Power, Trade, Ideas

Tracing connections across ancient Indian history

AWH.C.8.3 "Describe important political, economic, and cultural aspects of Indian history, including the Maurya and Kushan Empires, the Gupta Empire, Golden Age of India, Indian mathematics, and maritime expansion."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one political action, circle one economic activity, and number two examples of cultural or intellectual change in the passage. Use your marks to trace how government, trade, and ideas were connected.

Messages on Stone, Ideas Across Seas

1 A stone pillar carrying an emperor's message and a coin stamped with a ruler's image reveal different ways to hold an empire together. In the third century BCE, the Maurya emperor Ashoka used rock and pillar edicts to announce his policies across a vast territory. After a brutal war in Kalinga, he promoted *dhamma*, principles such as nonviolence and respect for others, while officials helped govern the empire. Centuries later, Kushan rulers controlled routes linking northern India with Central Asia. Trade brought revenue and ideas. Under Kushan patronage, Buddhist communities flourished, and artists in Gandhara made human images of the Buddha.

2 During the Gupta Empire, from the fourth to sixth centuries CE, rulers relied on local officials and powerful landholders rather than governing every village directly. Farmers' taxes and trade helped fund courts that supported Sanskrit literature, learning, and religious art. The period is often called a Golden Age because of notable work in the arts and sciences, though its benefits were not shared equally. Indian mathematicians refined a decimal place-value system, making large numbers easier to calculate. Aryabhata, writing in 499 CE, found a close approximation of pi. Knowledge could travel with people and goods as well as through books.

3 Meanwhile, maritime expansion did not require a single Indian empire to command the seas. Sailors used seasonal monsoon winds to cross the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. Indian merchants exchanged cotton cloth and beads for goods such as Southeast Asian spices. Buddhist and Hindu ideas traveled with merchants and monks, and Southeast Asian communities adapted them in their own ways. Ports on the southern coast often lay beyond the reach of northern empires, yet linked inland producers to overseas buyers. These connections show how economic activity could spread cultural practices without conquest, while local rulers shaped trade by supporting ports and collecting duties.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Ashoka use political power to spread values across the Maurya Empire?

2. How did the Kushan Empire's location affect both its economy and its culture?

3. How did the Gupta economy support achievements associated with its Golden Age, and why does the passage qualify that name?

4. How did maritime trade connect economic activity with cultural change without requiring conquest?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write an 80 to 100 word museum label for an exhibit called “Connections Across Ancient India.” Describe a political choice, an economic connection, and a cultural or intellectual development using at least two empires from the passage and maritime expansion. Explain how at least two of these aspects influenced each other.

ANSWER KEY

Power, Trade, Ideas

HIGH SCHOOL · AWH.C.8.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one political action, circle one economic activity, and number two examples of cultural or intellectual change in the passage. Use your marks to trace how government, trade, and ideas were connected. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Ashoka use political power to spread values across the Maurya Empire?	**He issued rock and pillar edicts announcing policies, including dhamma, while officials helped govern his territory.**
2	How did the Kushan Empire's location affect both its economy and its culture?	**Its control of routes between northern India and Central Asia brought trade revenue and ideas. Under Kushan patronage, Buddhist communities and Gandharan art flourished.**
3	How did the Gupta economy support achievements associated with its Golden Age, and why does the passage qualify that name?	**Farmers' taxes and trade helped fund courts that supported literature, learning, and art. The name Golden Age does not mean everyone shared equally in those achievements.**
4	How did maritime trade connect economic activity with cultural change without requiring conquest?	**Merchants exchanged goods across the seas, while merchants and monks carried Buddhist and Hindu ideas. Southeast Asian communities adapted those ideas without being conquered by an Indian empire.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

An Ashokan edict and a Kushan coin tell two stories about power. Ashoka's officials carried his policies across the Maurya Empire, including his call for respect toward others. Kushan rulers controlled trade routes, gaining revenue while Buddhist communities and Gandharan artists flourished. Later, Gupta courts supported learning with resources from farming and trade. At sea, merchants carried cloth and beads to Southeast Asia, and religious ideas traveled alongside goods. These examples show that rulers could shape culture through policy or patronage, while trade connected people beyond the borders of any one empire.

Accept other passage-supported connections between political choices, economic activity, and cultural or intellectual change. For the museum label, check for 80 to 100 words, at least two empires, maritime expansion, and an explained relationship rather than a list.