

Explore More—The First Emperor of China

Directions: Listen to your teacher talk about the policies and achievements of the First Emperor, Shi Huangdi. You will learn how Shi Huangdi unified northern China under the Qin Dynasty. Refer to the maps in your Explore Geography Picture Dictionary to locate the places your teacher mentions. Circle any words you don't understand. Underline or highlight important ideas in the text. Write notes in the margins to help you understand key points. Then answer the questions in your own words.

Shi Huangdi

After the Zhou Dynasty lost power, there was disorder and instability in China. States fought with each other constantly. It was during this chaotic time that a young boy came to power in the state of Qin.

Point to this date on the class time line.

Because of his age, the boy first had help ruling the province from his mother and an advisor. Later, when he got older, he was able to rule on his own. This was in 238 B.C. He became known as a harsh ruler. He seized control of the other Chinese states and unified China in 221 B.C.

Find the map of the Qin Dynasty in the textbook or historical anthology. Locate this date on the class time line.

This ruthless leader declared himself the First Emperor, Shi Huangdi. He used this name because he thought that the empire he created would exist for 1,000 generations. Shi Huangdi is the first ruler and founder of the Qin Dynasty. The name "China" comes from the word *Qin*.

One of the first things that Shi Huangdi did when he came to power was to order workers to start constructing his tomb. It took 36 years to complete. Excavation of the First Emperor's tomb began in 1974. This burial place consisted of 7,500 soldiers made of terra cotta, or clay. Each terra-cotta warrior had unique physical features and carried weapons. The terra-cotta army was formed in positions that made the statues appear ready for battle.

Shi Huangdi died in 210 B.C., after becoming gravely ill. In only three short years after the First Emperor's death, the Qin Dynasty came to an end. Shi Huangdi was wrong; his empire did not last forever.

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Policies and Achievements

Many of Shi Huangdi's policies served to unify China. He improved the conditions of the empire by ordering the building of highways and canals. He also started a postal system that strengthened communication between different provinces. He standardized the written language so that everyone could understand each other. He created a standard currency and protected the empire from invaders connecting portions of what we now call the Great Wall of China.

Find the photograph in the historical anthology of the Great Wall of China as it looks today.

Even though Shi Huangdi was a harsh ruler, he kept order in the empire. However, this order came at a great cost. He maintained stability primarily through fear, punishment, and strict control over people's lives. The First Emperor did not agree with the teachings of Confucius, especially the importance of education. He burned books about philosophy, art, history, and music. Shi Huangdi developed a strong central government and a powerful, merciless army. He kept control over the nobles by redistributing their land to the peasants. He also forced them to relocate to the capital so they were close to him. He took away people's weapons so they would not revolt. The First Emperor also used harsh punishments to limit crime. His policies were effective, but very hard on the people who lived under his rule. ❖

YOUR TURN!

Write your answers to the following questions.

1. Who was Shi Huangdi?

2. Name the First Emperor's policies and achievements.

3. How did the First Emperor unify northern China under the Qin Dynasty?

Questions for further discussion:

- What would you like to know more about in terms of the First Emperor of China? Frame questions that you can answer by historical study and research. Conduct this research and discuss your findings.
- Construct a time line recording the major events in the life of the First Emperor, Shi Huangdi. Be sure to show the extent of the Qin Dynasty on your time line.
- Why do historians consider Shi Huangdi to be a cruel ruler? Distinguish fact from opinion in the information you have read about the First Emperor.
- What conclusions can you draw about the economic state of the Qin Dynasty from what archaeologists found in Shi Huangdi's tomb? Use your analysis and further research to interpret basic indicators of economic performance and conduct a cost-benefit analysis of economic and political issues.