yangtze River. Illustration 3A is an ancient Chinese canal. Together, they help show not only why flooding is such a big problem, but they also suggest how the Chinese solved this problem. Can you explain?
3. One historian says, "The building of dams, canals, and levees helped make a more complicated way of life *possible*, with larger cities and many villages uniting to form a more organized society. But building such dams, canals, and levees also made a much more organized society *necessary*." What do you think this historian means? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** Flooding on China's rivers is still a big problem today. Use your library to learn more about this. Learn about floods that have devastated China in recent decades as well as in the distant past. Based on what you discover, create a map designed to teach the rest of the class about this problem. On the map, show the Huang He River, the Yangtze River, and their main tributaries. Also show any natural features you think help explain why floods are such a big problem in China. Finally, also show the locations of major dams and other flood-protection structures in China today. Use your map for a report on this problem to the rest of the class.
2. **Small-group activity:** Canals, dams, and levees have played a big role in several ancient civilizations, but not all. Study the use of these structures in ancient Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt, ancient Rome, and ancient Greece. Give a brief talk in class on the way efforts to control river water have affected the development of these ancient civilizations.

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will better understand some of the key cultural and intellectual accomplishments of ancient Chinese civilization.
 2. Students will better appreciate some of the unique features of religion and philosophy in ancient China.
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Gods, Ancestors, Ethics

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustrations 1A & 1B**

We can never be sure about the future, but the desire to foretell or control it has led to systems of magic, ritual, and religion down through the ages. This was especially true of ancient China. The woman in Illustration 1A is using the I Ching (or “Book of Changes”) to guide her in one ancient Chinese tradition of divination, or fortune telling. Civilization itself arose out of the search for ways to deal with nature’s uncertainties. In China, the earliest writing developed to aid a type of divination, the reading of oracle bones. Chinese characters would be written on animal bones or shells, such as the tortoise shell with incised pictographs (Illustration 1B). These would then be heated to produce cracks. The future could be interpreted by the way the cracks lined up with the written characters.

Illustration 2

As in other ancient civilizations, the Chinese believed in many gods. Often these gods were linked with natural forces, such as rain, wind, mountains, floods, etc. But the Chinese also believed that the spirits of their dead ancestors could help them gain the favor of these gods or natural forces. China’s most important spiritual thinker developed an entire philosophy of life out of this respect for tradition, ritual, and ancestors. His name was K’ung-fu-tzu (known in the West as “Confucius”). Born in a time of political troubles in the sixth century BCE, Confucius taught a philosophy stressing order, ritual, respect for authority, and reverence for ancestors. His views gave rise to China’s main school of ideas, one that would influence China’s rulers for centuries.

Illustration 3

Confucianism became ancient China’s most important philosophy. But the same troubled times in which Confucius lived saw the birth of a very different philosophy—the philosophy of the Tao (or the “Way”). Little is known for sure of its founder Lao Tzu. But the Tao soon became an alternative for those in China who did not agree with Confucius. This illustration is of an imaginary meeting between Confucius and Lao Tzu. (It is unlikely they ever actually met.) As the words suggest, Lao Tzu stressed the mystery of nature and the need to accept and give in to it. To follow the Tao meant to trust in individual insight and intuition, rather than tradition and the rules of society.

Illustrations 1A & 1B

1A



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1B



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Discussing the Illustrations

1. Religion and ideas about spiritual life have been very important in every ancient civilization. In China, magic and religious ritual were especially important as a way to foretell the future. Take for example the Chinese classic known as the *I Ching*, or “Book of Changes.” The woman in Illustration 1A is practicing with the sticks that are part of the *I Ching* ritual. What do you know about the *I Ching*? Why do you think it has continued to be of such interest to so many people all over the world?
2. In China, writing itself may have begun in an effort to know the future. What do you know about how Chinese written characters differ from our alphabet?
3. Illustration 1B is a tortoise shell. What seems unusual about it? The earliest use of Chinese characters was on such shells or bones. They would be heated until cracks appeared. The pattern of cracks and Chinese characters would then be read to tell the future. Do you think it is unusual that writing developed this way in China? Why or why not?

