

Genghis Khan Hero or Villain?

7th Grade World History

Ooltewah Middle School

Ooltewah, Tennessee

Jane Hill

Standards:

7.24 Describe and locate the Mongol conquest of China including Genghis Khan, Kublai Khan.

Class Periods & Time Needed:

Two 50-minute class periods

Objectives:

- Students will be able to determine the characteristics needed to rule a vast land.
- Students will be able to explain how the Mongol empire affected trade.
- Students will be able to explain changes that occurred in countries as a result of the Mongol conquest.

Narrative:

Start-Up Students will enter the class room to a Start-Up or Warm-Up question written on the board or typed on the overhead. Start-Up question reads: “Describe the basic survival skills learned at an early age and practiced by the Mongol people.” Students will quietly work to answer the start-up question on their own paper for 3 minutes. Possible answers to the question will be discussed with group partners (1 minute) then discussed with whole class (1-2 minutes).

Investigation Students should be placed into groups of 3-4. Each group will be given a packet containing the 4 resource materials about the history of Genghis Khan. The source materials have varying lengths and reading levels. Instructors have the choice to assign specific resource materials to specific students based on ability and need or they may allow student groups to choose their own article from the packet. Students will read their article and as they independently read they will identify items that are considered positive as well as negative deeds and accomplishments of the Mongolian leader Genghis Khan. These identified items will be written on their own paper into a T-bar graphic organizer with the titles Positives and Negatives in the form of bullet points. (20-30 minutes). Upon the completion of the individual T-bars, students will work in their 3-4 man groups to compile their individual items into group data on an anchor chart size T-bar using markers. (10-15 minutes) Groups will post their anchor chart T-bars around the classroom and each group will verbally share key items from their charts with the whole class. (15-20 minutes)

Evaluation:

Individually, students will be asked to consider both the positive and negative deeds and accomplishments of Genghis Khan listed on their groups anchor charts. They will use this information to assist them in the

answering of the key question: **Was Genghis Khan a Hero or a Villain?** Students will formulate an answer to this question in a detailed paragraph using information from the group anchor chart as supporting details. Students must use a minimum of 4 items to support their answer. (30 minutes)

Student Handouts:

Student Resource Articles:

1. 10 Things You May Not Know About Genghis Khan
2. 40 Facts about Genghis Khan from Owlcation.com
3. Genghis Khan Bio from history.com
4. Genghis Khan Encyclopedia Britannica

Student Worksheet:

Genghis Khan positive and negative T-bar worksheet

Resources:

Genghis Khan and the Mongol Empire Power Point Lesson

Genghis Khan – Mini Biography Video

<http://www.biography.com/video/genghis-khan-mini-biography-2165761046>

Genghis Khan's Personality source – New World Encyclopedia

Student Resource Articles I

Name: _____ Class: _____

1. **10 THINGS YOU MAY NOT KNOW ABOUT GENGHIS KHAN**

“GENGHIS” WASN’T HIS REAL NAME.

The man who would become the “Great Khan” of the Mongols was born along the banks of the Onon River sometime around 1162 and originally named Temujin, which means “of iron” or “blacksmith.” He didn’t get the honorific name “Genghis Kahn” until 1206, when he was proclaimed leader of the Mongols at a tribal meeting known as a “kurultai.” While “Khan” is a traditional title meaning “leader” or “ruler,” historians are still unsure of the origins of “Genghis.” It may have may have meant “ocean” or “just,” but in context it is usually translated as “supreme ruler” or “universal ruler.”

HE HAD A ROUGH CHILDHOOD.

From an early age, Genghis was forced to contend with the brutality of life on the Mongolian Steppe. Rival Tatars poisoned his father when he was only nine, and his own tribe later expelled his family and left his mother to raise her seven children alone. Genghis grew up hunting and foraging to survive, and as an adolescent he may have even murdered his own half-brother in a dispute over food. During his teenage years, rival clans abducted both he and his young wife, and Genghis spent time as a slave before making a daring escape. Despite all these hardships, by his early 20s he had established himself as a formidable warrior and leader. After amassing an army of supporters, he began forging alliances with the heads of important tribes. By 1206, he had successfully consolidated the steppe confederations under his banner and began to turn his attention to outside conquest.

