



#3608

FIRST EMPEROR OF CHINA

Grade Levels: 8-13+

42 minutes

NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA

1 Student Activity Sheet

DESCRIPTION

For 500 years, the seven states of China warred among themselves until conquered in 246 B.C. by Qin Shi Huang Di, the man who became China's first emperor. Reenacts his battles, political intrigues, and sweeping reforms that established an imperial system that lasted more than 2,000 years. Includes footage of his incredible terra cotta army, rediscovered in 1974 and still guarding the tomb of this first emperor of China.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Subject Area: History

- ◆ Standard: Understands family life now and in the past, and family life in various places long ago
 - Benchmark: Understands personal family or cultural heritage through stories, songs, and celebrations
 - Benchmark: Knows ways in which people share family beliefs and values (e.g., oral traditions, literature, songs, art, religion, community celebrations, mementos, food, language)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following themes to watch for in the film are but a few of Qin Shihuang's "firsts." Which of these firsts are in evidence today, either in their original form, or in a modified version?

1. The Dragon Motif

In Chinese mythology, the "lung," or dragon, is essentially a benevolent divinity and is held in high regard. The dragon is rain-bringer, the master of waters and clouds. During the time of Qin Shihuang, a theory existed known as "The Five Elements." According to this theory, fire, water, earth, wood and metal succeeded each other in an endless cycle, each destroying



its predecessor. Qin Shihuang chose water as his element. He likened himself to the dragon, “the master of the waters,” a superhuman, a demigod. Since water was considered a cold and harsh element, he determined his law would also be harsh and repressive and his rule, severe. He came to be known as “The Emperor of the Dragon Throne.”

2. **Qin Dynasty Warfare**

Prior to the Qin dynasty, the principal weapon of war was the war chariot, a heavy, clumsy vehicle. Qin introduced mounted cavalymen, armed with crossbows and swords, for greater mobility. In fact, the arrangement of terra cotta soldiers found in Qin Shihuang’s tomb suggests a formal arrangement similar to that of 19th-century Western armies. The main body was composed of infantry, while a smaller, more mobile force of mounted troops was detached to act separately, and a command unit oversaw the whole operation. Rank was awarded according to accomplishment, not social status, and insubordination was severely punished. Soldiers were equipped with superbly designed weapons; most were made of cast bronze, an alloy of copper and tin, surface-treated with chrome—a method not discovered by Europeans until the 1930s.

3. **Qin’s Chinese Script**

In 221 B.C., seven warring states—Qin, Yan, Qi, Zhao, Han, Wei, and Chu—were united by Qin Shihuang, albeit at great human cost. The imposition of a greater degree of cultural unity became Qin’s primary task. Each state had developed its own form of artistic expression, folklore, metallurgy, coinage, script, etc. A dictionary of newly standardized forms, consisting of 3,300 characters was created, providing the standard for all further evolution of written Chinese script. It is ironic that an emperor so dedicated to written communication should later be the first to order a “Burning of the Books.”

4. **Qin’s Code of Law**

Qin Shihuang, a student of “Legalism,” believed that man was by nature evil, and that harsh law was the most effective regulator of human behavior. He established the first Code of Law with a centralized bureaucracy. In this code, the presumption was “guilty until proven innocent.” Torture was permitted to extract confessions and punishments were physically severe. Murder, infanticide and injuring a fellow citizen were considered serious crimes. There were many convictions of people who unwittingly broke the complicated Code of Law. These people considered their punishment unjust, and many of them finally rebelled.

5. **The Great Wall**

Prior to Qin’s reign, seven states had constructed walls to protect their northern borders from the nomadic steppe tribes. When Qin Shihuang ordered the building of the Great Wall, it was both a consolidation of earlier walls and an extension. Both in 221 B.C., with a work force of more than 300,000 soldiers and thousands of

convicts, the Wall took ten years to be completed and covered 4,100 kilometers. Working through brutally cold winters and blazing summers, thousands of workers died. The Wall is an incredible engineering feat, but it is known in China as “The Wall of Tears,” and “The Longest Graveyard in the World.”

6. **View the Time Line**

What was happening in Rome, Athens, and the Americas while Qin was building his empire? Do you see parallel events, inventions or developments? (See STUDENT ACTIVITY SHEET.)