Follow-up Activity

1. **Small-group activity:** Written Chinese differs from other writing scripts that developed elsewhere in the ancient world. Several kinds of written script developed in the ancient Middle East. One was cuneiform, which was used to write in several different Mesopotamian languages. Another was Egyptian hieroglyphics. And a third group of scripts were the alphabetical ones used by the Canaanites, Phoenicians, and Hebrews. As a group, learn more about all of these various types of scripts. Create a chart showing when these scripts first appeared and where. Include your own drawings of examples of each script. Also as a group, talk about the advantages and disadvantages of each kind of script. Use your chart in a brief talk to the class in which you report on what you have learned and your group’s ideas about the value of each kind of written script.

Illustration 2

“Only when things are investigated is knowledge deepened; only when knowledge is deepened are thoughts sincere; only when thoughts are sincere are minds corrected; only when minds are corrected are the characters of persons cultivated; only when character is cultivated are our families regulated; only when families are regulated are states well governed; only when states are well governed is there peace in the world.”

K’ung-fu-tzu (Confucius)



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Discussing the Illustrations

1. As in other ancient civilizations, the Chinese believed in many gods, each linked with a natural force such as rain, wind, floods, the fertility of the soil, etc. Why do you suppose the gods of ancient peoples so often took this form?
2. But for the Chinese, the spirits of their dead ancestors were also very important. They thought the ancestors could help them gain the favor of the gods. This high respect for ancestors was also key to the ideas of China's most important spiritual thinker, K'ung-fu-tzu, known in the West as "Confucius." What do you know about Confucius?
3. Confucius lived in the sixth century BCE, a time of great political conflict in China. His philosophy stressed respect for tradition, ritual, family, ancestors, and official authority. In time, China's rulers came to see Confucius as the one thinker whom every leader and official needed to learn about. Why do you think China's rulers felt this way about Confucius? Does the quotation here help explain their views?

Follow-up Activities

1. The above quotation from Confucius links together a number of different characteristics of individuals and of societies. What do you think he means by each of the phrases in this long statement? Why do you think he links each phrase with the next one as he does? And finally, do you agree with all of the connections Confucius makes here? Write a brief essay on this one quote answering the questions asked here.
2. **Small-group activity:** Do you think Confucius would be pleased with the most important leaders in our society today? As a group, choose five to ten people you consider key leaders in our society today. You do not have to choose only political leaders in making this list. Once you have your list, rank those on it in order of how well they live up to the ideal stated by Confucius above. Try to come up with a single group ranking of those on the list. Present your list to the class and explain your ranking. Let others in the class comment on the way you have ranked the individuals you chose.

Illustration 3



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*The Tao abides in non-action,
Yet nothing is left undone.*

*All that is best can be seen to be like water.
Water benefits everything, yet exerts no effort.
Water finds the lowest places, shunned by all.
In this water is the closest to the Great Way.
Lao Tzu*

Discussing the Illustrations

1. Around the time of Confucius, a very different school of thought arose in China. Its founder was Lao Tzu. This illustration is of an imaginary meeting between him and Confucius. Lao Tzu expressed his ideas in short verses, two of which appear here. His philosophy centers around the word “Tao” (or the “Way”). What, if anything, do you know about Taoism?
2. Some see the ideas of Taoism as self-contradictory. What does this mean? Does the first verse here seem self-contradictory? Why or why not?
3. Confucius stressed the need for social order, respect for elders and authority, and self-control. From the verses you see here, do you think Taoism shares these concerns? Why or why not?
4. Some historians say Taoism appealed to Chinese unhappy with the social or political order and who wanted to trust in themselves or in nature. Do you think the two verses here fit with that view of Taoism? Why or why not?

Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** Your task is to write and act out a brief one-act play or dialogue between Lao Tzu and Confucius. First, read more about these two Chinese philosophers and discuss them in your group. Then choose one important issue or problem facing our society today. Discuss this issue in your group, and try to decide what Lao Tzu and Confucius would think about it. Write a brief dialogue between the two philosophers in which they apply their ideas to this current problem or issue. You may compose your dialogue as a group, or piece it together from separate dialogues that each group member writes. Perform your final dialogue in class and discuss it.
2. Read more about Confucius and Lao Tzu. When you think you understand enough about the philosophy of each man, write two letters. First, pretend you are Confucius and write Lao Tzu a letter about the above two verses of his. Then, pretend you are Lao Tzu, and write a letter responding to the one from Confucius. Share with the class the letters you have written.