THERE IS NO DEFINITIVE RECORD OF WHAT HE LOOKED LIKE.

For such an influential figure, very little is known about Genghis Kahn’s personal life or even his physical appearance. No contemporary portraits or sculptures of him have survived, and what little information historians do have is often contradictory or unreliable. Most accounts describe him as tall and strong with a flowing mane of hair and a long, bushy beard. Perhaps the most

surprising description comes courtesy of the 14th century Persian chronicler Rashid al-Din, who claimed Genghis had red hair and green eyes. Al-Din's account is questionable—he never met the Khan in person—but these striking features were not unheard of among the ethnically diverse Mongols.

SOME OF HIS MOST TRUSTED GENERALS WERE FORMER ENEMIES.

The Great Khan had a keen eye for talent, and he usually promoted his officers on skill and experience rather than class, ancestry or even past allegiances. One famous example of this belief in meritocracy came during a 1201 battle against the rival Taijut tribe, when Genghis was nearly killed after his horse was shot out from under him with an arrow. When he later addressed the Taijut prisoners and demanded to know who was responsible, one soldier bravely stood up and admitted to being the shooter. Stirred by the archer's boldness, Genghis made him an officer in his army and later nicknamed him "Jebe," or "arrow," in honor of their first meeting on the battlefield. Along with the famed general Subutai, Jebe would go on to become one of the Mongols' greatest field commanders during their conquests in Asia and Europe.

HE RARELY LEFT A SCORE UNSETTLED.

Genghis Khan often gave other kingdoms a chance to peacefully submit to Mongol rule, but he didn't hesitate to bring down the sword on any society that resisted. One of his most famous campaigns of revenge came in 1219, after the Shah of the Khwarezmid Empire broke a treaty with the Mongols. Genghis had offered the Shah a valuable trade agreement to exchange goods along the Silk Road, but when his first emissaries were murdered, the enraged Khan responded by unleashing the full force of his Mongol hordes on the Khwarezmid territories in Persia. The subsequent war left millions dead and the Shah's empire in utter ruin, but the Khan didn't stop there. He followed up on his victory by returning east and waging war on the Tanguts of Xi Xia, a group of Mongol subjects who had refused his order to provide troops for his invasion of Khwarizm. After routing the Tangut forces and sacking their capital, the Great Khan ordered the execution of the entire Tangut royal family as punishment for their defiance.

HE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATHS OF AS MANY AS 40 MILLION PEOPLE.

While it's impossible to know for sure how many people perished during the Mongol conquests, many historians put the number at somewhere around 40 million. Censuses from the Middle Ages show that the population of China plummeted by tens of millions during the Khan's lifetime, and scholars estimate that he may have killed a full three-fourths of modern-day Iran's population during his war with the Khwarezmid Empire. All told, the Mongols' attacks may have reduced the entire world population by as much as 11 percent.

HE WAS TOLERANT OF DIFFERENT RELIGIONS.

Unlike many empire builders, Genghis Khan embraced the diversity of his newly conquered territories. He passed laws declaring religious freedom for all and even granted tax exemptions to places of worship. This tolerance had a political side—the Khan knew that happy subjects were less likely to rebel—but the Mongols also had an exceptionally liberal attitude towards religion. While Genghis and many others subscribed to a shamanistic belief system that revered the spirits of the sky, winds and mountains, the Steppe peoples were a diverse bunch that included Nestorian Christians, Buddhists, Muslims and other animistic traditions. The Great Khan also had a personal interest in spirituality. He was known to pray in his tent for multiple days before important campaigns, and he often met with different religious leaders to discuss the details of their faiths. In his old age, he even summoned the Taoist leader Qiu Chuji to his camp, and the pair supposedly had long conversations on immortality and philosophy.

HE CREATED ONE OF THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL POSTAL SYSTEMS.

Along with the bow and the horse, the Mongols most potent weapon may have been their vast communication network. One of his earliest decrees as Khan involved the formation of a mounted courier service known as the "Yam." This medieval express consisted of a well-organized series of post houses and way stations strung out across the whole of the Empire. By stopping to rest or take on a fresh mount every few miles, official riders could often travel as far as 200 miles a day. The system allowed goods and information to travel with unprecedented speed, but it also acted as the eyes and ears of the Khan. Thanks to the Yam, he could easily keep abreast of military and political developments and maintain contact with his extensive network of spies and scouts. The Yam also helped protect foreign dignitaries and merchants during their travels. In later years, the service was famously used by the likes of Marco Polo and John of Plano Carpini.

