



Big Era Five
Patterns of Interregional Unity
300 - 1500 CE



Landscape Teaching Unit 5.1
Centuries of Upheaval in Afroeurasia
300 - 600 CE

Table of Contents

Why this unit?	2
Time and materials	2
Unit objectives	2
Authors	3
The historical context	3
This unit in the Big Era time line	7
Lesson 1: Empire	8
Lesson 2: A concatenation of miseries (or, CSI Han China)	11
Lesson 3: Rome didn't fall in a day	20
Lesson 4: Gupta kaputa	28
Assessment: Why do empires fall?	35
This unit and the Three Essential Questions	35
This unit and the Seven Key Themes	35
This unit and the Standards in Historical Thinking	36
Resources	36
Correlations to national and state standards	38
Conceptual links to other lessons	38

Why this unit?

Many of the major long-lived empires that dominated Big Era Four suffered collapse between 200 and 600 C.E. This unit is an investigation of the reasons behind this disintegration, using the Han, Roman, and Gupta empires as models. Students naturally look for, and will readily latch onto, simple mono-causal explanations for such events. It is therefore important for students to learn that major events in history often have highly complex interrelated causes and that they must learn to probe beyond simplistic answers to really understand what happened and why. The unit begins with a look at the definition of empire and the ingredients that make an empire successful. Students are then asked to speculate about what might go wrong that could bring down such an empire. The rest of the unit seeks to answer this question. In the second and third lessons, students investigate the demise of the Han and Roman empires. In both cases, students use a variety of materials including graphic organizers to discover the enormous number of interrelated factors that contributed to the downfall of both empires. The attempts made to reestablish unity are also studied, contrasting the successful unification of China under the Sui emperor Wen with Emperor Justinian's failed attempt to reunite Rome. The Gupta empire is examined in the fourth lesson, which begins with a study of the empire's rise and the "golden age" in India that resulted. Students are then introduced to the Hephthalites, the pastoral nomads from Central Asia, who, in a swift and brutal campaign, annihilated the Gupta. The Gupta model demonstrates to students that, although enduring empires often collapsed for complex reasons, occasionally an overwhelming force armed with superior military technology and tactics obliterated an otherwise strong and well-organized empire. Sometimes the answer is simple after all. Students must consider all of the models in the final lesson, which consists of a writing assessment answering the question, "Why do empires fall?"

Unit objectives

- 1 Identify characteristics of empire.
- 2 Explain multiple causes for the fall of the Han empire.
- 3 Research and evaluate the multiple causes for the fall of Rome.
- 4 Describe Justinian's attempt to recreate the Roman empire and why it failed.
- 5 Describe the rise of the Gupta empire and its golden age.
- 6 Give reasons for the success of pastoral nomads in Inner Eurasia Asia.
- 7 Explain the role of pastoral nomads in the collapse of the Gupta empire.
- 8 Use evidence from the Han, Roman, and Gupta empires to identify reasons for the demise of long-enduring empires.

Time and Materials

This unit should take 5 to 8 class periods, depending on the length of the class, the abilities of students, and whether teachers choose to teach all parts of each lesson. Materials required:

- Variety of texts or access to the internet to conduct research on China's Emperor Wen and the Sui Dynasty and on the fall of Roman empire
- A rhyming dictionary

Authors

Ernest O’Roark and Eileen Wood are teachers at Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School in Germantown, Maryland. They have collaborated for a number of years on curriculum and literary projects. Their historical fiction appears in *Kongo: A Kingdom Divided*, a teaching unit published by the NCHS. Both teachers joined the World History for Us All Development team in 2001.

The Historical Context

The era from 200 to 600 CE was a time of dramatic change across much of Afroeurasia. Successful, long-enduring empires that had risen and flourished during the preceding centuries began to flounder. One by one, nearly all were extinguished by the end of the sixth century. Why and how this happened in such a limited span of time is the subject of this unit.

The Han empire in China. The first to fall was the Han Dynasty in China. The Han demise was a complicated affair. Not surprisingly, a large part of the story involved pressure from pastoral nomads who lived along China’s northern borders. Over the preceding centuries a confederation of nomadic groups known as the Xiongnu amassed so much power in horse cavalry that they were able to extort resources from the Han in return for agreeing to keep the peace. The Han cooperated, finding it cheaper to pay the Xiongnu than to fight them. For a while, this compromise worked well. But in 51 CE, a succession dispute divided the Xiongnu into two groups. This set off a chain reaction that had a severe impact on the Han. The Xiongnu nearest the Chinese border took the payment intended for the entire confederation. The farther group immediately retaliated, attacking the Han (for not paying) as well as their greedy Xiongnu kinsmen. As the confederation disintegrated, individual groups began to demand separate payments from the Han. The costs to the Han rose considerably, and at the same time nomadic cavalry raids increased. The Han were not getting what they continued to pay for.

At the same time, nature entered the fray as an enemy of the Han. In 153 CE a swarm of locusts laid waste to large areas of farmland. Deforestation that had started in much earlier times produced erosion and floods. The Huang He (Yellow River) filled with silt and began to flood more frequently, with more devastating results. Infectious diseases new to China began to arrive via the silk roads causing widespread epidemics.

The misery these disasters caused was compounded by the increasingly desperate economic situation of the peasants. Over time, the long-standing tradition of dividing land equally among all sons had reduced the size of the average farm to the point where farmers could not make enough from the land to pay their taxes. Farmers had little choice but to give over their small plots to wealthy aristocratic landlords whose legal status exempted them and their dependents from taxes. Thus the wealthy landlords grew richer, the peasants became poor tenant farmers, and the Han government lost tax revenue. As conditions worsened, poverty and frustration fueled a series of peasant revolts.

All of these dilemmas placed heavy demands on the Han government and called for creative and decisive leadership. But internal competition for power among factions within the Han court paralyzed the government and left it incapable of dealing effectively with the empire's many problems. The rising power of large landowners and the increasing independence of Han generals continually eroded the power of the emperor. In 220 CE the dynasty collapsed, and the most powerful among the generals divided the empire into several smaller kingdoms.

The Roman empire. Rome was next. Many of the same pressures that brought down the Han plagued the Romans as well. Similar in size to the Han empire, but more linguistically and culturally diverse, Rome was even more difficult to hold together in the face of such pressures.

As with the Han, increased trade along the silk roads brought new contagious diseases from afar. These diseases repeatedly ravaged populations throughout the empire. Because conditions were worst in the cities during such outbreaks, those who could afford to do so fled to their country villas.

Neighboring pastoral societies were also a problem for both the Han and Roman empires. Rome had a long and turbulent border with Germanic peoples, called Goths, who lived to the north and east along the Rhine and Danube Rivers. Roman rulers wished to keep the Germanic Goths out of Roman territory, but raids were frequent and the financial and logistical burden of maintaining troops along the border was enormous. Eventually, the Romans ended up with an arrangement similar to the one established by the Han with the Xiongnu. The Romans paid Gothic chiefs an annual tribute in return for an end to raids on Roman territory. In addition, the Romans allowed Goths to cross the border to sell their goods in Roman markets. In fact, many Germanic warriors served in the Roman army. This arrangement worked well for a time. One result of this interaction was that many Germanic men and women converted to Christianity, which by the fourth century CE was the religion of Rome.

The Huns brought this fragile peace to an abrupt end around 375 CE. After crossing the Volga River from Central Asia and conquering the farming peoples there, the Huns swept into eastern Europe and attacked Germanic settlements. Trapped between the borders of Rome and the onrushing Huns, the terrified Goths requested and received Rome's permission to migrate west of the Danube. The crossing was a disaster. According to the Roman historian Ammianus, the desperate refugees took to the dangerous, rain-swollen river, clinging to almost anything that would float. Some tried to swim. For those who survived the crossing, their problems were just beginning. The generals in charge of the refugees mishandled their resettlement, starving and mistreating them in the process. Within three years, these Germanic groups had regrouped and took their revenge, defeating a Roman army at Adrianople and killing the emperor Valens. This was the first time a Roman army had been beaten by Germanic peoples in Roman territory. It signaled an end to Roman military superiority. Other Goths, as well as the Huns, soon took notice.