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will understand how the brief Qin dynasty unified China and brought to an end a time of social and political chaos.
2. Students will better understand how much power a tyrant in the ancient world could get and use.

The Qin Unification

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustrations 1A & 1B**

China's history is usually told as the story of one ruling dynasty following another. A dynasty is rule by a single royal family. The first two dynasties we know of with certainty are the Shang and the Chou. But they ruled loosely, sharing authority with many independent princes and smaller states. In the last centuries of Chou rule, the so-called "Warring States" era (475–221 BCE), several large states fought one another constantly. This was also when the ideas of Confucius, Lao Tzu, and many other thinkers spread throughout China. The short-lived Qin (or Ch'in) dynasty put an end to this chaotic time. The first Qin leader, Shi Huangdi, was ruthless. He may not actually have burned books, as Illustration 1A suggests. But he did ban many of them, while also executing hundreds of scholars. He felt the nation needed unity, and he did all he could to impose it—on the followers of Confucius and everyone else.

Illustration 2

Emperor Shi Huangdi acted to limit the powers of independent princes and nobles. He relied instead on administrators under his direct control, and on his huge army. He took many other steps as well to place China completely under the control of its emperor. You can get a sense of Shi Huangdi's great power and desire for glory by viewing his imperial tomb in Shaanxi Province. Guarding this tomb are 8000 life-sized statues of armed warriors, along with their weapons, servants, chariots, and horses. This photo of only a portion of the tomb and its soldiers gives some idea of how much work went into building it. Seen up close, each of these warriors had its own distinct features and personality.

Illustration 3

Shi Huangdi unified China's legal codes, its weights and measures, and its written language. He ordered hundreds of thousands of people to work on huge projects such as roads and canals. These were meant to improve trade and tie the nation together. His most famous project was to link all parts of the Great Wall of China into a single 2000-mile-long barrier across northern China. Its purpose was to keep out nomadic tribes, whom the Chinese saw as barbarians ready to swoop in and destroy their civilized way of life. This 1845 painting shows the wall after changes were made to it during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644).

Lesson 3—The Qin Unification

Illustrations 1A & 1B

1A



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1B



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Discussing the Illustrations

1. For about 1500 years, China was ruled by just two dynasties, the Shang (1766–1122 BCE) and the Chou (1122–221 BCE). Can you explain what it means to say China was ruled by a dynasty?
2. In 221 BCE, the ruthless leader on the right founded a new dynasty, the Qin (or Ch'in) dynasty. His name was Shi Huangdi. He was very unhappy about all the arguing and complaining that Confucian scholars and other writers were doing. How does Illustration 1A indicate what he might have done about this? How do Illustrations 1A and 1B give you a sense of what sort of ruler Shi Huangdi was?
3. Historians are not sure Shi Huangdi actually burned books. He did ban many Confucian scholars and others and had many of these writers executed. Do you think it is typical for powerful rulers to distrust writers who discuss social and political ideas? Is it ever right for a ruler to worry about such writers? Why or why not?

Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** In the centuries before Shi Huangdi, writers and scholars in China argued over many matters. Often the arguments pitted followers of Confucius against followers of Taoism. A third group were the “Legalists.” These scholars were often advisers to princes and other rulers. Shi Huangdi’s top advisers were Legalists. Split your group into three subgroups, and have each group learn more about one of these schools of thought: Taoism, Confucianism, or Legalism. Each subgroup should then write a group statement about Shi Huangdi and the scene in Illustration 1A. Write the letter from the point of view of the philosophy your subgroup has studied. Share the letters in a panel discussion in front of the class.
2. Is there a leader in the world today who reminds you of Shi Huangdi? Spend some library time looking through news magazines from the past year or two. Choose a leader who reminds you of Shi Huangdi. Explain your choice in a two-minute talk in class.

Illustration 2



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Discussing the Illustration

1. Emperor Shi Huangdi unified all of China. He was easily China's most powerful ruler up to that time. This amazing tomb in Shaanxi Province is evidence of his great power. These are only some of its 8000 life-sized soldier statues. Horses, chariots, and other weapons also filled the tomb. Why do you think the soldiers are arranged as they are here? What purpose do you suppose they were meant to serve? What else do you know about this famous tomb?
2. The earlier emperors let China's many independent princes and nobles rule in various provinces and cities. Shi Huangdi relied instead on administrators under his direct control and on his huge army. Why do you think he made this change?
3. Shi Huangdi may have been cruel, but at least he buried only statues. Earlier rulers and nobles often followed the custom of having their wives, slaves, and soldiers killed and buried with them. This custom also existed elsewhere, such as in ancient Mesopotamia. Why do you think this custom was common?

Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** You should be able to find a large number of sites on the Web dealing with the famous Terracotta Warriors of Emperor Shi Huangdi. Your group's task is to become familiar with as many of these sites as you can and evaluate them. Create an annotated directory of the sites by including your written evaluations of each site next to its name on your list. Group these sites in terms of how interesting they are, how accurate their information is and how useful they would be in learning the history involved. Make enough copies of your directory for everyone in class, and distribute them.
2. Learn more about the burial customs of ancient Chinese rulers in the centuries before Emperor Shi Huangdi. Focus on the way tombs were built, what objects were placed in them, what rituals the living performed in or near them, who if anyone was buried with the ruler in them, etc. Sum up what you learn in a brief essay describing these burial customs and explaining why you think they were followed.

Lesson 3—The Qin Unification

Illustration 3



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Discussing the Illustration

1. Shi Huangdi's burial site is only one of the wonders built during his reign. From this picture, can you name another of these wonders and explain what it is?
2. Actually, not all of the Great Wall of China was built during Shi Huangdi's reign. What he did was to have the separate parts of it connected into one huge barrier across northern China. Why did the Chinese feel the need for such a barrier?
3. From what you know of the nature of warfare 2000 years ago, and from the painting you see here, can you explain why this wall would often have been a very effective barrier against attacking armies?
4. The Great Wall was only one of several huge building projects Shi Huangdi began. Others included roads and canals connecting the nation together. Often hundreds of thousands of people would be ordered to work on these projects. How do you think they felt about this? Was it good for China to take on these projects? Why or why not?

Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** Many colorful illustrations and photos of the Great Wall of China exist, both in books and on the Web. Find ten or 15 such illustrations from as many different sections of the Great Wall as you can. Try to make copies of these (preferably in color) and create a detailed map of China showing the location of the entire Great Wall. Arrange your photos or illustrations around the map, and connect each picture to its correct location on the map. Write brief paragraphs or captions to go with each illustration.
2. **Small-group activity:** Some historians see similarities between Shi Huangdi and his Legalist philosophy on the one hand, and Mao Zedong and communism in 20th-century China on the other hand. Learn more about both Emperor Shi Huangdi and Mao Zedong. Based on what you learn, make up a list of five to ten important ways in which the two leaders and their philosophies were alike and five to ten ways they were not alike. Discuss your list with the class.

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will understand how China was unified and enlarged during the four centuries of rule by the Han dynasty.
 2. Students will better understand some of the strengths and the weaknesses of Han China.
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The Han Empire

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustration 1**

When Shi Huangdi died in 210 BCE, a palace struggle for power took place. Anger over Shi Huangdi and his tyrannical rule led to rebellions by nobles and peasants alike. In 202 BCE, a new dynasty took over—the house of Han. The Han rulers were less harsh than the brief Qin dynasty had been, yet they maintained the new powers of the emperor and his central government. The Han unified China, ruling for about 400 years. Advances in technology, such as paper, new plows and other iron tools, and unique methods of silk production added to China's wealth. As this map shows, China under the Han dynasty was as large as the Roman Empire, which was then also at the height of its power.

Illustration 2

The Han dynasty fortified the Great Wall and fought to keep back the nomadic peoples north of China. The strongest of these, the Hsiung-nu tribes, were growing more powerful and united. To defend itself, China looked to the north and west, including the network of trade routes known as the Silk Road. These routes led 4000 miles west, skirting huge mountain ranges and vast deserts, to reach western Asia and all the way to Rome. Over this network of roads, China traded its silk goods, porcelain, and other products for horses, glass, ivory, and various items from many faraway lands. This photo is of a mountain range along the Silk Road near Samarkand, in modern-day Uzbekistan.

