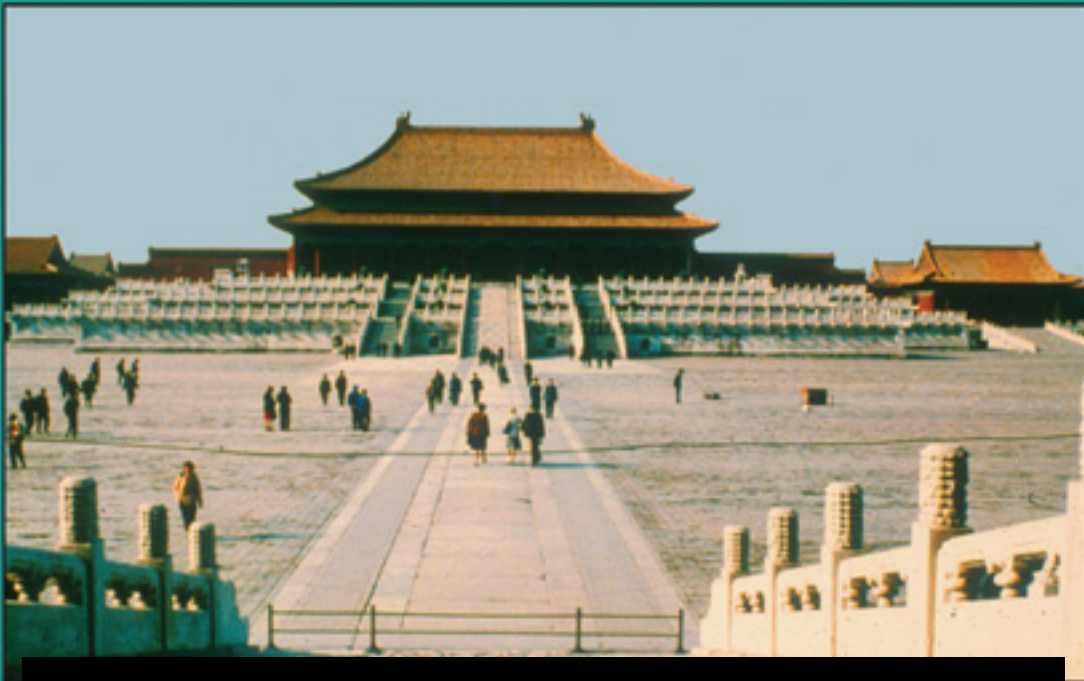


History
UNFOLDING

CHINA

FROM HAN TO THE MANCHUS



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MindSparks
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

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Introduction

China's Classical Age

This MindSparks set is the second of two on China before the modern era. The first is *Ancient China* (HS841).

Here the story is carried forward from the chaotic time after the fall of the Han dynasty in 220 CE. No effort is made to examine each dynasty in detail. Instead, the aim is to touch on a few key themes in the enormously rich mosaic of Chinese history, such as how the natural setting has shaped China's past, or how its unique systems of philosophy and religion have affected its thought and culture. In the process, just a small sampling of its many accomplishments are examined as a way to illustrate the variety and creative energy of this ancient civilization.

This set uses 12 visual displays to focus on these key themes. Each lesson uses three visual displays to explore one broad topic. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

The Challenge of Nature

A look at some of the daunting natural features that have challenged the Chinese to adapt and innovate over the centuries.

Buddha, Tao, and the Confucian Order

The focus here is on the central role of Confucian philosophy in China's religious, spiritual, social, and political life. Buddhism and Taoism also had a huge impact, but often also in relation to Confucian thought.

From Tang to the Mongols

The illustrations and maps here call attention to the cultural triumphs of China under the Tang and Song dynasties and to the sudden eruption of the Mongol Empire as a force in both China's history and the world's.

The Mongols to the Manchus

The Mongol disruption stabilized under Kublai Khan, though his new Yuan dynasty was not long lasting. The images here call attention to the dynamic yet inward-looking nature of Chinese culture under both the Ming dynasty and the Manchus' Qing dynasty.

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.

*China: From Han to the Manchus***OBJECTIVE:**

1. Students will better understand how key natural conditions have affected the development of civilization in China over the centuries.

The Challenge of Nature

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

China is vast, but only small parts of it are fertile. Two main rivers—the Huang He (Yellow River) in the north and the Yangtze in the south—deposit rich soil onto nearby plains as they near the sea. China's earliest civilization grew up along the Huang He. This photo shows the arid but fertile Loess Plateau through which the Huang He passes in several areas. This plain was a major crop producer for ancient China. Ringing such plains are rugged mountains, deserts, and jungles cutting China off from the west, south, and north. The sea is a barrier to the east. Nature left China isolated. It also posed other challenges, such as the periodic raging floods of the Huang He (called "China's Sorrow"), which have brought havoc and misery as well as life-giving soil and water.

Illustration 2

From an early time, the Chinese learned to tame their rivers with dams, dikes, and complicated irrigation systems. Such systems only work if villages cooperate and plan together. As population grew, every bit of land had to be used. Wheat and millet were the main crops in northern China. Rice was better suited to southern China's warmer and moister climate. In time, the Chinese there built amazing systems of irrigated and terraced rice paddies on hillsides such as this one. Rice production takes a great deal of backbreaking labor. But rice is also a rich, nutritious food able to support a large number of people per acre. The Chinese became masters at using every bit of arable land to produce it.

Illustrations 3A & 3B

China's geography presented challenges that only strong governments could solve. Fierce nomads to the north had to be contained. To do that, the Great Wall was built piece by piece over the centuries. China's main rivers flow west to east. The Grand Canal, part of which is shown here, was built north to south to link the Huang He with the Yangtze to the south. Much of its construction took place during the Sui dynasty (589–618 CE). The canal was key to helping both the Tang (618–907 CE) and Song (960–1279 CE) dynasties better control southern China and its enormous rice crop. Like the Great Wall, the canal took millions of laborers to build. Both are examples of how natural challenges helped bring China's complex civilization into being.

Lesson 1 – The Challenge of Nature

Illustration 1



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Discussing the Illustration

1. Passing through this plain in several places is a major river in China. More than 3000 years ago, China's earliest civilizations grew up along this river on plains like this. Can you name this river?
2. Thousands of years before the earliest Chinese civilizations, very small farming settlements existed on this plain. Why do you think the word "civilization" is not also used for those earlier societies?
3. This plain is part of the Loess Plateau. What is loess? From what you know about loess, the Huang He, and what you see here, explain why a huge civilization could grow up first on plains such as this one.
4. To the south of the Huang He is another huge river, which has also been of great importance to Chinese civilization. Can you name it?
5. Aside from these rivers and their plains, much of China is mountains and deserts. These have helped to keep China isolated from the world for much of its history. Can you explain why?

Follow-up Activities

1. Learn more about the Huang He in China. Create your own map of the river from its origins near the Bayankala Mountains high on the Tibet Plateau through its loops north, south, and then east to the sea. Show all the key geographic regions through which the river flows, and mark its basin or the entire area it drains. Also mark key cities and historical sites along the river. Use your map and information on these sites to create a tour guide for a trip along the Yellow River. Share your map and guide in a brief presentation to the class.
2. The Huang He is also often called "China's Sorrow." Why? Learn more about the Huang He and the role it has played in China's history. Find at least one account of a great disaster connected with this river. Prepare a newspaper-style report on that disaster and post your "news story" on the bulletin board.