

# Heaven and Dynasties

How Chinese rulers explained changes in power

**SS.6.W.4.6** “Describe the concept of the Mandate of Heaven and its connection to the Zhou and later dynasties.”

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

## 1 READ AND MARK \_\_\_\_\_ Read it twice

**YOUR JOB** Underline the sentences that explain what a ruler had to do to keep the Mandate of Heaven.  
Circle the sentences that show how the Zhou or a later dynasty used the idea to claim power.

### Why Dynasties Changed

- ① In ancient China, many people believed that Heaven gave a ruler the right to govern. This idea was called the Mandate of Heaven. Heaven was not thought of as a person choosing a family forever. Instead, a ruler had to govern wisely, protect the people, and keep order. If a ruler became cruel or failed to meet people’s needs, people could believe that Heaven had withdrawn its support. The mandate explained why a new ruling family might take power.
- ② The Zhou dynasty used this belief when it replaced the Shang dynasty around 1046 BCE. Zhou leaders said that the last Shang king had ruled badly and had lost Heaven’s approval. They claimed Heaven had given the mandate to the Zhou instead. This claim helped the Zhou explain their victory as more than a military takeover. It also set a condition for Zhou rulers. They needed to rule well to keep the mandate. In this way, the idea connected a dynasty’s right to rule with its behavior.
- ③ Later dynasties used the Mandate of Heaven to support their own claims to power. For example, after the Qin dynasty fell, Han leaders could argue that the Qin had lost the mandate through harsh rule and disorder. Floods, famines, invasions, or rebellions were sometimes seen as signs that a dynasty had lost Heaven’s favor. These events did not prove the mandate had changed. Instead, rulers and challengers used the idea to explain change and persuade people that a new dynasty should rule.

## 2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE Use the passage

1 What was the Mandate of Heaven?

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2 How did Zhou leaders use the Mandate of Heaven after replacing the Shang dynasty?

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3 How could Han leaders use the Mandate of Heaven after the Qin dynasty fell?

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4 Name two events people sometimes saw as signs that a dynasty had lost Heaven's favor. Why did those events not prove the mandate had changed?

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## 3 YOUR TURN Your own words

Imagine that the River dynasty has high taxes, food shortages, and a revolt. Write three sentences explaining how a challenger could use the Mandate of Heaven to argue for a new dynasty. Include two details from the situation and explain that they are signs, not proof.

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**PART 1 • READ AND MARK**

Underline the sentences that explain what a ruler had to do to keep the Mandate of Heaven. Circle the sentences that show how the Zhou or a later dynasty used the idea to claim power. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

**PART 2 • ANSWERS**

| # | QUESTION                                                                                                                                      | ANSWER                                                                                                                                                              |
|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | What was the Mandate of Heaven?                                                                                                               | <b>It was the belief that Heaven gave a ruler the right to govern, but could withdraw that support.</b>                                                             |
| 2 | How did Zhou leaders use the Mandate of Heaven after replacing the Shang dynasty?                                                             | <b>They said the last Shang king had ruled badly, lost Heaven's approval, and that Heaven gave the mandate to the Zhou.</b>                                         |
| 3 | How could Han leaders use the Mandate of Heaven after the Qin dynasty fell?                                                                   | <b>They could argue that the Qin lost the mandate because of harsh rule and disorder, so a new dynasty should rule.</b>                                             |
| 4 | Name two events people sometimes saw as signs that a dynasty had lost Heaven's favor. Why did those events not prove the mandate had changed? | <b>Accept any two: floods, famines, invasions, or rebellions. The events were interpreted as signs, but they did not prove that Heaven had changed the mandate.</b> |

**PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)**

A challenger could say that Heaven withdrew its support from the River dynasty. The high taxes, food shortages, and revolt could be presented as signs that its rulers failed the people. These events would be interpreted as signs, not proof, that the challenger should receive the mandate.

Accept responses that explain the mandate as conditional on good rule and connect it to the Zhou, Han, or another later dynasty named in the passage. For the open response, accept reasonable claims that use the fictional evidence as interpreted signs rather than certain proof.