The disappearance of Roman military invincibility was due in large part to serious economic and political problems within the empire. Epidemics and war led to a steep decline in population

during the third and fourth centuries. The loss may have been as high as thirty percent. Labor shortages developed. Trade and business slowed. Tax revenues plummeted. At the same time, the gulf between rich and poor grew. The emperor Diocletian attempted to save the empire by dividing it into more manageable eastern and western sectors governed by its own set of co-rulers. Making such reforms was politically risky and required the cooperation of the wealthy senatorial class. To gain that cooperation, Diocletian exempted rich families from taxes, shifting the burden to the lower classes. Members of the senatorial class could expect to earn as much as 120,000 gold pieces a year. Peasant farmers typically earned about five. Farmers who could not pay their taxes were sold into slavery along with their children. Aristocratic landlords gained land and wealth, while ordinary Romans sank into poverty or slavery. The benefits of Roman citizenship became less apparent to many Romans and loyalties faded accordingly. With conditions deteriorating in Rome, the emperor Constantine established a new capital at the Greek city of Byzantium, known henceforth as Constantinople. This city was in more populous and richer eastern part of the empire. And its strategic and easily defensible location astride the major maritime trade route between the Mediterranean and Black seas ensured its survival and continued prosperity regardless of Rome's fate. The elites of Rome flocked to the new city, continuing the economic abandonment of the old capital that had started during earlier outbreaks of disease.

So by the time the Germanic army defeated Rome in 378 CE, the stage was set for collapse. The western empire, all but abandoned by the east, was ill-equipped to deal with the flood of Germanic and Hunnic migrants who surged across the borders. Indeed, these movements had the character of migrations of entire populations, along with their livestock and belongings, intent on making parts of the western empire their home. The Goths were divided into a number of groups. One of them were the Visigoths. Their chieftain Alaric led an attack on Rome and sacked the city in 410. Another group, the Vandals, did so again in 455. In 476 a Germanic general deposed the last western emperor. Meanwhile, the eastern empire, which became known as the Byzantine empire, or Byzantium, had enough financial and military resources to deter would-be invaders, including the Huns. In fact, Byzantium survived for another thousand years.

The Gupta empire in India. The story of the rise and fall of the Gupta empire is in many ways different from that of the Han and Roman empires. The Gupta empire was much younger, dating to about 320 CE. Before the rise of the Gupta, India had been governed by a number of kingdoms. All of them prospered from the enormous amount of trade that flowed through the region. Both the Han and Roman empires were major consumers of Indian cotton and spices. Chandra Gupta, the Gupta founder, built his empire by conquering some neighboring kingdoms and establishing alliances with others. Unlike the Romans or Han, who favored central control, the Guptas gained the loyalty and support of regional kingdoms by allowing them to retain a great deal of autonomy.

So long as the empire remained united and good order was maintained by regional authorities, Gupta rulers were content to devote most of their energy to promoting learning, religion, and art. This they did in spectacular fashion, resulting in what has been termed a "golden age" for India. Gupta scholars made remarkable achievements in many fields including literature, astronomy, and mathematics. Important discoveries were passed along the trade routes to be adopted by

other civilizations. One example is the use of Hindi (later termed Arabic) numbers, place value, and the decimal system. Gupta rulers also enthusiastically supported a revival of Hinduism, which had earlier suffered a decline owing to the rise of Buddhism. During Gupta rule the caste system was codified in greater detail, forming the basis for Indian law for centuries to come. For over two hundred years, India enjoyed a high level of organization, peace, and prosperity.

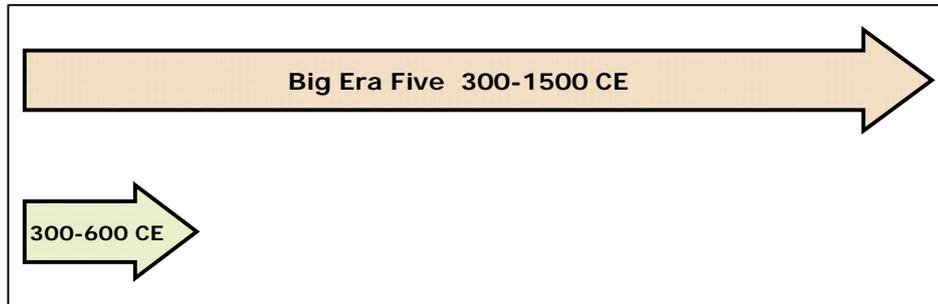
While Han China and Rome struggled to deal with attacks by pastoral nomads, the formidable Hindu Kush and Himalaya Mountains gave the Gupta some protection. The powerful Sassanian empire in Persia also provided something of a buffer against nomad invasion. But such defenses could not last forever. Central Asian nomads, sometimes referred to as “White Huns” or Hephthalites, invaded and occupied Bactria (Afghanistan) during the fourth century. In 455 CE, they crossed the Hindu Kush and invaded Gupta territory. Gupta forces at first repulsed the Hephthalites. But defense was costly, and attrition of resources eventually left the Gupta at the mercy of the invaders, who finally rampaged across northern India. With Gupta authority fading, India broke up once more into regional kingdoms. By 550 the empire was gone. So, in contrast to the complicated stories of disintegration that explain the fall of the Han and Roman empires, the Gupta story is relatively simple.

Common elements help explain why all of these empires collapsed between 300 and 600 CE. The most obvious common thread is the role of pastoral nomads. Competition among various groups of herding peoples for diminishing land and resources, combined with the comparative wealth of the settled empires they bordered, led nomadic confederations to first raid, then invade their neighbors. This set off a chain reaction of events that, when combined with internal weaknesses, helped bring down the Han and the Romans, while the Gupta simply fell victim to their conquests directly. The growth of trans-hemispheric trade, which had greatly enriched all three empires, also helped destroy the Han and Roman empires because long-distance communications permitted infectious diseases to travel across Afroeurasia and trigger widespread epidemics. India, however, seems to have been little affected by such outbreaks.

In the case of both the Han and Roman empires, wealth from trade was accumulated and concentrated in the hands of a relatively small elite class whose greed and indifference toward ordinary citizens led to widespread poverty and disillusionment. In the end, neither empire had the support of the majority of its own people. When these empires fell, few ordinary people mourned their passing. Internal political struggles also marked the final days of both the Han and Roman empires. Both had long survived such struggles in the past, but combined with other pressures, chronic infighting left governments unable to deal with crises at critical times.

By the time the Gupta succumbed to the Hephthalites, trade and communication had already begun to falter across Afroeurasia. Trade became more limited and dangerous to conduct. Warfare became more local. Where once great empires tied many diverse peoples together, there stood fragmented, regional kingdoms whose outlook was far more geographically and culturally limited. China, with its common script and traditions was eventually able to regain unity under the Sui. India would not see unification again until the Mughals arose in the early sixteenth century. The Mediterranean basin never regained unity.

This unit in the Big Era Timeline



Microsoft® Encarta® Reference Library 2002. © 1993-2001 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Lesson 1

Empire

Preparation

Duplicate Student Handout 1.1 (“What is an empire?”) for the class.

Introduction

Review the fact that in the previous era (Big Era Four) a number of complex and enduring empires had dominated large parts of Afroeurasia. Among these were the Han empire in China and the Roman empire in the Mediterranean Basin. In spite of their vast size, wealth, and power, all of these large empires suffered catastrophic collapse between 200 and 600 C.E. The central question that concerns us in this unit is why this near-simultaneous series of disintegrations took place.

Activities

In order to understand why empires fall, it is first necessary to have a clear idea of what an empire is and what it takes for an empire to survive and thrive.

1. Ask students, “What is an empire? How is an empire different from a kingdom?” As part of the discussion, have students name examples of empires they have heard of. Have students also list the names of states they know that were not called empires. Build a working definition of empire by discussing the differences between the listed examples.
2. Have students read Student Handout 1.1 (“What is an empire?”). Have them compare their definition to the explanation given in the reading.
3. Would you rather rule a kingdom or an empire? Explain your thinking.
4. Although some large empires survived for a very long time, even the strongest and most organized among them disintegrated in the early centuries C.E. What do you think may have caused their collapse? [Note: Explain to students that in the subsequent lessons their predictions will be tested as they examine the fall of the Han, Roman, and Gupta empires.]
5. Have students refer to Student Handout 1.1 to make a list of things that seem necessary for an empire to survive and be successful. Rank your completed list according to importance. Place a “1” next to the most important item, a “2” next to the second most important, and so on.

