Name: _____

Date: _____

ANCIENT CHINA
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The Qin Dynasty

King Zheng of Qin (chin*) proved to be the most ruthless warlord of the third century BCE. One by one, rival kingdoms fell before his armies until no challenger remained. By 221 BCE, all of China answered to this single ruler. History remembers him as the First Emperor, a leader who believed peace required iron discipline, clear laws, and harsh punishments.

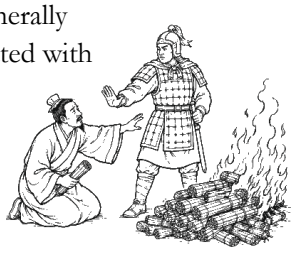
The Legalists

During the chaos of the Age of Warring States, many scholars concluded that disorder resulted from people acting in their own self-interest. They argued that rulers could not depend on citizens acting virtuously to maintain order. Instead, they believed that iron-fisted leadership, clear laws, strict punishments, and generous rewards were needed to keep society stable.

Their ideas came to be known as Legalism. Once he had conquered his rivals, the First Emperor put this philosophy into practice.

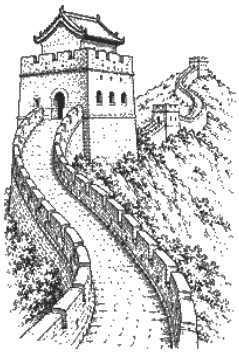
The Burning of the Books

Legalists believed that criticism weakened the state and that loyalty to the ruler was essential for maintaining order. To prevent scholars from praising earlier rulers or questioning his authority, the First Emperor ordered many historical and philosophical works destroyed. Books on practical subjects such as agriculture and medicine were generally spared, but many writings associated with Confucius were banned. According to traditional accounts, scholars who opposed the policy were arrested, executed, or even buried alive.



Reshaping Society

With dissent tightly controlled, the First Emperor used his authority to strengthen and unify China. He built roads and major irrigation projects, promoted officials based on merit, and stripped power from the local nobles who had dominated the Age of Warring States. In the north, he linked and expanded defensive walls to protect the empire from steppe raiders, laying the foundation for the Great Wall. His greatest achievements, however, came from standardizing society.



Becoming One

The First Emperor required people throughout the empire to use standardized weights, measures, and currency. He also mandated a single written language, making it easier to govern a vast territory and enforce laws consistently. Local customs and standards developed over centuries were swept aside in favor of uniform, government-imposed rules. For the first time, regions that had once been rival kingdoms were bound together into a single empire. The Qin Dynasty was short-lived, but its influence was so great that many historians believe the Western word China is derived from Qin.

The Unraveling

When the First Emperor died in 210 BCE, his son briefly inherited the throne. The harsh rule of the Qin had created deep resentment, and rebellions soon spread across China. The dynasty began unraveling within months, though historians traditionally date its final collapse to 206 BCE. The unified empire survived, however, and one rebel leader eventually emerged victorious to found the Han Dynasty.

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Fill in the Blanks

The Q__n Dynasty began when King Z__e__g conquered the rival kingdoms that had fought during the A__e of W__r__i__g States. By 221 BCE, Zheng had united much of China and became known as the F__r__t E__p__r__r. His government was based on L__g__l__sm, a p__i__o__o__hy that taught that s__r__ng rulers, s__r__ct laws, harsh p__n__s__m__n__s, and r__w__r__s were necessary to maintain o__d__r. To strengthen his authority, the First Emperor ordered many h__s__o__i__al and p__i__o__o__h__c__l works destroyed in an event later known as the B__r__i__g of the B__o__s. Books on a__r__c__l__u__e and m__d___c__ne were generally spared, but many writings associated with C__n__u__i__s were b__n__ed. The First Emperor also s__r__n__t__e__ed the empire by building r__a__s, expanding i__r__g__t__on projects, and linking d__f__n__i__e walls that later became part of the G__e__t W__ll. He required people to use s__a__d__r__i__ed weights, measures, and coins, and he imposed a common written l__n__u__ge throughout the empire. Local c__s__o__s that had developed over centuries were swept aside in favor of u__i__o__m government-imposed rules. Although the Qin Dynasty lasted only s__x__e__n years, it created a u__i__i__d empire that survived its *c__l__a__se.

Answer in Complete Sentences

*1. What was King Zheng? What did he accomplish?

_____

_____

_____

*2. Do you believe a kinder leader might have been able to end the chaos of the Age of Warring States? Defend your answer.

_____

_____

_____

3. Why did the First Emperor order the Burning of the Books?

_____

_____

_____

*4. Was the Qin Dynasty good or bad for China? Defend your answer.

_____

_____

_____

*A higher order learning question. Any reasonable answer will be accepted.

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