NO ONE KNOWS HOW HE DIED OR WHERE HE IS BURIED.

Of all the enigmas surrounding the Khan's life, perhaps the most famous concerns how it ended. The traditional narrative says he died in 1227 from injuries sustained in a fall from a horse, but other sources list everything from malaria to an arrow wound in the knee. One of the more questionable accounts even claims he was murdered while trying to force himself on a Chinese princess. However he died, the Khan took great pains to keep his final resting place a secret. According to legend, his funeral procession slaughtered everyone they came in contact with during their journey and then repeatedly rode horses over his grave to help conceal it. The tomb is most likely on or around a Mongolian mountain called Burkhan Khaldun, but to this day its precise location is unknown.

THE SOVIETS TRIED TO SNUFF OUT HIS MEMORY IN MONGOLIA.

Genghis Khan is now seen as a national hero and founding father of Mongolia, but during the era of Soviet rule in the 20th century, the mere mention of his name was banned. Hoping to stamp out all traces of Mongolian nationalism, the Soviets tried to suppress the Khan's memory by removing his story from school textbooks and forbidding people from making pilgrimages to his birthplace in Khentii. Genghis Khan was eventually restored to Mongolian history after the country won independence in the early 1990s, and he's since become a recurring motif in art and popular culture. The Great Khan lends his name to the nation's main airport in the city of Ulan Bator, and his portrait even appears on Mongolian currency.

<http://www.history.com/news/history-lists/10-things-you-may-not-know-about-genghis-kha>

Student Resource Articles II

Name: _____ Class: _____

2. 40 Facts about Genghis Khan

Genghis Khan is a name that resonates with all who have heard of his harrowing exploits. History books portray him as a brutal emperor who massacred millions of Asian and Eastern European people. However, he also practiced religious and racial tolerance, and his Mongolian Empire valued the leadership of women. Khan also brought law and civilization to Mongolia and is regarded as a hero in his native land.

So who was the real Genghis Khan? Western impressions are heavily influenced by negative Persian accounts, whereas Eastern impressions vary. For a balanced perspective, the following list of 40 facts explores the full story of this fascinating historical figure.

A Portrait of Genghis Khan



1. Genghis Khan was born in Delüün Boldog in 1162. He died in 1227 at the age of 65. According to legend, he was born with a blood clot in his clenched fist, foretelling his emergence as a great leader.
2. Khan was tall, had a long beard, and likely sported red hair and green eyes, although he would have looked oriental. This mixing of European and Asian characteristics was quite common in Mongolia at the time.
3. Khan founded the Mongol Empire when he united the tribes occupying the Mongol plains. These plains are situated between China and Russia in central Asia.
4. The Mongol Empire went on to become the largest contiguous empire in history, stretching from the Pacific Ocean to Eastern Europe.
5. As well as modern day Mongolia, Khan's empire included most of China, Korea, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Georgia, Turkmenistan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and some parts of Russia.
6. Genghis Khan believed the strength of a man was defined by the children he left behind. He had thousands of women within his harem and fathered children with many of them.
7. Around 8% of men from Asia are his descendants. This Mongol lineage is known for men because the common DNA is within the Y-chromosome.
8. Khan's armies may have slaughtered more people than Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler's combined. His military campaigns sometimes involved eliminating an entire civilian population. As many as 40 million people were killed under his rule.
9. On Genghis Khan's order, he was buried in an unmarked grave at an unknown location in Mongolia. In order to conceal the location, his funeral escort executed everyone in their path.
10. According to legend, Khan requested that a river be diverted over his grave so that he would never be disturbed. This followed the custom of burial for ancient leaders such as Gilgamesh and Attila the Hun.
11. Surprisingly, Khan promoted religious tolerance and was interested in the philosophies of other cultures. He studied Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, and Christianity. When he attempted to befriend Persia, he sent a Muslim emissary.
12. Genghis Khan also supported ethnic diversity within his empire, allowing people from other cultures to administer his cities. The Mongolians lacked experience for this task, given their nomadic roots.
13. Women were also well respected in the Mongolian Empire, with Töregene Khatun ruling as regent for 5 years after the death of Genghis' son, Ögedei.
14. Genghis Khan modernized Mongolian culture by adopting the Uyghur script as a writing system and by creating the Yassa code of law.