Lesson 1

Student Handout 1.1—What is an empire?

High school version

An empire is the political rule of one group of people over other people who may have differing languages and customs. In contrast, a kingdom is a smaller political state composed of people who often share a common set of cultural characteristics. If a kingdom is well organized and powerful enough to rule over other lands, it can become an empire. Throughout history, empires were often built through conquest, and conquered peoples were forced to become subjects of the empire. But occasionally, people in neighboring territories saw benefits to being part of a larger, more complex political and economic organization. So they joined an empire willingly. Either way, empires were made up of kingdoms, at least in part, in much the same way that modern countries are made up of states or provinces.

Empires were much more difficult than kingdoms to organize and sustain. A massive bureaucracy was needed to govern diverse peoples under a single administration. Language and cultural barriers had to be overcome. (The language of the ruling power often became the official language used for government and trade throughout the empire.) Extensive transportation and communication networks had to be built, maintained, and protected, so that the natural riches of the empire's far-flung provinces could be brought to the ruling center. Long distance trade, the economic lifeblood of an empire, had to be regulated and a common currency established. Taxes needed to be collected and legal systems established. Much effort and money had to be devoted to maintaining the military so that it could protect trade, enforce laws, and defend the empire from its enemies, both external and internal.

All this had to be accomplished in a balanced fashion. For example, enough tax money had to be collected to pay for the roads, armies, and bureaucracies needed to run the empire. But if the tax rate was too high, it could impoverish people, ruin commerce, and actually reduce the amount of money flowing into the treasury. This type of economic blunder could lead to rebellion. Similarly, government officials needed authority to do their jobs effectively, but they had to be closely monitored to ensure that they did not abuse their positions of power and enrich themselves at the expense of the empire and its people. Widespread corruption could also anger an empire's subjects and incite them to rebellion. Imperial powers tried to win the loyalty of their subjects by granting privileges such as citizenship and local autonomy and by sharing knowledge and technology. At the same time, they had to be careful that subject peoples did not gain so much power and knowledge that they could break away from or overthrow the government. Such equilibrium was difficult to maintain. Empires had to be flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances and challenges, while keeping everything in balance. Several large empires in Afroeurasia maintained this balance for long periods of time. But from the third to seventh centuries, three of the most powerful and enduring empires began to weaken and disintegrate.

Principal reference: Howard Spodek, *The World's History*, second ed., vol. 1 (Upper Saddle River NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000)

Lesson 1

Student Handout 1.1—What is an empire?

Middle school version

An empire is the rule of one group of people over other groups who have different languages and customs. An emperor rules an empire.

A kingdom is a smaller state made up of people who share the same culture. If a kingdom is strong enough to rule over other lands, it can become an empire. Throughout history, empires were built through wars. Conquered lands were forced to become part of the empire.

Empires were more difficult to rule than kingdoms. A well-organized government was needed to keep the many different lands and people united under the emperor's rule. Transportation networks had to be built and protected so that products from the empire's far corners could be brought to the capital. Long distance trade had to be established and taxes collected. Money was needed to build an army that would protect trade and defend the empire.

Enough tax money had to be collected to pay for roads, armies, and the officials needed to run the empire. But if taxes were too high, people couldn't pay them. Trade suffered and the amount of money flowing into the treasury decreased. This type of economic mistake could cause people to rebel.

Emperors tried to win people's loyalty by making people citizens and by sharing knowledge and technology. But, they had to be careful that people did not gain so much power that they could break away from or overthrow the government. Some empires throughout Afroeurasia maintained this balance for long periods of time. But from the 3rd to 7th centuries, three of the most powerful empires began to weaken and collapse.

Principal reference: Howard Spodek, *The World's History*, second ed., vol.1 (Upper Saddle River NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000)

Lesson 2

A Concatenation of Miseries *(or, CSI Han China)*

Preparation

Duplicate copies of Student Handouts 2.1-2.3

Introduction

Explain that the first empire to fall was the Han. This lesson is an investigation into the Han empire's demise and why it occurred. One clue to what happened is found in China's later literature concerning this period.

Activities

1. Ask students if they have ever seen the Disney movie *Mulan*. Explain that the original story is a poem that focuses on one of the problems that helped lead to China's downfall. Distribute Student Handout 2.1 (*The Poem of Mulan*). Read aloud and discuss the poem, as well as the paragraph that follows. Have students answer and discuss the questions. (Note that in the Disney version of *Mulan*, the leader of the invaders is named "Xiongnu.")
2. Explain that constant struggle with northern nomads was indeed one of the contributing factors in the collapse of the Han. But it was not the whole story. To get a real "picture" of the empire's fall, students will use a graphic organizer. Distribute Student Handout 2.1 (Han Dynasty Graphic Organizer). Give students a few moments to react to it. Students may express astonishment (dismay?) at the organizer's complexity. This is a good thing since the complexity of the story is the point. Emphasize that it is important in reading the organizer to follow the arrows. Explain that many of the events listed have a cause-and-effect relationship. They are like rows of dominos that fall one into the next.
3. Give students either Student Handout 2.3 (What Happened and Why) for higher level students or Student Handout 2.4 (The Fall of the Han) for lower level students. Have students work in small groups to examine the graphic organizer and answer the discussion questions. Follow this up with a full-class discussion of the answers. In the course of this discussion, emphasize how interrelated the many factors are that contributed to the fall. Also as part of this discussion, compare the causes to the predictions made by students in the first lesson.
4. Some of the vocabulary in the graphic organizer may be unfamiliar to younger students. Student Handout 2.2 (Terms to Know) may be used as a pre-reading activity if needed.

5. Optional Extension: Explain to students that the collapse of the Han empire resulted in more than 300 years of political fragmentation and unrest in China. However, by the late 6th century China was again reunified under the Emperor Wen who founded the Sui Dynasty. Assign students to research the Emperor Wen and the Sui Dynasty (581-618 CE) to discover how Wen managed to resurrect a united Chinese empire. Compile a class listing of what the students discover. Compare Wen's actions to the list of things necessary for the success and survival of an empire that students compiled in the first lesson.

Lesson 2***Student Handout 2.1—The Poem of Mulan***

Tsiek tsiek and again *tsiek tsiek*,
Mu-lan weaves, facing the door.
You don't hear the shuttle's sound,
You only hear Daughter's sighs.
They ask Daughter who's in her heart,
They ask Daughter who's on her mind.
"No one is in Daughter's heart,
No one is on Daughter's mind.
Last night I saw the draft posters,
The Khan [Emperor] is calling many troops,
The army list is in twelve scrolls,
On every scroll there's Father's name.
Father has no grown-up son,
Mu-lan has no elder brother.
I want to buy a saddle and a horse,
And serve in the army in Father's place.
.....
At dawn she takes leave of the Yellow River,
In the evening she arrives at Black Mountain.
She doesn't hear the sound of Father and Mother calling,
She only hears Mount Yen's nomad horses cry *tsiu tsiu*.
She goes ten thousand miles on the business of war,
She crosses passes and mountains like flying.
Northern gusts carry the rattle of army pots,
Chilly light shines on iron armor.
Generals die in a hundred battles,
Stout soldiers return after ten years.

On her return she sees the Son of Heaven [Emperor]
The Son of Heaven sits in the Splendid Hall.
He gives out promotions in twelve ranks
And prizes of a hundred thousand and more.
The Khan asks her what she desires.
"Mu-lan has no use for a minister's post.

I wish to ride a swift mount
To take me back to my home.”

When Father and Mother hear Daughter is coming
They go outside the wall to meet her, leaning on each other.
When Elder Sister hears Younger Sister is coming
She fixes her rouge, facing the door.
When Little Brother hears Elder sister is coming
He whets the knife, quick quick, for pig and sheep.
“I open the door to my east chamber,
I sit on my couch in the west room,
I take off my wartime gown
And put on my old-time clothes.”
Facing the window she fixes her cloudlike hair,
Hanging up a mirror she dabs on yellow flower-powder.
She goes out the door and sees her comrades.
Her comrades are all amazed and perplexed.
Traveling together for twelve years
They didn’t know Mu-lan was a girl.

