

Ancient China

Module 6

Lesson 1



MAIN IDEAS

1. China's physical geography made farming possible but travel and communication difficult.
2. Civilization began in China along the Huang He and Chang Jiang rivers.
3. China's first dynasties helped Chinese society develop and made many other achievements.

Key Terms and People

jade a hard gemstone

oracle a prediction

part 1

Lesson Summary

CHINA'S PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY

China is a large country—about the same size as the United States. It has many geographical features that affected Chinese civilization. Some features separated China from the rest of the world. An example is the Gobi, a desert that spreads over much of China's north. Some features separated groups of people within China. These include rugged mountains on the western frontier.

Low-lying plains in the east form one of the world's largest farming regions. Weather patterns vary widely across China. Two great rivers flow from west to east, the Huang He, or Yellow River, and the Chang Jiang, or Yangzi River. These rivers helped connect people in the east with the west.

In which part of China is the Gobi?

Underline the names of the features that helped connect people in the eastern part of China with those in western China.

CIVILIZATION BEGINS

Like other ancient peoples, people in China first settled along rivers. By 7000 BC, farmers grew rice in the Chang Jiang Valley. Along the Huang He, they grew millet and wheat. They also fished and hunted and raised pigs and sheep.

Where did the Chinese first grow rice?

Lesson 1, continued

Separate cultures developed along the rivers. As populations grew, villages spread. A social order developed. Graves of the rich often had objects made from **jade**.

CHINA'S FIRST DYNASTIES

Societies along the Huang He grew larger and more complex. Around 2200 BC, a legendary emperor called Yu the Great is said to have founded the Xia (SHAH) dynasty. It is believed that the first flood control channels were built during the Xia dynasty.

The first dynasty for which there is clear evidence is the Shang. It was established by the 1500s BC. The Shang ruler and his family were at the top of the social order. Nobles and warrior leaders also had high rank. Artisans came next. They lived in groups depending on what they did for a living. Farmers were below artisans. They worked hard but had little wealth. Slaves, the lowest rank, provided an important source of labor.

The Shang made many advances, including China's first writing system. The Chinese symbols that are used today are based on the pictographs and symbols of the Shang period. Priests carved questions about the future on bones or shells, which were then heated, causing them to crack. The priests believed they could "read" these cracks to predict the future. So the bones were called **oracle** bones.

Artisans made bronze containers for cooking and religious ceremonies. They made ornaments, knives, and axes from jade. The military developed war chariots and bronze body armor. Shang astrologers developed a calendar based on sun and moon cycles.

Under which dynasty were the first flood control channels built in China?

Which dynasty created China's writing system?

Underline some achievements of Shang artisans.

Lesson 1, *continued*

Part 2

CHALLENGE ACTIVITY

Critical Thinking: Interpret Using the library or online resources, study ancient Chinese writing. Use some of these symbols to illustrate something you have learned about China and its culture.

DIRECTIONS Read each sentence and fill in the blank with the term in the word pair that best completes the sentence.

Part 3

- One of the physical barriers that separates China from the outside world is a desert called the _____. (**Gobi/Huang He**)
- Farmers grew millet and wheat along the _____, or Yellow River. (**Gobi/Huang He**)
- An indication of a social order was that the graves of many rich people had objects made of _____. (**oracle/jade**)
- A legendary emperor, Yu the Great, is believed to have founded the _____ dynasty around 2200 BC. (**Xia/Shang**)
- The _____ dynasty made many advances, including China's first writing system. (**Xia/Shang**)
- _____ bones were pieces of bone or shell that Chinese priests believed they could "read" to predict the future. (**Oracle/Jade**)
- The Shang social order had the ruler and nobles at the top and _____ in the middle. (**warrior leaders/artisans**)
- China's first writing system used _____, symbols that express words or ideas. (**pictographs/jade**)

DIRECTIONS Look at each set of three vocabulary terms following each number. On the line provided, write the letter of the term that does not relate to the others.

Part 4

- _____ 9. a. Chang Jiang b. jade c. Huang He
- _____ 10. a. Gobi b. Shang c. Xia