

Lesson Title

The Yuan Empire, the Silk Road and the Mongols

Class and Grade level(s)

History, Grades 6-8

Goals and Objectives

The student will be able to:

- Identify the boundaries of the Mongol Empire
- Understand that Mongol rule was a time of cosmopolitan cultural exchange in China and across Asia
- Understand the values of the Mongol leaders that underlined this cultural exchange
- Understand how this might have differed from those of the Chinese dynasties that came before them, particularly the Song dynasty
- Understand the concept of Eurasia and the Silk Road
- Appreciate that a desire for global trade seen in the operation of the Silk Road foreshadowed the exploration and colonization of the Americas
- Connect the exchange of ideas and goods along the Silk Road to our current exchanges through the internet, and compare the spread of ideas (cultural diffusion) throughout the Mongolian Empire to the spread of American ideas throughout the world
- Read, understand and contextualize two primary sources.

Time required/class periods needed

5 class periods, 44 minutes each.

Primary source bibliography

1. Marco Polo's description in translation at:

http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/china/polo_hangzhou.pdf

2. Objects traded on the Silk Road

<http://www.advantour.com/silkroad/goods.htm>

3. The Beijing Qing Ming Scroll, viewable at:

http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/song/pop/c_scroll.htm

interactive roll-over version: http://www.npm.gov.tw/exh96/orientation/flash_4/index.html

Other resources used

<http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/mongols/>

Two lesson plans about Marco Polo's travels: <http://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plan/marco-polo-takes-trip>

<http://edsitement.neh.gov/curriculum-unit/road-marco-polo> (This one has an interactive map that allows students to take Polo's route by answering questions about his travels)

Required materials/supplies

Outline maps of Eurasia

Colored pencils and paper

Vocabulary

Mongol, Yuan dynasty, Silk Road, Confucianism, caravan

Procedure

First Class Period

1. Give an overview of the Mongols that starts with the traditional view of them as barbaric invaders, contextualizes their rule, describes some of the changes and innovations they brought to China during the Yuan dynasty (be sure to mention that they also adopted a lot of Chinese culture rather than totally suppressing it and imposing their own), gives an idea of the size of the Mongol empire (the largest land empire ever) and touches upon the advantages of Mongol rule: including the Pax Mongolica. Compare the size of the Mongol Empire to the USA.
 2. Introduce the Silk Road and explain that although it flourished in previous dynasties like the Song, the size of the Mongol Empire and the fact that the Mongols did not have the traditional Confucian disdain for business and merchants created unprecedented safety and volume of traffic on this route. SUGGESTION: MAKE POWERPOINTS FOR BOTH 1 AND 2 USING THE RESOURCES GIVEN ABOVE.
 4. Have students color a modern map of Eurasia to show the extent of the Mongolian Empire
 5. View short video section on the Silk Road (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vn3e37VWc0k>), Marco Polo (<http://www.biography.com/people/marco-polo-9443861/videos/marco-polo-full-episode-2073408403>) and the Yuan dynasty (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yzjmUBDArk>)
- Have students take notes in their class journal – 3 minutes

Second Class Period

1. Review the information on the Silk Road learned in the previous lesson.
2. Have each student research the main routes of the Silk Road then draw them on their map of the Mongolian Empire. They should mark the major cities.
3. Have each student choose one item of trade from this website <http://www.advantour.com/silkroad/goods.htm> and draw it.
4. Make a classroom display of these drawings.

Third Class Period

1. Review with students the basics of what they know about Marco Polo.
3. Give the relevant biographical facts and show a map of his journey. You can use this interactive map <http://edsitement.neh.gov/curriculum-unit/road-marco-polo> and have the class answer questions as a whole or let each student or groups of students follow the route on their own.
4. Introduce Polo's writings. Assess with students how reliable the writings are likely to be, any possible biases, or reasons for inaccuracies? Briefly mention some of the issues that certain historians have with his writings as accurate primary sources. <http://www.history.com/news/marco-polo-went-to-china-after-all-study-suggests>
5. Locate modern Hangchow (Kinsay in Polo's description). As a class have students read out loud Marco Polo's description of the City of Kinsay. Have students underline points they feel made an impression (either positive or negative) on Polo.

Fourth Class Period

1. Have students sit in pairs at a computer to view the details of the Beijing Qing Ming scroll.
2. Have them make note of similarities and differences between Marco Polo's description of Kinsay and the city shown in the Qing Ming scroll.
3. Ask them to think, and discuss with their partner, what these differences might tell us about the change in society between the Song and Yuan dynasty.
4. Debrief as a class and have students tell what they think are the similarities and differences, what might explain the differences?

Assessment/evaluation

- Maps completed neatly and clearly
- Drawing done with careful observation and some level of craftsmanship
- Written assignment:

Imagine you have moved to Kinsay for business from another prosperous Chinese city, and you are writing a letter (3 paragraphs) to your friends back home.” What do you like about the city? What do you dislike about it? Maybe you remember life before the Mongols? How has your life changed? Do you feel it has changed for the better or the worse?