Source: “The Poem of Mulan,” in *The Flowering Plum and the Palace Lady: Interpretations of Chinese Poetry*, trans. Hans H. Frankel (New Haven: Yale UP, 1976), 68-70.

The Story of Mulan first appeared during the later Tang Dynasty, but her story reflects the long history of nearly continuous military struggles against the nomadic Xiongnu, who lived on China’s northern borders. The Han dynasty was able to keep the Xiongnu at bay for several hundred years through a combination of military defense and simple bribery. (Han officials found that it was cheaper to pay the Xiongnu to refrain from attacking than to fight them.) But the uneasy truce between the Han and the Xiongnu began to unravel around 50 CE. This crisis, in concert with many others, helped bring down the Han.

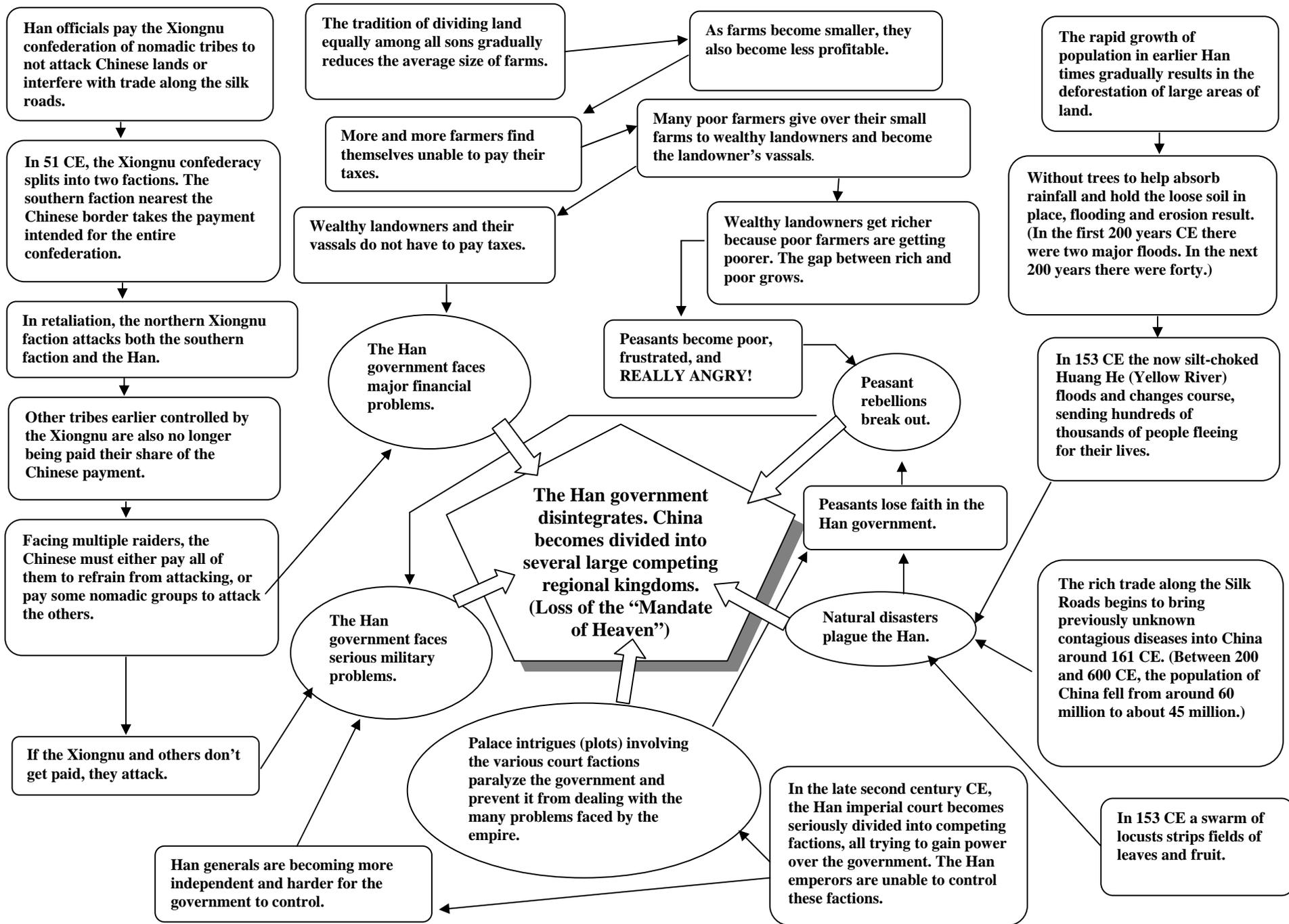
Consider the following questions:

- What clues can you find in the poem that Mulan was fighting the Xiongnu?
- Use evidence from the poem to explain how Chinese emperors obtained soldiers for their armies.
- Why do you think Mulan refused the emperor’s offer of a government job as a reward for her loyal military service?
- For discussion: How does *The Poem of Mulan* compare to Disney’s movie, *Mulan*?

Lesson 2

Student Handout 2.2—Han Dynasty Graphic Organizer

The graphic organizer is on the following page in “landscape” layout.



Lesson 2

Student Handout 2.3—What Happened and Why?

Often historians have to wrestle with complex sets of individual events and interrelated factors that together explain the “how” and “why” of major historical events. This can be quite a challenge because it is sometimes only possible to understand what really happened if *all* of these many interwoven details are taken into consideration. One way to accomplish this is to use a graphic organizer, which is a visual means of displaying not only the events and factors, but also how many details are related to one another. In this activity you will use The Student Handout 2.2 Graphic Organizer to understand why the Han Dynasty collapsed.

Directions

Read carefully the complex graphic organizer that details the disintegration of the Han empire in China. Be careful to follow the arrows since they show how circumstances and events were related to one another.

Discussion Questions

- List what you believe are the four or five main reasons for the collapse of the Han empire.
- Of the reasons you listed, which single reason do you think was the most important?
- Given what you have learned from the graphic organizer, do you believe that the fall of the Han could have been prevented? Why or why not?
- Imagine you were an adviser to the Han emperor. What advice would you have given him?
- Describe what you think took place in the final days of the Han empire.
- Challenge! In a single sentence explain the collapse of the Han empire. (No run-ons!)

Assignment:

Use the graphic organizer and the ideas brought out by the discussion questions to help you compose in your own words a well-organized, multi-paragraph explanation of how and why the Han empire collapsed.

Challenge!

“For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong.”

This is a famous quote by H.L. Mencken. Based on what you learned in this lesson, explain what you think the author of the quote was trying to say.

Lesson 2

Student Handout 2.4—The Fall of the Han Dynasty

Name _____

Use the Student Handout 2.2 Graphic Organizer to answer these discussion questions.

1. What major financial problems did the Han empire have?

2. What major military problems did the Han face?

3. Why did peasants rebel against the Han government?

4. What natural disasters contributed to the fall of the Han?

5. Why was the Han government unable to solve the many problems China was having?

Did you get the main idea?

Place an “X” next to the statement below with which you most agree. On the lines below, explain your choice using specific evidence from the Graphic Organizer and this activity.

_____ The fall of the Han empire has a simple cause that can easily be explained.

_____ The fall of the Han empire is a complex story that involves many causes.

Lesson 3

Rome Didn't Fall in a Day

Preparation

Duplicate copies of Student Handout 3.1 (The Crossing) and Student Handout 3.2 (Forty-Two Reasons for the Fall of Rome). Gather a variety of texts and other research materials the activity related to Student Handout 3.2. Or, arrange to use the school library. If you intend to teach the optional extension activity, also Student Handout 3.3 (The Plague, 542 CE).

Introduction

Review the conclusion of the previous lesson that the fall of the Han empire was a very complex story involving many interrelated factors. Explain that the next big empire to fall was the Roman empire. Was this also a complicated affair? Were there similar causes for fall of Han and Rome? Or was Rome's fall a completely different story? This next lesson will explore these questions.