15. Before he united Mongolia, the plains were occupied by nomadic tribes including the Tatars, Keraites, Mongols, Merkits, and Naimans. Khan belonged to one of the Mongol tribes. The Chinese Jin dynasty used to periodically switch their support between the tribes to ensure that none attained superiority. This made the Jin dynasty one of Khan's first targets.

16. Genghis Khan's birth name was Temujin, which was the name of a powerful warlord defeated by his chieftain father, Yesugei.

17. When Temujin was only 9 years old, Yesugei arranged for him to stay with Börte, Temujin's future wife. She was the daughter of a neighboring chieftain.

18. Yesugei was poisoned by the Tatars, forcing Temujin to return home to claim leadership. However, he was outcast and forced to live in squalor for a number of years with his mother and brothers.

19. At the age of 10, he killed one of his half-brothers in a fight over hunting spoils.

20. At the age of 15, he was enslaved by a neighboring Mongol tribe but escaped with the help of a guard. This enhanced his reputation and gained him valuable allies.

21. At 16, he married Börte and allied with her Mongol tribe. As was tradition, he took numerous other wives during his life, but Börte was his only Empress.

22. When Börte was kidnapped by the Merkits, Temujin rescued her with the help of the Kerait tribe (who were allied with his father) and another Mongol tribe led by Jamukha.

23. Eight months after Börte's capture, she gave birth to her first son, Jochi. This led to questions about the paternity and a later challenge from Khan's other sons.

24. With the Mongol tribes united and the Merkit tribe defeated, Temujin found himself at war with his previous allies, the Keraites. After defeating them, he destroyed the Naimans. In each case he was successful in convincing a greater number of tribes to become his allies. He was also helped by the alliance of the formidable general, Subutai.

25. Temujin became ruler, or 'Khan', of the united Mongolian tribes around 1206 and adopted the name Genghis.

26. The name Genghis likely comes from the word Jenggis, meaning 'right, just, and true,' though it could also come from the word Tenggis, meaning 'ocean' and 'wide-spreading.'

27. Khan had four sons in total: Jochi, Chagatai, Ögedei, and Tolui.

28. He assigned his son, Ögedei Khan, as his successor because Ögedei had no quarrel with Genghis' other sons.

29. Khan valued loyalty and brotherhood and promoted his generals on the basis of merit rather than noble standing. This system of meritocracy contributed greatly to the success of his armies. In the early years, he allowed captured soldiers to join his army, growing his forces with each victory.

30. He was a master tactician and organizer, employing novel and sometimes brutal methods. As well as forging alliances where possible, his military meritocracy used siege warfare, spy networks, and supply routes with way-stations to aid the communication of covert intelligence.

31. On the battlefield, Khan's army used cavalry charges, 'feigned retreats' (before ambush), pincer assaults, and prisoners as human shields to achieve victory. He also liked to foster discord in enemy countries before an assault, inciting revolution or civil war.

32. Khan forced the surrender of Xia China in 1209 after correctly predicting that Jin China would not aid them. He then defeated the Jin dynasty in 1215 by gathering intelligence about the location of their army.

33. He turned west and defeated the Kaira-Khitan Khanate in 1218 by using a small force to incite a revolution within the country.

34. The Persian Khwarezmid Empire offended Genghis Khan by beheading his messenger and looting his trade caravan. The insult led to a huge Mongol invasion by 200,000 men. The Persians were crushed by the Mongol's superior tactics in 1222. The civilian population were decimated with as many as 90% killed; though skilled workers were sent back to Mongolia.

35. Khan's army split for the journey home. Generals Subutai and Jebe went north to conquer large swathes of Russia and the Ukraine, while Khan ploughed through Afghanistan and Northern India in the south.

36. During this time, the Xia and Jin had allied to resist Mongolian rule. In his final military victory, Khan returned and defeated them both in 1226. To prevent further betrayal, he had the Chinese royal family executed.

