Empire on Horseback

How Mongol rule changed land-based empires across Asia

WH.3.7 "Describe and explain the rise, expansion, and decline of the Mongol Empire and its impact on the development and expansion of land-based empires throughout Asia."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB As you read, underline a cause of the Mongols' rise, circle two methods they used to expand, and put a box around one effect of their rule and one cause of their decline.

From Steppe Alliance to Divided Empire

1 In 1206, leaders of several steppe groups chose Temüjin as Genghis Khan. Before this, rival groups on the grasslands north of China often fought over animals and grazing land. Genghis Khan united many of them by rewarding skill and loyalty instead of only noble birth. He organized warriors into units that could move quickly and follow clear orders. Mounted archers could strike from a distance, retreat, and then attack again. This combination of political unity and flexible tactics gave the Mongols a powerful army. By Genghis Khan's death in 1227, Mongol forces had conquered lands in northern China and Central Asia.

2 After 1227, Genghis Khan's successors pushed farther into Asia. They brought siege engineers into their armies to take walled cities, while riders carried messages across long distances. Mongol leaders sometimes offered cities a chance to surrender; those that resisted could face devastating attacks. By the late 1200s, Mongol rulers controlled China, much of Central Asia, and Persia. Kublai Khan founded the Yuan dynasty in China in 1271, using Chinese officials alongside Mongol leaders to govern. Across these vast lands, protected roads and relay stations helped merchants and messengers travel, increasing trade and the movement of ideas and disease.

3 Conquest did not produce a single lasting government. After 1259, rival heirs competed for power, and the empire divided into khanates, including the Yuan in China and the Ilkhanate in Persia. Rulers in these regions used existing officials and tax systems, adapting Mongol rule to local conditions. Distance made it harder for any one leader to control the whole empire, while wars between khanates weakened their cooperation. In China, unrest and rebellion ended Yuan rule in 1368; the Ming dynasty then took power. Mongol conquests had expanded land-based empires across Asia, but those empires developed different governments and did not remain united.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Genghis Khan's choices about leadership and the army help the Mongols rise?

2. How did siege engineers and fast messengers help Mongol rulers expand their territory?

3. How did Mongol rulers adapt their governments after expanding into China and Persia?

4. Why did the Mongol Empire stop functioning as one united empire?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you rule one Mongol khanate. Write one paragraph of 80 to 110 words proposing two actions to hold your territory together. Explain how a Mongol strength and a problem described in the passage shape your plan, then predict one effect on connections across Asia.

ANSWER KEY

Empire on Horseback

HIGH SCHOOL · WH.3.7

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

As you read, underline a cause of the Mongols' rise, circle two methods they used to expand, and put a box around one effect of their rule and one cause of their decline. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Genghis Khan's choices about leadership and the army help the Mongols rise?	**He united steppe groups by rewarding skill and loyalty, then organized warriors into units that could move quickly and follow orders.**
2	How did siege engineers and fast messengers help Mongol rulers expand their territory?	**Siege engineers helped take walled cities, while riders carried messages that helped leaders coordinate across long distances.**
3	How did Mongol rulers adapt their governments after expanding into China and Persia?	**The Yuan used Chinese officials alongside Mongol leaders, while rulers in Persia used existing officials and tax systems.**
4	Why did the Mongol Empire stop functioning as one united empire?	**Rival heirs competed for power, dividing the empire into khanates. Great distances and wars between khanates made cooperation difficult.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

As the new ruler of a khanate, I would keep relay stations working so officials could report trouble quickly. This builds on the Mongols' skill at moving messages across long distances. I would also let local officials manage taxes, but require them to send regular reports to my court. Since distance made a single empire hard to control, local leaders need some authority. These steps might reduce disputes and make merchants more willing to travel between regions. Trade could carry more goods and ideas across Asia, even if the khanates remained separate.

Accept other passage-supported causes and effects. For Part 3, look for two distinct actions, a clear link to a Mongol strength and problem, and a plausible prediction about connections across Asia.