Activities

1. Explain to students that to understand what happened in the final years of the Roman empire, it is useful to examine an important event during that time in order to see some of the forces at work. The historical fiction story titled "The Crossing" is an account of real events that took place along the Danube River in 376 CE.
2. Give students "The Crossing." Instruct them to read the story, keeping in mind the central questions of this unit. What factors are found in this story that might have helped bring down the Roman empire? (Teachers may employ a variety of reading strategies to complete the activity depending on the level of students. The story's reading level is approximately eighth grade.) Have students answer the discussion questions at the end of Student Handout 3.1.
3. Hold a class discussion of the questions. Ask students to cite factors that might have led to the eventual destruction of the empire. Remind students of what they learned in their examination of the fall of the Han. Are there any similarities? What "falling dominoes" could have resulted from the events portrayed in the story? Do the *Poem of Mulan* and "The Crossing" have anything in common?
4. Explain that other forces at work beyond those illustrated in "The Crossing" to help explain the decline of Rome. In fact, historians continue to debate a rather long list of causes for the fall of Rome. In the next activity, students will join in this debate.
5. Distribute Student Handout 3.2 (Forty-Two Reasons for the Fall of Rome.) Review the directions and have students select research topics, then direct students to complete the task.

6. Explain to students that the next step is to share the research in order to evaluate the significance of the possible factors. Have students present their findings to the class. Instruct students to take notes during each presentation.
7. Have students use the compiled list of factors and their notes to rank the factors in order of significance. In a class discussion, have students share their rankings and debate the relative significance of the causes presented. See if there is a class consensus as to the most important factors.
8. Have students compare the story of the fall of Rome to the fall of the Han by answering the questions posed in the lesson's Introduction. Also have students once again compare what they have learned so far regarding the predictions they made in Lesson 1.

Optional Activity

Remind students of the Student Handout 2.2 Graphic Organizer, which illustrated the fall of the Han. Ask students whether a graphic organizer showing the fall of Rome would look similar or different. Challenge students to create such a graphic organizer.

Optional Extension Activity

Explain that, as was the case with China, attempts were made following the fall of Rome to reunite the empire. Have students research the Byzantine Emperor Justinian and his attempts to resurrect Rome. Instruct students to discover whether, like Emperor Wen, Justinian's efforts were successful. As part of a follow-up discussion of Justinian's ultimate failure, have students read Student Handout 3.3 (Procopius, Plague, 542 CE). Discuss the plague's impact on Justinian's efforts. Procopius, the author of the Student Handout 3.3 selection was a Byzantine Greek historian who wrote during the sixth century CE. He died around 562.

Lesson 3***Student Handout 3.1—The Crossing*****The Crossing****By****Ernest O’Roark and Eileen Wood**

A frigid blast of wind nearly ripped the cloak from Athaneric’s shoulders as he stared at the swollen river below. A steady rain added to the early morning chill. Athaneric shuddered, but not from the cold. He stood atop the riverbank, transfixed by the horrifying scene playing out before him and fearful of the menace that loomed from behind. Although he was only fifteen, Athaneric was already a veteran survivor of countless raids by the terrifying Huns. Relentlessly, the Huns had driven his people from their homeland toward this watery border. Below him Athaneric’s family, with the rest of the Tervingi people, made feverish preparations to cross the Danube River. Their destination, shrouded in mist this bleak morning, was the Roman empire. At any moment the Huns could arrive and wholesale slaughter or slavery would surely be the result. The entire tribe had to attempt the hazardous crossing by whatever means possible. There were few real boats, so Athaneric watched as hundreds of men, women, and children struggled to put together anything that would float. Some chopped furiously at large tree trunks, carving them into crude canoes. Others lashed logs together to form makeshift rafts.

In spite of the danger posed by the Huns, Athaneric was reluctant to cross the river. His father had told him all about the treacherous Romans. Nine years earlier, Valens, the Roman emperor, had broken a treaty with the Tervingi and invaded their land. As incentive for his soldiers, Valens had offered to pay his men a bounty for every Tervingi head they could deliver. Many Tervingi had died. Now that same emperor had given his permission for the Tervingi and other Goths to cross into Roman territory. What, thought Athaneric, do the Romans have in mind for us now?

The sky darkened as the rain fell more heavily. Athaneric frowned and pulled his cloak closer about him as he considered the Danube. In the best of conditions, the river was dangerous to cross. But the heavy rains had added to the danger considerably, making the river wider and swifter than he had ever seen it.

“Come, boy!” His father’s voice startled Athaneric from his thoughts. “We must go now before this rain swells the river any further.”

Athaneric turned with a sigh and slowly approached the crude raft that would either take his family to other side or drown them in the attempt. Unaware of the danger, Athaneric’s young brother and sister laughed and chatted excitedly as they climbed in. His mother, struggling to keep up a brave front, sat between the pair, holding onto their hands tightly. Athaneric helped his father shove the raft off the muddy bank, then scrambled aboard as it entered the rushing current and hurtled downstream. The children yelled in surprise as the raft pitched crazily from side to

side. But gradually the raft stabilized and Athaneric and his father took up their paddles and began to guide their little craft toward the opposite shore.

Suddenly, Athaneric spotted a shape in the water ahead, barely visible through the downpour. In a matter of moments they were upon it, and Athaneric realized that someone was trying to swim across the raging river. The man was flailing his arms, fighting the powerful current with all his strength. But that strength was clearly failing. The man lunged toward their raft as it approached in a desperate attempt to grab hold. But the current was too strong. In a flash they were past him. Athaneric looked back, but the man was gone.

“Look sharp!” Athaneric’s father cried out as another raft, larger than theirs, appeared, headed on a collision course with them. Fearing that their frail craft would never survive such a collision, Athaneric and his father threw all their strength into furious paddling to alter their course. Sweat mingled with raindrops as father and son fought the powerful current of the rain-swollen Danube. Time seemed to slow as the larger raft and its human cargo drew nearer and nearer. Athaneric saw that the people on the other raft had finally noticed the danger and they too were working to avoid the collision. But, would their efforts be too late? It was close. The two rafts touched briefly, and the smaller craft began a slow spin in response.

Athaneric and his father continued to paddle for what seemed like hours until the far bank began to take shape. Athaneric could just make out the forms of Roman soldiers standing on a low ridge overlooking the riverbank. Finally, their raft washed up onto the muddy bank, as did scores of others. Confusion reigned as the first to arrive scrambled to get out of the way of others trying to pull themselves ashore. The Roman soldiers stood watching, but did nothing to help. Exhausted, Athaneric and his family managed to climb onto the low ridge above the river. There, the Romans herded them and other Tervingi families into open areas a short way inland where they were ordered to camp. No food or blankets were offered to the cold, wet refugees.

The next day, as more and more Tervingi made the crossing, Athaneric’s father and other elders were summoned to a meeting with the Roman generals in charge. When Athaneric’s father returned to the camp a short time later, he was visibly shaken. “The Romans are making unreasonable demands of us in return for allowing us to settle here in Thrace,” he began. “First they demanded that we give up all our weapons, but we rejected that idea. It would leave us totally defenseless in Roman territory, and we know the Roman tendency to make slaves of all those they can conquer. Besides, what sort of a warrior would a Tervingi be without his weapons? But when we remained adamant about not giving up our weapons, the Romans insisted that we give them hostages in return—our youngest males.” With this, he looked sadly in the direction of Athaneric’s little brother, who was playing with another small boy nearby. “As agreed by their emperor, we are being given land to farm, but it will be months before we can harvest our crops. The Romans refuse to give us food in the meantime if we do not agree to their terms. They mean to starve us! What are we to do? We cannot go back.”

Just days later, the sounds of children crying and mothers screaming filled the air as Roman soldiers gathered up all the little Tervingi boys and herded them out of the camp like so many

cattle. In return for these tiny hostages the Romans doled out just enough food for the refugees to survive. The emaciated Goths struggled to clear their new farmland, plant their crops, and tend the fields. Many foraged in the countryside to keep starvation at bay. Still the Romans did nothing to help. As time passed and conditions worsened, anger and resentment toward the Romans grew.

The very young and very old suffered the most. Many died, including Athaneric's little sister. Athaneric grew to hate the Romans and vowed that when he was old enough to be a Tervingi warrior, he would join his father and the other great warriors of his tribe to avenge the injustices and hardships inflicted on them by the Romans and their treacherous emperor, Valens.