37. Genghis Khan died in 1227. According to legend, a Chinese princess castrated him with a concealed dagger, leading to his death. This was said to be an act of revenge for the death of her family and a way to prevent him from raping her.

38. A more likely theory about his death is that he was thrown from his horse and died from his injuries. Another theory claims he died from pneumonia and another suggests he was killed in his final battle with the Chinese.

39. To avoid conflict among his sons, he divided his empire among them in his will. The new Khan, Ögedei, expanded the Mongolian Empire further.

40. Today, Genghis Khan is very popular in Mongolia, with his face appearing on bank-notes and a number of consumer products. He is regarded as the father of the Mongols.

Source: www.Owlcation.com

Student Resource Articles III

Name: _____ Class: _____

3. GENGHIS KHAN BIO

INTRODUCTION

Mongol leader Genghis Khan (1162-1227) rose from humble beginnings to establish the largest land empire in history. After uniting the nomadic tribes of the Mongolian plateau, he conquered huge chunks of central Asia and China. His descendents expanded the empire even further, advancing to such far-off places as Poland, Vietnam, Syria and Korea. At their peak, the Mongols controlled between 11 and 12 million contiguous square miles, an area about the size of Africa. Many people were slaughtered in the course of Genghis Khan's invasions, but he also granted religious freedom to his subjects, abolished torture, encouraged trade and created the first international postal system. Genghis Khan died in 1227 during a military campaign against the Chinese kingdom of Xi Xia. His final resting place remains unknown.

GENGHIS KHAN: THE EARLY YEARS

Temujin, later Genghis Khan, was born around 1162 near the border between modern Mongolia and Siberia. Legend holds that he came into the world clutching a blood clot in his right hand. His mother had been kidnapped by his father and forced into marriage. At that time, dozens of nomadic tribes on the central Asian steppe were constantly fighting and stealing from each other, and life for Temujin was violent and unpredictable. Before he turned 10, his father was poisoned to death by an enemy clan. Temujin's own clan then deserted him, his mother and his six siblings in order to avoid having to feed them.

DID YOU KNOW?

Mongol leader Genghis Khan never allowed anyone to paint his portrait, sculpt his image or engrave his likeness on a coin. The first images of him appeared after his death.

Shortly thereafter, Temujin killed his older half-brother and took over as head of the poverty-stricken household. At one point, he was captured and enslaved by the clan that had abandoned him, but he was eventually able to escape. In 1178 Temujin married Borte, with whom he would have four sons and an unknown number of daughters. He launched a daring rescue of Borte after she too was kidnapped, and he soon began making alliances, building a reputation as a warrior and attracting a growing number of followers. Most of what we know about Genghis Khan's childhood comes from "The Secret History of the Mongols," the oldest known work of Mongolian history and literature, which was written soon after his death.

GENGHIS KHAN UNITES THE MONGOLS

Going against custom, Temujin put competent allies rather than relatives in key positions and executed the leaders of enemy tribes while incorporating the remaining members into his clan. He ordered that all looting wait until after a complete victory had been won, and he organized his warriors into units of 10 without regard to kin. Though Temujin was an animist, his followers included Christians, Muslims and Buddhists. By 1205 he had vanquished all rivals, including his former best friend Jamuka. The following year, he called a meeting of representatives from every part of the territory and established a nation similar in size to modern Mongolia. He was also proclaimed Chinggis Khan, which roughly translates to "Universal Ruler," a name that became known in the West as Genghis Khan.

GENGHIS KHAN ESTABLISHES AN EMPIRE

Having united the steppe tribes, Genghis Khan ruled over some 1 million people. In order to suppress the traditional causes of tribal warfare, he abolished inherited aristocratic titles. He also forbade the selling and kidnapping of women, banned the enslavement of any Mongol and made livestock theft punishable by death. Moreover, Genghis Khan ordered the adoption of a writing system, conducted a regular census, granted diplomatic immunity to foreign ambassadors and allowed freedom of religion well before that idea caught on elsewhere.