AFTER SHOWING

Applications and Activities

1. Use a detailed map of China’s geographical features to help explore the geographical reasons for Qin’s growth.
2. Examine Qin’s methods of physically, psychologically and sociologically unifying the great empire of China.
3. Trace the routes of expansion of the Qin dynasty.
4. Trace the Great Wall, the northern border of the Qin empire. How did the topography and climate of the area affect the construction of the Great Wall?

SUMMARY

The year is 246 B.C. and China is at war. Ying Zheng, the young ruler of Qin, is waging ruthless battles against neighboring states. However, at home, revolution is in the air, for in this corrupt and dangerous court of intrigue, the young king’s control over the kingdom of Qin is tentative—his reform measures meet with resistance. The ensuing coup attempt led by his advisors is foiled and the leaders of the rebellion are executed. Having established complete control within his own state, the king presses on with his military campaigns abroad.

After years of battle and an assassination attempt, Qin orders a final assault on the state of Qi, the last nation to fall to his army. In victory, he declares himself Qin Shihuang—“First Emperor.” For the first time in history, China is unified.

To consolidate his vast conquests, Qin institutes sweeping reforms. He unifies the system of measures and currency, standardizes the written language, and lays out a radiating system of roads and canals for transportation. Yet, life in the new empire is harsh. More than 700,000 slaves are organized into huge labor gangs to join together in the construction of the Great Wall of China. Hundreds of thousands more are drafted to work on Qin’s 270 palaces and his burial tomb. Thousands of books are burned in a scourge against freedom of thought; scholars who voice opposition are buried alive.

After several attempts on his life, Qin Shihuang becomes obsessed with death and has his alchemists prepare a potion that would make him immortal. The elixirs he

ingests to achieve everlasting life contain poisonous chemicals such as mercury, lead and arsenic. When Qin eventually dies, Eunuch Zhao Gao and Prime Minister Li Si secretly engineer the suicide of Qin's oldest son, and enthrone a younger—and weaker—son.

Qin's dynasty, predicted to last "ten thousand generations," survives his own death by only four years. Yet the imperial system he created endured for more than 2,000 years, proving to be one of the world's most durable political structures.

The story ends in contemporary China where Qin's "guardian army" is slowly being excavated. In 1974, well diggers in China's Shaanxi province stumbled upon a huge subterranean vault—the forgotten tomb of Emperor Qin. Within the underground chamber, archaeologists discovered an extraordinary treasure: an army of 7,000 life-sized terra cotta men, horses and chariots. The uniform rows of clay soldiers, each with a distinctly different face, appear lifelike, poised in time, as if they are waiting for a signal from the emperor himself.



RELATED RESOURCES



Captioned Media Program

- China: A History #2366
- China: Turning to the 21st Century #3448

World Wide Web



The following Web sites complement the contents of this guide; they were selected by professionals who have experience in teaching deaf and hard of hearing students. Every effort was made to select accurate, educationally relevant, and "kid-safe" sites. However, teachers should preview them before use. The U.S. Department of Education, the National Association of the Deaf, and the Captioned Media Program do not endorse the sites and are not responsible for their content.

- **CHINA TODAY**

www.chinatoday.com

Billed as the "most comprehensive information base on today's China." Information on the armed forces, art and entertainment, banking and finance, government agencies and services, and much more!

- **CHINA TOUR**

www.chinatour.com

For planning a "perfect trip to China." Information from the "China National Tourism Administration," "Chinese Embassies and Consulate Generals," "Current Exchange Rate Converter," "Travel Related Laws and Regulations," and much more!

- **YAHOO! LIGANS DIRECTORY: CHINA**

[www.yahooligans.com/Around the World/Countries/China/History](http://www.yahooligans.com/Around_the_World/Countries/China/History)

This kids' search engine offers a comprehensive list of links to Web sites on Chinese history.

- **CHINA-TAIWAN HISTORY**

www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/asia/china/china-taiwan.html

One of the PBS online NewsHour reports. Explains the history of tensions between China and Taiwan, which find their roots in the 1949 Chinese Revolution.

- **CONDENSED CHINA**

<http://asterius.com/china/>

A comprehensive introduction to Chinese history which describes itself as "the CliffsNotes version of Chinese history."