Comment

The story of Athaneric's crossing of the Danube is historical fiction. It is based on real events that took place in 376 CE as recorded by the Roman historian Ammianus. Blame for the mistreatment of the refugees must fall on two Roman generals, Lupicinus and Maximus, who had been put in charge of the fleeing Goths. Emperor Valens had given these generals money to provide food for the Goths to tide them over until the harvest, but the generals apparently pocketed the money instead. Just two years later, the Goths took their revenge. A combined force of Gothic tribes rebelled against the Romans in 378 and defeated a Roman army at the Battle of Adrianople. Valens was killed in the clash. This was the first time a Roman army had ever been destroyed by a "barbarian" people inside Roman territory, but it would not be the last.

Discussion

1. Why did the Goths want to cross the Danube into Roman territory?
2. Why did the Goths distrust the Romans?
3. What mistakes did the Romans make in dealing with the Goths?
4. Describe the result of the mistakes made by the Romans in this event.
5. What effect do you think the news of the Gothic victory over the Romans at Adrianople would have had on other "barbarian" tribes located along Rome's borders?

Lesson 3

Student Handout 3.2—Forty-two Reasons for the Fall of Rome

Historians offer many theories to explain why the Roman empire declined. Some are logical, compelling reasons. Others are pretty silly. Below is a list of factors that may have contributed to the fall of Rome. Choose one and research how that factor did (or did not) contribute to the demise of the empire.

Attila and the Huns	Mercenary system
Bread and circuses	Military spending
Bureaucracy	Money, shortage of
Corruption	Natural disasters
Decline of trade	Odoacer
Deforestation	Outflow of gold
Depletion of mineral resources	Overexpansion
Disease and epidemics	Political Corruption
Division of empire	Population pressures
Excessive urbanization	Poverty
Germanic peoples	Religion
Inadequate educational system	Rise of uneducated masses
Inferior technology	Ruin of middle class
Inflation	Slavery
Lack of good leadership	Soil exhaustion/erosion
Lack of orderly imperial succession	String of misfortunes
Large estates	Taxation
Laziness	Unemployment
Lead poisoning	Unwise foreign policy decisions
Loss of military discipline	Urban decay
Loss of population	Wars

Source: Alexander Demandt, *Der Fall Roms* (Munich: Beck, 1984), 695. The author lists 210 possible reasons for the fall of the Roman empire. For an English version of the list, see <http://crookedtimber.org/2003/08/25/decline-and-fall>. See also: Karl Galinsky, *Classical and Modern Interactions* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 53-73.

Lesson 3***Student Handout 3.3—The Plague, 542 CE***

Procopius
History of the Wars
II.xxii-xxxiii

DURING these times there was a pestilence, by which the whole human race came near to being annihilated. Now in the case of all other scourges sent from heaven some explanation of a cause might be given by daring men, such as the many theories propounded by those who are clever in these matters. . . . But for this calamity it is quite impossible either to express in words or to conceive in thought any explanation, except indeed to refer it to God. For it did not come in a part of the world nor upon certain men, nor did it confine itself to any season of the year, so that from such circumstances it might be possible to find subtle explanations of a cause, but it embraced the entire world, and blighted the lives of all men, though differing from one another in the most marked degree, respecting neither sex nor age. . . .

It started from the Egyptians who dwell in Pelusium. Then it divided and moved in one direction towards Alexandria and the rest of Egypt, and in the other direction it came to Palestine on the borders of Egypt; and from there it spread over the whole world, always moving forward and traveling at times favorable to it. . . .

And in the second year it reached Byzantium in the middle of spring, where it happened that I was staying at that time. . . . With the majority it came about that they were seized by the disease without becoming aware of what was coming either through a waking vision or a dream. And they were taken in the following manner. They had a sudden fever, some when just roused from sleep, others while walking about, and others while otherwise engaged, without any regard to what they were doing. And the body showed no change from its previous color, nor was it hot as might be expected when attacked by a fever, nor indeed did any inflammation set in, but the fever was of such a languid sort from its commencement and up till evening that neither to the sick themselves nor to a physician who touched them would it afford any suspicion of danger. It was natural, therefore, that not one of those who had contracted the disease expected to die from it. But on the same day in some cases, in others on the following day, and in the rest not many days later, a bubonic swelling developed; and this took place not only in the particular part of the body which is called *boubon*, that is, "below the abdomen," but also inside the armpit, and in some cases also beside the ears, and at different points on the thighs. . . .

There ensued with some a deep coma, with others a violent delirium, and in either case they suffered the characteristic symptoms of the disease. For those who were under the spell of the coma forgot all those who were familiar to them and seemed to lie sleeping constantly. . . . But those who were seized with delirium suffered from insomnia and were victims of a distorted imagination; for they suspected that men were coming upon them to destroy them, and they would become excited and rush off in flight, crying out at the top of their voices. And those who

were attending them were in a state of constant exhaustion and had a most difficult time of it throughout. . . . For when the patients fell from their beds and lay rolling upon the floor, they kept putting them back in place, and when they were struggling to rush headlong out of their houses, they would force them back by shoving and pulling against them. And when water chanced to be near, they wished to fall into it, not so much because of a desire for drink (for the most of them rushed into the sea), but the cause was to be found chiefly in the diseased state of their minds. They had also great difficulty in the matter of eating, for they could not easily take food. And many perished through lack of any man to care for them, for they were either overcome by hunger, or threw themselves down from a height. . . .

Now some of the physicians who were at a loss because the symptoms were not understood, supposing that the disease centered in the bubonic swellings, decided to investigate the bodies of the dead. And upon opening some of the swellings, they found a strange sort of carbuncle that had grown inside them. Death came in some cases immediately, in others after many days; and with some the body broke out with black pustules about as large as a lentil and these did not survive even one day, but all succumbed immediately. With many also a vomiting of blood ensued without visible cause and straightway brought death. . . .

Now the disease in Byzantium ran a course of four months, and its greatest virulence lasted about three. And at first the deaths were a little more than the normal, then the mortality rose still higher, and afterwards the tale of dead reached five thousand each day, and again it even came to ten thousand and still more than that. . . .

At that time all the customary rites of burial were overlooked. For the dead were not carried out escorted by a procession in the customary manner, nor were the usual chants sung over them, but it was sufficient if one carried on his shoulders the body of one of the dead to the parts of the city which bordered on the sea and flung him down; and there the corpses would be thrown upon skiffs [boats] in a heap, to be conveyed wherever it might chance. . . .

Such was the course of the pestilence in the Roman empire at large as well as in Byzantium. And it fell also upon the land of the Persians and visited all the other barbarians besides.

Source: Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 7 vols., trans. H. B. Dewing (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1914), 1: 451-473. Qtd. in the Internet Medieval Sourcebook, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook.html>

Lesson 4

The Light Go Out in India

Preparation

Gather texts and other research materials related to Gupta India or arrange to use the school's library. A rhyming dictionary is also very useful for the first activity. Duplicate copies of Student Handouts 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3.

Introduction

Remind students of the conclusions reached in the previous two lessons. Both the Han and Roman Empires disintegrated as a result of many complex, interrelated factors. Did the Gupta empire suffer the same fate?

Activities

1. Explain that one important form of literature from this time period is the “epic poem.” An epic poem is a long poem that tells a story. The story to be told in this case is the “golden age” of India, which was the era of the Gupta empire. This story is important because it helps us better understand the significance of the empire’s collapse. In the previous two lessons, students were given stories to read that illustrated such important points. In this lesson students will compose the story themselves.

Give students Student Handout 4.1 (The Gupta empire: An Epic Poem). Review the directions, discuss examples, and answer questions. Assign or have students choose sections of the poem to research and compose. Have students work in small groups to complete their portion of the poem.

Compile the student’s finished poems into one complete class version of the story. Duplicate copies of the poem for all students. Hold a “reading” of the completed epic poem. Discuss the significance of the many accomplishments of Gupta India.

2. Point out that although the accomplishments of the Gupta “golden age” are very impressive, this lesson is really about the demise of the Gupta empire. So how could such a successful and brilliant empire suddenly collapse? Is the story similar to that of the Han and the Romans?

Give students Student Handout 4.2 (The Hephthalites [The *Who?*]). Assign students to read this description of the end of Gupta empire. Point out that as a result of the Hephthalite invasions, the Gupta empire was completely annihilated. Even though the Hephthalites were eventually defeated, India fragmented into dozens of small kingdoms and was not united again on a large scale for almost a thousand years.