Illustration 3

The Han rulers completed the unification begun by Shi Huangdi, but they accepted Confucian ideas instead of banning them. Confucianism stressed virtue and respect for tradition, ritual, and authority. It was suited to training loyal civil servants who would carry out the wishes of the emperor. As China grew in wealth and power, the gap between rich and poor widened. The emperor, his family and advisers were caught up in a world of elaborate ritual, palace intrigue, and elegant luxury. As with Shi Huangdi, emperors of the Han buried their dead with many luxury goods and other objects. Shown here are artifacts recovered from one Han imperial tomb. Among the objects shown is a gilded horse (at upper left). On the right is a gilded incense burner that might have been used to perfume the air and drive off mosquitoes.

Illustration 1

Major States of Eurasia and Africa, c. 100CE



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Discussing the Illustration

1. Shi Huangdi died in 210 BCE. Over the next few years, huge rebellions involving millions of people broke out. Why do you suppose that happened?
2. A new dynasty—the Han dynasty—took over China in 202 BCE. Under the Han rulers, China became more united and powerful than ever before. In many ways, it was the equal of any of the great empires that arose in western Asia and the Mediterranean. Can you name some of those other great empires?
3. How does this map help to show what a powerful empire China had become? Does the size of China in comparison to the size of the Roman Empire surprise you? Why or why not?
4. What aspects of the power of an empire cannot be shown by a map such as this alone? What could be added to this map to help show some of those other aspects of the power and wealth of China under the Han dynasty?

Follow-up Activities

1. The growing strength of Han China was aided by its many advances in technology and industry. Two of the most important were paper and silk. Paper was invented by the Chinese during the Han dynasty, and silk production had begun in China thousands of years earlier. Learn more about one of these products. Find out how it was produced and what it was used for during the Han dynasty in China. Write a brief essay on what you learn. In the essay, explain in what ways the product and its production affected Chinese society during the years of Han rule.
2. **Small-group activity:** The Han rulers wanted to expand, especially to the north and west, in large part because of their fear of “barbarian” invasions. The Roman Empire also faced threats from those it considered “barbarians.” How do history textbooks today describe these two groups of “barbarians”? Look through your own and other textbooks. Report your findings to the class.

Illustration 2



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Discussing the Illustration

1. Under the Han dynasty, China conquered regions far to its west. One reason it did this was to protect the Silk Road. This photo is of a mountain range along the Silk Road. It is near Samarkand in modern-day Uzbekistan in Central Asia, to the west of China. Briefly, can you explain what the Silk Road was?
2. The Chinese did not call it the Silk Road. But the name does have something to do with China. Can you explain?
3. Merchants did not travel the full length of the Silk Road. Instead, caravans would cross part of it, trade with other caravans, and return. From this photo and your geography knowledge, explain why few if any caravans could have traveled the entire Silk Road?
4. Only luxury goods were worth transporting over the Silk Road, and the amount of trade overall was not large. However, the cultural and intellectual impact of the Silk Road on both East and West was large. Why do you suppose that was so?

Follow-up Activities

1. Learn as much as you can about the Silk Road. Based on what you discover, create a map of the Silk Road routes. Then choose five stopping points along the Silk Road, starting at the Han capital of Chang'an (modern Xi'an) and ending in Palmyra, in present-day Syria. Few caravans would have gone all this way—but suppose you could. Pretend you have made such a trip during the time of Han China, and create a good story about your journey. Write the story in the form of five long diary entries, one for each of the five stopping points you have chosen. Be detailed and realistic about the caravans, the countryside, the goods carried, the peoples met, and other aspects of your imaginary trip.
2. **Small-group activity:** The Silk Road opened China up for the first time to influences from other cultures. A major one during the Han period was Buddhism, which arrived from India. Learn more about Buddhism and its arrival and spread in China. Sum up what you learn in a brief class presentation.

Lesson 4—The Han Empire

Illustration 3



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Discussing the Illustration

1. These are artifacts recovered from one Han imperial tomb. At the upper left is a gilded horse. On the right is a gilded incense burner that might have been used to perfume the air and drive off mosquitoes. What impresses you most about these items? Why do you suppose emperors and aristocrats wanted to be buried with them?
2. For the Chinese, the emperor was a spiritual as well as political leader. Some historians say the ritual, ceremony, and luxury surrounding him helped him to appear as the all-powerful leader he was expected to be. Do you agree? Why or why not?
3. As China grew wealthy under the Han rulers, many problems arose. The gap between rich and poor grew. Enemies threatened China from outside its borders. In 220 CE the Han dynasty ended as China fell into civil war. This happened to other Chinese dynasties as well. Strong leaders were followed in time by weak leaders, big troubles, and a time of chaos. Why do you think this happened so often?

