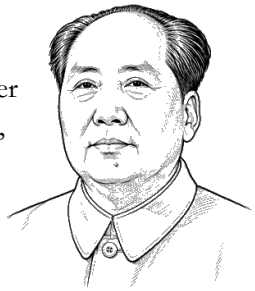
Name: _____

Date: _____

Mao Zedong

With the Nationalists driven to Taiwan, Mao Zedong and the Communists established the People's Republic of China. Having grown up doing farm labor, Mao understood village life firsthand, and millions of peasants believed he spoke for them. But as leader of one-quarter of humanity for 27 years, Mao made decisions that brought devastating consequences.



Land Reform

Mao championed the idea that those who worked the land should own it, not wealthy landlords. His government seized estates and divided them among millions of poor farming families. For many villagers, it was the first time they had ever owned the fields they worked.

But Mao never intended for farmers to keep their land forever. He soon required them to join large collective farms rather than own land individually. Under this system, everyone shared the harvest, but many farmers quickly learned that working harder no longer meant their own family would receive more food.

Social Reform

Despite growing concerns, Mao remained popular with millions of Chinese peasants. Beyond land, his government expanded women's legal rights by banning forced and child marriages. It also launched nationwide literacy campaigns, improved basic health care, and sharply reduced the opium addiction that had plagued China for generations. As a result, life expectancy soared, leaving a lasting impact on society.

The Great Leap Forward

In 1958, Mao launched the Great Leap Forward, an ambitious plan to transform China from a poor farming nation into a modern industrial power in just a few years. He expected villagers to produce record harvests while at the same time constructing massive infrastructure and manning backyard furnaces. To make this possible, Mao forced families into communal kitchens and nurseries. He believed that determination and hard work could accomplish in a few years what had taken other nations generations.

Backyard Furnaces

Steel is normally produced in large factories by trained experts using carefully controlled temperatures. Instead, Mao ordered thousands of backyard furnaces built across the countryside. Under pressure to meet production quotas, villagers melted down their pots, pans, and essential farm tools. Some low-grade iron reached factories, but most villages were left with nothing but inferior slag, created from the tools farmers needed to grow food.

Famine

The Great Leap Forward quickly unraveled. Eager to impress their superiors, local officials wildly exaggerated how much grain their villages produced. Believing these reports, the government ordered grain deliveries based on harvests that existed only on paper, leaving farming families to starve.

As famine spread across the countryside, parents watched helplessly as their children grew weaker each day. Families searched fields for roots, leaves, and any scrap they could eat. Entire villages fell silent as hunger claimed one life after another. By the time it ended, tens of millions of Chinese had died in one of the deadliest famines in human history.

The Cultural Revolution

The failure of the Great Leap Forward weakened Mao's influence over policy, but not his enormous prestige or authority with the public. Believing the government had lost its revolutionary spirit, he called on young Chinese to lead the Cultural Revolution.

Millions joined the Red Guards, who attacked teachers, officials, and anyone accused of opposing Mao. They destroyed historic temples, books, and art, while publicly humiliating, imprisoning, and killing countless citizens. What began as an effort to revive the revolution plunged China into years of fear, violence, and chaos.

Mao's Legacy

Mao died in 1976, ending one of the most remarkable and controversial careers in modern

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history. He reunited China, transformed its society, and inspired millions to believe they could build a better future. Yet his determination to reshape the nation also led to famine, persecution, and the deaths of tens of millions of people.

Fill in the Blanks

After the Nationalists fled to T__i__an, Mao Zedong and the C__m__u__i__ts established the P__o__le's Republic of China. Mao r__d__s__r__b__t__d land to poor f__r__e__s but later required them to join large c__l__e__t__ve farms where everyone *s__a__ed the harvest. Although many farmers lost the i__c__n__i__e to work harder, Mao remained p__p__l__r because his government expanded w__m__n's rights, improved h__a__th care, increased l__t__r__cy, and reduced o__i__m addiction. In 1958, Mao launched the G__e__t Leap F__r__a__d to i__d__s__r__a__i__e China. Villagers built backyard f__r__a__es that produced little usable s__e__l. Meanwhile, local officials e__a__g__r__t__d grain harvests. Believing the *f__l__e reports, the government claimed to collect grain that did not exist, causing one of history's deadliest f__m__n__s. In 1966, Mao launched the C__l__ur__l Revolution, urging young Red Guards to a__ta__k anyone accused of o__p__s__ng him. Mao died in 19____, leaving a legacy of both *r__f__rm and *tr__g__dy.

Answer in Complete Sentence

*1. Why did Mao remain popular with many Chinese farmers despite his many missteps?

_____

_____

_____

2. What was Mao hoping to accomplish with the Great Leap Forward?

_____

_____

_____

3. What was the Cultural Revolution?

_____

_____

_____

*4. Was Mao a good or a bad leader. Defend you answer with at least two facts from the article?

_____

_____

_____

*This is a higher order learning question. You must answer the question to the best of your ability, but any reasonable answer will be graded as correct.

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