Ask students to compare the story of the end of the Gupta empire to the fall of the Han and Roman Empires. Students should be able to articulate the idea that this story is much simpler. That is, an overwhelming force simply smashed an otherwise fairly healthy empire.

3. Pose this rhetorical question (if students have not already asked it): “If the Gupta empire was well organized and healthy, how could it be so decisively overwhelmed by a bunch of nomads?” Distribute Student Handout 4.3 (Shock and Awe: Nomad Style). Read and discuss.

Conclude the unit with a brief overall discussion of what happened to the three empires. Have students cite the important similarities and differences among the stories. Refer back to the first lesson that defined what an empire was and what was needed for one to survive and thrive. Remind students of their predictions in Lesson 1, and discuss how close their predictions actually came to the real causes.

Lesson 4

Student Handout 4.1—Golden Age Epic Poem

An epic poem is a long narrative poem that celebrates a people's heroic traditions. As you study the Gupta period of South Asian history, you will create an epic poem to emphasize important events, people, and ideas of that “golden age.”

Research the events, people, and ideas important to the Gupta period. Make your notes thorough and clear.

1. Select from your notes the events, people, and ideas that you feel are most significant. Then compose verses that tell the story. Your epic poem must:
 - contain rhyming couplets. (The end of each pair of lines must rhyme.)
 - have a meter that scans. (There must be the same number of beats or syllables in each line.)
 - must contain 20 or more couplets. You may break the poem into as many stanzas as you like.
 - be historically accurate.

Here is an example of 5 rhyming couplets:

India, land of many races,
Countless languages, varied faces;
Of Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and Sikhs,
Of palaces built of golden bricks,
Towering mountains and fertile plains,
Hot, dry deserts and tropical rains.

How did India come to be?
Let's examine her history.
These events that made her diverse
Are to be rendered verse by verse.

Lesson 4

Student Handout 4.2—The Hephthalites (The Who?)

Beyond the settled civilizations of Eurasia lived the little-known pastoral nomads of the Central Asian steppes. A great migration southward of one of these groups, known variously as the Hephthalites, Hunas, or White Huns, had a devastating effect on India. Beginning in the fifth century CE, wave after wave of these invaders terrorized settled peoples in lands ranging from the Tigris and Euphrates to the Ganges river valleys.

The origin of the Hephthalites is something of a mystery. The earliest information about them comes from Chinese chronicles. These accounts claim that the Hephthalites were originally a tribe of the great Yue-Chi, who lived north of the Great Wall. In the sixth century, the Roman historian Procopius wrote that the Hephthalites were "of the stock of the Huns in fact as well as in name; however they do not mingle with any of the Huns known to us. . . . They are the only ones among the Huns who have white bodies and countenances which are not ugly." Because Procopius described them as having Caucasian features, some historians believe that the Hephthalites may have been related to the Persians. Others think that they may have been distantly related to the Xiongnu, a pastoral people who lived in Mongolia and regularly harassed the Chinese.

Like other pastoral nomads of the Central Asian steppes, the Hephthalites had a markedly different way of life from that of the settled peoples with whom they came in contact. Moving frequently in search of game, water, and fresh grazing land for their animals, they practically lived on horseback. Portable round tents called yurts were their homes. Their clothing was made of felt or animal skins and included leather boots and fur caps. Hephthalite men were distinguished by their shaved heads, except for two braided pigtailed behind their ears and a patch of hair on top. Many men also wore long wooden earrings.

According to two Chinese pilgrims, Sung Yun and Hui Sheng, who visited them in 520 CE: "The Hephthalites have no cities, but roam freely and live in tents. They do not live in towns; their seat of government is a moving camp. They move in search of water and pasture, journeying in summer to cool places and in winter to warmer ones. . . . They have no belief in the Buddhist law and they serve a great number of divinities." In the mid-fifth century, the Hephthalites expanded westward, probably because another nomadic group was pressing them from the east. As early as 440, their armies took Samarkand and Bactria (today Uzbekistan).

After the death of the Gupta ruler Skandagupta in 470, the Hephthalites entered India destroying towns and villages along the Ganges River. Pataliputra, The Gupta capital, was reduced in population to the size of a village. They persecuted Buddhists and burned their monasteries. Their conquest was accomplished with such brutality that the Gupta dynasty was completely extinguished. The Guptas were not the only Hephthalite victims. In 484, the Hephthalites struck westward into Persia, invading the Sassanian empire. They destroyed agricultural lands and killed the Sassanid king before withdrawing to the east once more.

Toramana and Mihirakula, the most famous of the Hephthalite kings, ruled India in the first half of the 6th century. Toromana led the successful invasion of India. His son, Mihirakula, succeeded him in about 515. In 520, the Chinese ambassador Song-yun described this king as cruel, vindictive, and barbarous, not believing in the law of Buddha, having 700 war-elephants, and living with his troops on the frontier. About ten years later the Greek Cosmas of Alexandria described Mihirakula as a ruler who exacted an oppressive tribute from subject peoples with the help of a large army of cavalry and war elephants. Mihirakula's reputation was so fierce that even today, oral accounts in India still include stories of him amusing himself by rolling elephants down a precipice and watching their agonies.

The cruelty of Mihirakula's rule caused a number of Indian princes to form a confederation and revolt against him about 528. He was not killed in this rebellion, however, but fled to Kashmir, where a few years later he seized the throne and then started attacking neighboring kingdoms. He died in about 540.

Between 557 and 561, the Sassanid king opened contacts with a Turkic nomadic group who had appeared from Inner Eurasia. Seeking revenge for the Hephthalite murder of his grandfather, who had been king before him, he formed an alliance with the Turkic leader. This chief had the largest and most powerful army in the region; it was he who finally conquered the Hephthalites and killed their king. By 565, only a small number of Hephthalites remained in India. Their decline marked a turning point in the story of Inner Eurasia. For the allies of the Persian king were Turks, a new power that would dominate the steppes for next few centuries.

Lesson 4

Student Handout 4.3— Shock and Awe: Nomad Style

To the settled peoples who witnessed it, the arrival of nomadic peoples from the steppes of Inner Eurasia must have been an awesome and terrifying sight. They struck like lightning on swift, sure-footed horses, showering their victims with arrows. Then they galloped off before any counterattack could be organized, only to reappear when least expected. In wave after wave they came, wearing down their enemy until victory was theirs. Pillage and looting often followed, for the raiders were not interested in acquiring land and they did not fight for a particular cause or religion. Rather, warfare was the means by which the nomadic raiders extracted valuable resources from the rich settled peoples living within their range.

Who were these people and how did they manage to overwhelm the defenses of the well-organized civilizations they encountered? There is much we do not know about the origins and makeup of the many tribal groups that populated the steppes of Inner Eurasia. The pastoral nomadic way of life that evolved in this region took good advantage of the vast treeless grasslands of the steppes, which were perfect for grazing animals. Pastoral nomads raised horses, cattle, camels, sheep, and goats, and they moved from place to place in order to have fresh grazing land continuously available. We know from historical records the names of many groups. (And, in some cases, many names for a single group.) But because victims who did not know the history of their attackers wrote these records, it is unclear whether or how some of the nomadic groups were related. One example of this confusion is the group known as the Huns. They may be related to other Inner Eurasia Asian groups, including the Hephthalites and the Xiongnu. But lacking more definitive evidence, historians have been unable to determine whether any or all of these groups were related beyond a shared way of life.

One reason why the pastoral nomads of the steppes were such successful warriors was their superior technology. Although they were materially a more simple people than those they raided, these nomads developed or acquired particular technologies that enabled them to thrash just about everyone they encountered. These technologies included:

The horse. From early times, Inner Eurasian nomads bred excellent horses well suited to the arid steppes. Their horses were fast, easy to take care of, and could survive harsh winters. The Chinese prized Inner Eurasian horses, calling them “Heavenly Horses.” Horses were one of the main objects of trade between the Chinese and nomadic peoples. Not surprisingly, nomad children were taught from a very young age how to ride and spent much of their lives on horseback. In referring to one nomadic group north of the Black Sea, the Greek historian Herodotus said, “Their country is the back of a horse.” In short, the nomads of the steppes possessed the best horses and the most expert cavalry on the continent.