Follow-up Activity

1. **Small-group activity:** Your group's task is to help the rest of the class learn more about the Han dynasty, its strengths, and its weakness. To do this, have one or more group members spend time learning about one of the four rulers listed below, along with the key aspects of his rule:

Wu-di (ruled 141–87 BCE), who helped create the civil service system based on Confucian teaching and examinations

Wang Mang (ruled 9–23 CE), a usurper, whose reform efforts led to a horrendous civil war

Kuang-wu-ti (ruled 25–57 CE), restored Han power and Confucian scholarship

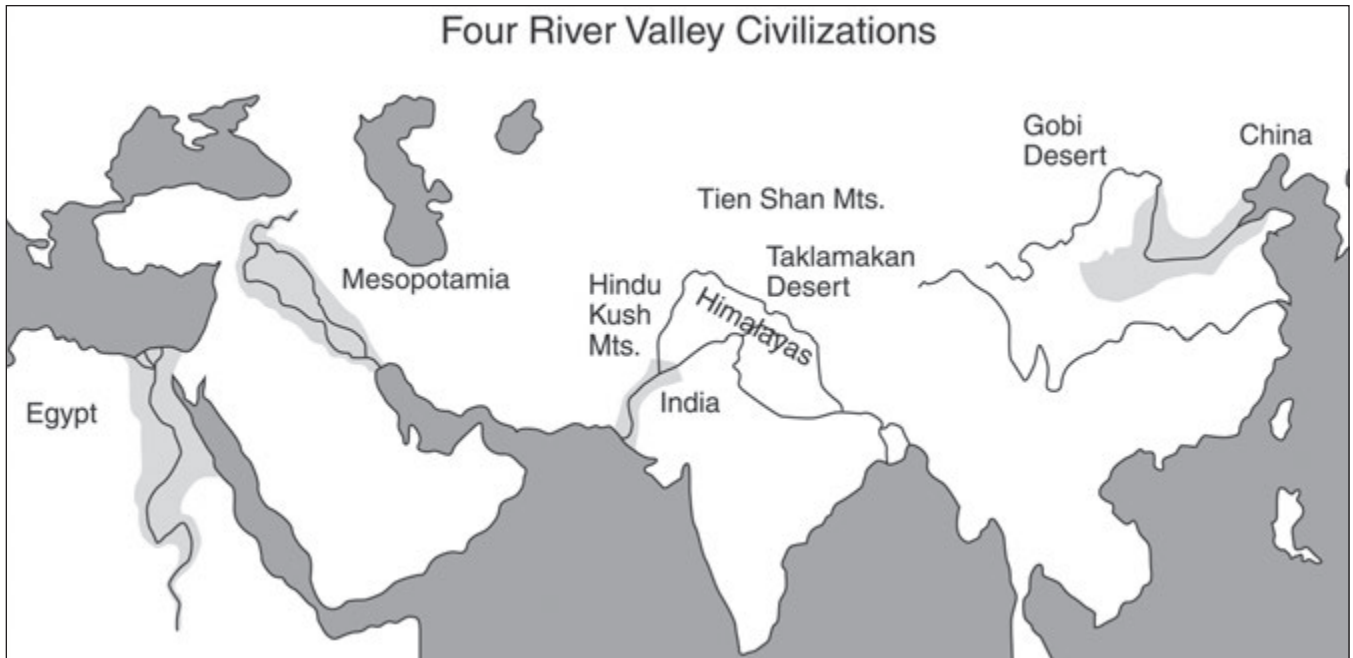
Ling-di (ruled 168–189 CE), one of several child emperors at a time of growing social turmoil

Prepare a panel discussion in front of the class. Briefly describe in chronological order the reigns of these four rulers and what each shows about the strengths and weakness of the Han dynasty.