Genghis Khan's first campaign outside of Mongolia took place against the Xi Xia kingdom of northwestern China. After a series of raids, the Mongols launched a major initiative in 1209 that brought them to the doorstep of Yinchuan, the Xi Xia capital. Unlike other armies, the Mongols

traveled with no supply train other than a large reserve of horses. The army consisted almost entirely of cavalymen, who were expert riders and deadly with a bow and arrows. At Yinchuan, the Mongols deployed a false withdrawal—one of their signature tactics—and then initiated a siege. Though their attempt to flood the city failed, the Xi Xia ruler submitted and presented tribute.

The Mongols next attacked the Jin Dynasty of northern China, whose ruler had made the mistake of demanding Genghis Khan's submission. From 1211 to 1214, the outnumbered Mongols ravaged the countryside and sent refugees pouring into the cities. Food shortages became a problem, and the Jin army ended up killing tens of thousands of its own peasants. In 1214 the Mongols besieged the capital of Zhongdu (now Beijing), and the Jin ruler agreed to hand over large amounts of silk, silver, gold and horses. When the Jin ruler subsequently moved his court south to the city of Kaifeng, Genghis Khan took this as a breach of their agreement and, with the help of Jin deserters, sacked Zhongdu to the ground.

In 1219 Genghis Khan went to war against the Khwarezm Empire in present-day Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Iran. The sultan there had agreed to a trade treaty, but when the first caravan arrived its goods were stolen and its merchants were killed. The sultan then murdered some of Genghis Khan's ambassadors. Despite once again being outnumbered, the Mongol horde swept through one Khwarezm city after another, including Bukhara, Samarkand and Urgench. Skilled workers such as carpenters and jewelers were usually saved, while aristocrats and resisting soldiers were killed. Unskilled workers, meanwhile, were often used as human shields during the next assault. No one knows with any certainty how many people died during Genghis Khan's wars, in part because the Mongols propagated their vicious image as a way of spreading terror.

GENGHIS KHAN'S DEATH AND THE CONTINUATION OF THE EMPIRE

When Genghis Khan returned to Mongolia in 1225, he controlled a huge swath of territory from the Sea of Japan to the Caspian Sea. Nevertheless, he didn't rest for long before turning his attention back to the Xi Xia kingdom, which had refused to contribute troops to the Khwarezm invasion. In early 1227 a horse threw Genghis Khan to the ground, causing internal injuries. He

pressed on with the campaign, but his health never recovered. He died on August 18, 1227, just before the Xi Xia were crushed.

Genghis Khan conquered more than twice as much land as any other person in history, bringing Eastern and Western civilizations into contact in the process. His descendants, including Ogodei and Khubilai, were also prolific conquerors, taking control of Eastern Europe, the Middle East and the rest of China, among other places. The Mongols even invaded Japan and Java before their empire broke apart in the 14th century. Genghis Khan's last ruling descendant was finally deposed in 1920.

<http://www.history.com/topics/genghis-khan>

Student Resource Articles IV

Name: _____ Class: _____

4. Genghis Khan

Genghis Khan, Genghis also spelled Chinggis, Chingis, Jenghiz, or Jinghis, original name Temüjin, also spelled Temuchin (born 1162, near [Lake Baikal](#), [Mongolia](#)—died [August 18, 1227](#)), Mongolian warrior-ruler, one of the most famous conquerors of history, who consolidated tribes into a unified Mongolia and then extended his empire across Asia to the [Adriatic Sea](#).

Genghis Khan was a warrior and ruler of genius who, starting from obscure and insignificant beginnings, brought all the [nomadic](#) tribes of Mongolia under the rule of himself and his family in a rigidly [disciplined](#) military [state](#). He then turned his attention toward the settled peoples beyond the borders of his nomadic realm and began the series of campaigns of plunder and conquest that eventually carried the [Mongol](#) armies as far as the Adriatic Sea in one direction and the Pacific coast of [China](#) in the other, leading to the establishment of the great Mongol Empire.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