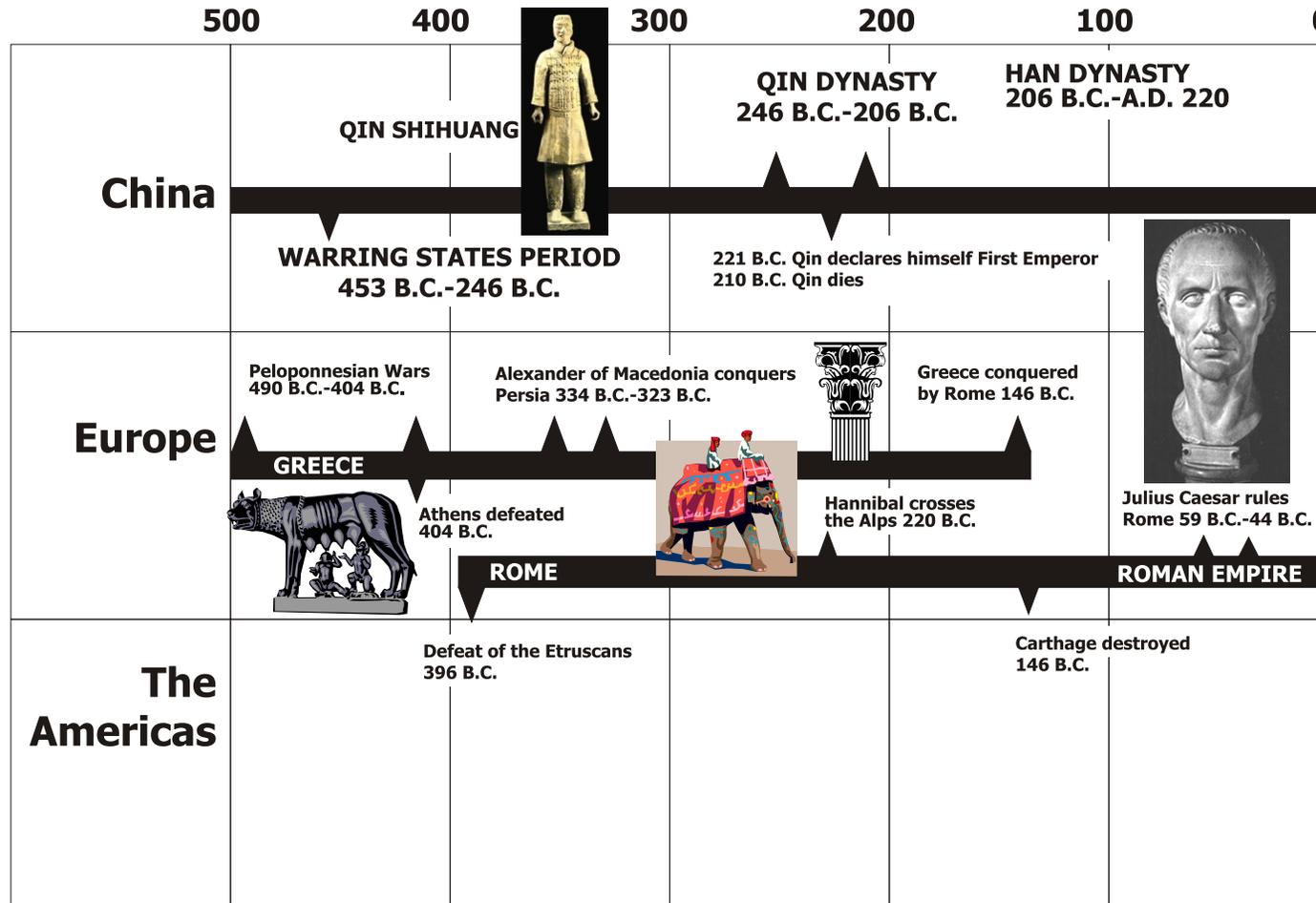
STUDENT ACTIVITY SHEET

- Time Line

China and the Great Ancient Civilizations of Europe and the Americas



B.C.



Time Line Construction:
 Duplicate pages 1-4.
 Cut off borders and
 assemble into a
 horizontal time line