Image Close-ups

The Land and the People

Illustration 1

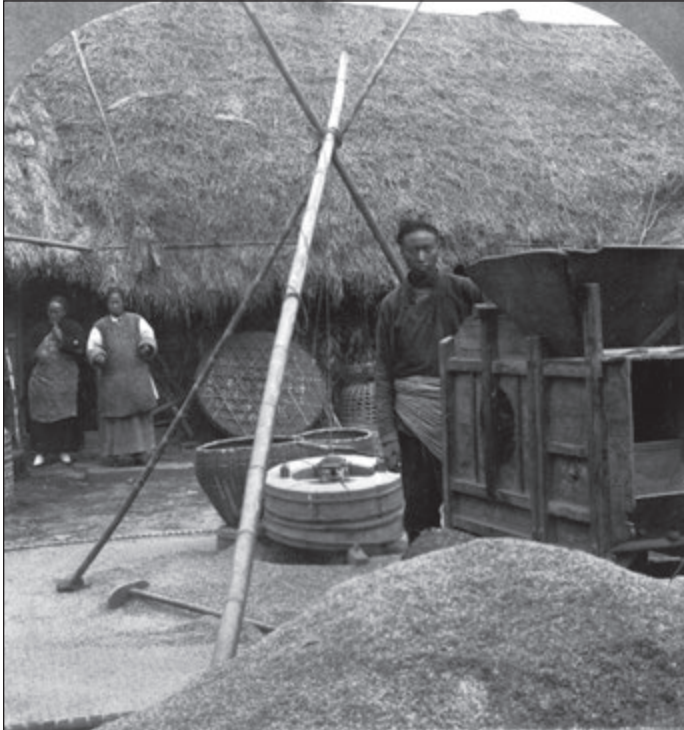


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The Land and the People

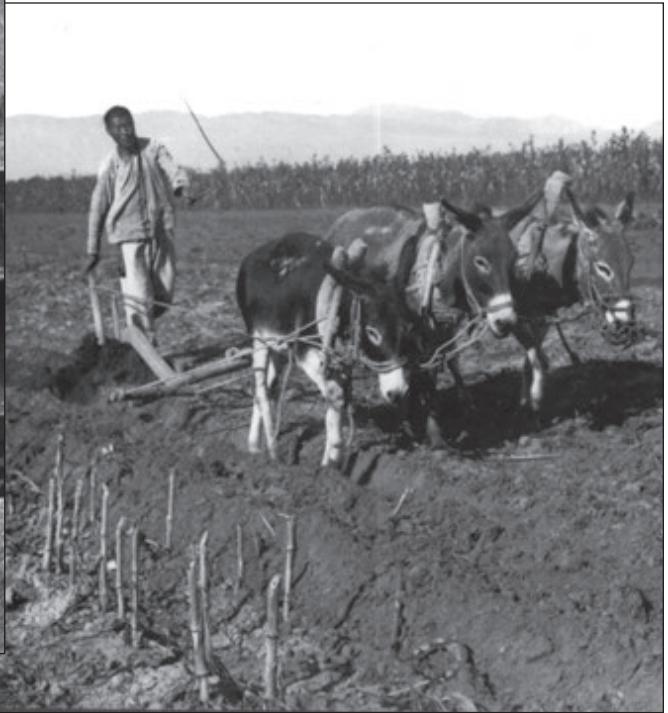
Illustrations 2A & 2B

2A



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2B



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The Land and the People

Illustrations 3A & 3B

3B



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3A



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Gods, Ancestors, Ethics

Illustrations 1A & 1B

1A



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1B



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Gods, Ancestors, Ethics

Illustration 2

“Only when things are investigated is knowledge deepened; only when knowledge is deepened are thoughts sincere; only when thoughts are sincere are minds corrected; only when minds are corrected are the characters of persons cultivated; only when character is cultivated are our families regulated; only when families are regulated are states well governed; only when states are well governed is there peace in the world.”

K'ung-fu-tzu (Confucius)



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Gods, Ancestors, Ethics

Illustration 3



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*The Tao abides in non-action,
Yet nothing is left undone.*

*All that is best can be seen to be like water.
Water benefits everything, yet exerts no effort.
Water finds the lowest places, shunned by all.
In this water is the closest to the Great Way.*

Lao Tzu

The Qin Unification

Illustrations 1A & 1B

1A



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1B



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The Qin Unification

Illustration 2



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The Qin Unification

Illustration 3



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The Han Empire

Illustration 1

Major States of Eurasia and Africa, c. 100 CE



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The Han Empire

Illustration 2



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The Han Empire

Illustration 3



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