The bow: The composite bow was an innovation developed by the nomads of Inner Eurasia. It was easily one of the most powerful weapons of its time. Because of its laminated, curved design, it had more than double the tension and power of ordinary bows. Barbed, iron-tipped arrows fired by this weapon could penetrate armor.

The iron stirrup: Although the stirrup was probably invented in China, the neighboring nomadic peoples were quick to adopt any good technology having to do with horses. The use of stirrups gave a rider more control over his horse as well as better balance. With stirrups and very secure saddles, nomad cavalry were able to ride their fast, well-trained horses at a full gallop, while using their powerful bows to shoot with deadly accuracy in any direction.

Questions

- Why do you think the written records about the various nomad groups of Inner Eurasia were written by their victims?
- Which of the three technologies do you think was the most important to the success of the steppe nomads?
- What do you think would be the best defense against raids by the nomads of Inner Eurasia?

Assessment

Have students compose a multi-paragraph essay answer to the question: “Why do empires fall?” Hand out Assessment Rubric to students before they begin writing so that they may use it as a guide. Use the rubric then to grade and give students feedback on their compositions.

This unit and the Three Essential Questions

	<p>In his book title <i>Collapse</i> (see Resources) Jared Diamond writes: “Rome became increasingly beset by barbarian invasions. . . . Eventually, it was the barbarians rather than Romans who won the battles: what was the fundamental reason for that shift of fortune? Was it because of changes in the barbarians themselves, such that they became more numerous or better organized, acquired better weapons or more horses, or profited from climate change in the Central Asian steppe? In that case, we would say that barbarians really could be identified as the fundamental cause of Rome’s fall. Or was it instead that the same old unchanged barbarians were always waiting on the Roman Empire’s frontiers, and that they couldn’t prevail until Rome became weakened by some combination of economic, political, environmental, and other problems? In that case we would blame Rome’s fall on its own problems, with the barbarians just providing the coup de grace.” (13-14). Debate these questions.</p>
	<p>Identify through library and Internet research empires, kingdoms, or dynasties that have endured for 500 years or more. What might have been the “secret of long life” for these states? Do you think that some modern states, for example, the USA, might endure that long or longer? Why or why not?</p>
	<p>Make a list of dramatic films you have seen or heard about that depict life on earth (or in a particular country or city) following the “collapse of civilization.” Why do people often find these movies intriguing and entertaining? What are some of the points these films try to make? Representative examples are “Planet of the Apes,” “The Day after Tomorrow,” “The Postman,” and “The Road Warrior.”</p>

This unit and the Seven Key Themes

This unit emphasizes:

Key Theme 3: Uses and Abuses of Power

Key Theme 7: Science, Technology, and the Environment

This unit and the Standards in Historical Thinking

Historical Thinking Standard 1: Chronological Thinking

The student is able to (F) reconstruct patterns of historical succession and duration in which historical developments have unfolded, and apply them to explain historical continuity and change.

Historical Thinking Standard 2: Historical Comprehension

The student is able to (G) draw upon data in historical maps.

Historical Thinking Standard 3: Historical Analysis and Interpretation

The student is able to (C) analyze cause-and-effect relationships bearing in mind multiple causation.

Historical Thinking Standard 4: Historical Research Capabilities

The student is able to (D) identify the gaps in the available records and marshal contextual knowledge and perspective of the time and place.

Historical Thinking Standard 5: Historical Issues-Analysis and Decision-Making

The student is able to (C) identify relevant historical antecedents and differentiate from those that are inappropriate and irrelevant to contemporary issues.

Resources

Resources for teachers

Demandt, Alexander. *Der Fall Roms*. Munich: Beck, 1984. The author lists 210 possible reasons for the fall of the Roman empire.

Diamond, Jared. *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*. New York: Viking, 2005. In this book the author of *Guns, Germs, and Steel* investigates how and why both past and modern societies have crumbled. Lively reading for high school students.

Fagan, Brian. *Floods, Famines and Emperors: El Niño and the Fate of Civilizations*. New York: Basic Books, 1999. Fagan writes in an accessible, sometimes humorous, style.

Frankel, Hans H., trans. "The Poem of Mulan." In *The Flowering Plum and the Palace Lady: Interpretations of Chinese Poetry*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1976.

Galinsky, Karl. *Classical and Modern Interactions*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992.

Keys, David. *Catastrophe: An Investigation into the Origins of the Modern World*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1999. This book presents a controversial thesis about the fall of the Roman, Han Chinese, and other states centering on climate change.

Ponting, Clive. *A Green History of the World: The Environment and the Collapse of Great Civilizations*. New York: Penguin, 1991.

Procopius. *History of the Wars*. 7 vols. Trans. H. B. Dewing. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1914. Qtd. in the Internet Medieval Sourcebook, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook.html>.

Redman, Charles. *Human Impact on Ancient Environments*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999.

Spodek, Howard. *The World's History*, 2nd ed., vol. 1. Upper Saddle River NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000.

Tainter, Joseph. *The Collapse of Complex Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988.

Yoffee, Norman, and George Cowgill, eds. *The Collapse of Ancient States and Civilizations*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988.

Resources for Students

Kenoyer, Jonathan Mark, and Kimberley Heuston. *The Ancient South Asian World*. New York: Oxford UP, 2005. This is a volume in the series "The World in Ancient Times" published by Oxford University Press for young readers. The series offers superb illustrations and maps.

Kleeman, Terry, and Tracy Barrett. *The Ancient Chinese World*. New York: Oxford UP, 2005. This is a volume in the series "The World in Ancient Times" published by Oxford University Press for young readers. The series offers superb illustrations and maps.

Mellor, Ron, and Marni McGee. *The Ancient Roman World*. New York: Oxford UP, 2005. This is a volume in the series "The World in Ancient Times" published by Oxford University Press for young readers. The series offers superb illustrations and maps.

Correlations to National and State Standards

National Standards for World History

Era 3: Classical Traditions, Major Religions, and Giant Empires, 1000 BCE-300 CE. 1D: The student understands how pastoral nomadic peoples of Central Asia began to play an important role in world history. Era 4: Expanding Zones of Exchange and Encounter, 300-1000 CE. Standard 1: Imperial crises and their aftermath, 300-700 CE.

California: History-Social Science Content Standard

Grade Seven, 7.1: Students analyze the causes and effects of the vast expansion and ultimate disintegration of the Roman Empire.

Illinois Standards of Learning: Social Science

State Goal 16: 16.B.3a (W) Compare the political characteristics of Greek and Roman civilizations with non-Western civilizations, including the early Han dynasty and Gupta Empire between 500 BCE and 500 CE. 16.B.3b (w) Identify causes and effects of the decline of the Roman empire.

New York: Social Studies Resource Guide with Core Curriculum

Unit One: Ancient World—Civilizations and Religion (4000 BC – 500 AD), Global Interactions (1200-1650), B. The rise and fall of great empires. Unit Two: Expanding Zones of Exchange and Encounter (500 – 1200), A. Gupta Empire (320-550 AD).

Virginia: History and Social Science Standards of Learning

WHI.6. The student will demonstrate knowledge of ancient Rome from about 700 BC to 500 AD in terms of its impact on Western civilization by: k) citing the reasons for the decline and fall of the Western Roman Empire.

Conceptual links to other teaching units

As we have seen in this unit, societies in several parts of Afroeurasia experienced much political, economic, and social turbulence between the fourth and sixth centuries. In the later sixth centuries, however, new signs of population and economic growth began to appear across the Eastern Hemisphere. Trade flourished on the silk roads and maritime routes, and new empires appeared. In the Arabian Peninsula in the early seventh century, Arabic-speaking people created a new state that within little more than a century embraced the entire region from Morocco and Spain in the west to northwestern India and parts of Inner Eurasia in the east. Unlike the Roman, Han, or Gupta empires, however, the Arab state arose in connection with a new religion, Islam, which was soon to emerge as one of the major world belief systems. The rise of the Arab empire, and to an even greater degree the spread of Islam, contributed to a significant tightening of the web of commercial and cultural interchange that connected peoples across Afroeurasia. Landscape Teaching Unit 5.2 explores the early centuries of Islam and the fundamental teachings of this faith.