With the exception of the saga-like *Secret History of the Mongols* (1240?), only non-Mongol sources provide near-contemporary information about the life of Genghis Khan. Almost all writers, even those who were in the Mongol service, have dwelt on the enormous destruction wrought by the Mongol invasions. One Arab historian openly expressed his horror at the recollection of them. Beyond the reach of the Mongols and relying on second-hand information, the 13th-century chronicler [Matthew Paris](#) called them a “detestable nation of Satan that poured out like devils from Tartarus so that they are rightly called Tartars.” He was making a play on words with the classical word Tartarus (Hell) and the ancient tribal name of [Tatar](#) borne by some of the nomads, but his account catches the terror that the Mongols evoked. As the founder of the Mongol nation, the organizer of the Mongol armies, and the genius behind their campaigns, Genghis Khan must share the reputation of his people, even though his generals were frequently operating on their own, far from direct supervision. Nevertheless, it would be mistaken to see the Mongol campaigns as haphazard incursions by bands of marauding savages. Nor is it true, as some have supposed, that these campaigns were somehow brought about by a progressive desiccation of Inner Asia that compelled the nomads to look for new pastures. Nor, again, were

the Mongol invasions a unique event. Genghis Khan was neither the first nor the last nomadic conqueror to burst out of the steppe and terrorize the settled [periphery](#) of Eurasia. His campaigns were merely larger in scale, more successful, and more lasting in effect than those of other leaders. They impinged more violently upon those sedentary peoples who had the habit of recording events in writing, and they affected a greater part of the Eurasian continent and a variety of different societies.

Two societies were in constant contact, two societies that were mutually hostile, if only because of their diametrically opposed ways of life, and yet these societies were interdependent. The nomads needed some of the staple products of the south and coveted its luxuries. These could be had by trade, by taxing [transient](#) caravans, or by armed raids. The settled peoples of [China](#) needed the products of the steppe to a lesser extent, but they could not ignore the presence of the nomadic barbarians and were forever preoccupied with resisting encroachment by one means or another. A strong [dynasty](#), such as the 17th-century Manchu, could extend its military power directly over all Inner Asia. At other times the Chinese would have to play off one set of barbarians against another, transferring their support and juggling their alliances so as to prevent any one tribe from becoming too strong.

The cycle of dynastic strength and weakness in China was accompanied by another cycle, that of unity and fragmentation amongst the peoples of the steppe. At the peak of their power, a nomadic tribe under a determined leader could subjugate the other tribes to its will and, if the situation in China was one of weakness, might extend its power well beyond the steppe. In the end this extension of nomadic power over the incompatible, sedentary [culture](#) of the south brought its own [nemesis](#). The nomads lost their traditional basis of superiority—that lightning mobility that required little in the way of supply and fodder—and were swallowed up by the Chinese they had conquered. The cycle would then be resumed; a powerful China would reemerge, and disarray and petty squabbling among [ephemeral](#) chieftains would be the new pattern of life among the nomads. The history of the Mongol conquests illustrates this analysis perfectly, and it is against this background of political contrasts and tensions that the life of Genghis Khan must be evaluated. His campaigns were not an inexplicable natural or even God-given [catastrophe](#) but the outcome of a set of circumstances manipulated by a soldier of ambition, determination, and genius. He found his tribal world ready for unification, at a time when China and other settled states were, for one reason or another, simultaneously in decline, and he exploited the situation.

EARLY STRUGGLES

Various dates are given for the birth of Temüjin (or Temuchin), as Genghis Khan was named—after a leader who was defeated by his father, Yesügei, when Temüjin was born. The chronology of Temüjin’s early life is uncertain. He may have been born in 1155, in 1162 (the date favoured today in Mongolia), or in 1167. According to [legend](#), his birth was [auspicious](#), because he came into the world holding a clot of blood in his hand. He is also said to have been of divine origin, his first ancestor having been a [gray wolf](#), “born with a destiny from heaven on high.” Yet his early years were anything but promising. When he was nine, Yesügei, a member of the royal Borjigin clan of the Mongols, was poisoned by a band of Tatars, another nomadic people, in continuance of an old feud.

With Yesügei dead, the remainder of the clan, led by the rival Taychiut family, abandoned his widow, Höelün, and her children, considering them too weak to exercise leadership and seizing the opportunity to usurp power. For a time the small family led a life of extreme poverty, eating roots and fish instead of the normal nomad diet of mutton and mare’s milk. Two [anecdotes](#) illustrate both Temüjin’s straitened circumstances and, more significantly, the power he already had of attracting supporters through sheer force of personality. Once he was captured by the Taychiut, who, rather than killing him, kept him around their camps, wearing a wooden collar. One night, when they were feasting, Temüjin, noticing that he was being ineptly guarded, knocked down the sentry with a blow from his wooden collar and fled. The Taychiut searched all night for him, and he was seen by one of their people, who, impressed by the fire in his eyes, did not denounce him but helped him escape at the risk of his own life. On another occasion horse thieves came and stole eight of the nine horses that the small family owned. Temüjin pursued them. On the way he stopped to ask a young stranger, called Bo’orchu, if he had seen the horses. Bo’orchu immediately left the milking he was engaged in, gave Temüjin a fresh horse, and set out with him to help recover the lost beasts. He refused any reward but, recognizing Temüjin’s authority, attached himself irrevocably to him as a [nökör](#), or free companion, abandoning his own family.

Temüjin and his family apparently preserved a considerable fund of [prestige](#) as members of the royal Borjigin clan, in spite of their rejection by it. Among other things, he was able to claim the wife to whom Yesügei had betrothed him just before his death. But the [Merkit](#) people, a tribe living in northern Mongolia, bore Temüjin a grudge, because Yesügei had stolen his own wife, Höelün, from one of their men, and in their turn they ravished Temüjin’s wife Börte. Temüjin

felt able to appeal to Toghril, [khan](#) of the Kereit tribe, with whom Yesügei had had the relationship of [anda](#), or sworn brother, and at that time the most powerful Mongol prince, for help in recovering Börte. He had had the foresight to rekindle this friendship by presenting Toghril with a sable skin, which he himself had received as a bridal gift. He seems to have had nothing else to offer; yet, in exchange, Toghril promised to reunite Temüjin's scattered people, and he is said to have redeemed his promise by furnishing 20,000 men and persuading Jamuka, a boyhood friend of Temüjin's, to supply an army as well. The contrast between Temüjin's destitution and the huge army furnished by his allies is hard to explain, and no authority other than the narrative of the *Secret History* is available.

UNIFICATION OF THE MONGOL NATION

The year 1206 was a turning point in the history of the Mongols and in world history: the moment when the Mongols were first ready to move out beyond the steppe. Mongolia itself took on a new shape. The petty tribal quarrels and raids were a thing of the past. Either the familiar tribe and clan names had fallen out of use or those bearing them were to be found, subsequently, scattered all over the Mongol world, testifying to the wreck of the traditional clan and tribe system. A unified Mongol nation came into existence as the personal creation of Genghis Khan and, through many [vicissitudes](#) (feudal disintegration, [incipient](#) retribalization, colonial occupation), has survived to the present day. Mongol ambitions looked beyond the steppe. Genghis Khan was ready to start on his great adventure of world conquest. The new nation was organized, above all, for war. Genghis Khan's troops were divided up on the decimal system, were rigidly disciplined, and were well equipped and supplied. The generals were his own sons or men he had selected, absolutely loyal to him.

Genghis Khan's military genius could adapt itself to rapidly changing circumstances. Initially his troops were exclusively [cavalry](#), riding the hardy, grass-fed Mongol pony that needed no fodder. With such an army, other nomads could be defeated, but cities could not be taken. Yet before long the Mongols were able to undertake the siege of large cities, using mangonels, catapults, ladders, burning oil, and so forth and even diverting rivers. It was only gradually, through contact with men from the more settled states, that Genghis Khan came to realize that there were more sophisticated ways of enjoying power than simply raiding, destroying, and plundering. It was a minister of the khan of the Naiman, the last important Mongol tribe to resist Genghis Khan, who taught him the uses of literacy and helped reduce the [Mongol language](#) to writing. The *Secret History* reports it was only after the war against the Muslim empire of [Khwarezm](#), in

the region of the **Amu Darya** (Oxus) and **Syr Darya** (Jaxartes), probably in late 1222, that Genghis Khan learned from Muslim advisers the “meaning and importance of towns.” And it was another adviser, formerly in the service of the Jin emperor, who explained to him the uses of peasants and craftsmen as producers of taxable goods. He had intended to turn the **cultivated** fields of northern China into grazing land for his horses.

The great conquests of the Mongols, which would transform them into a world power, were still to come. China was the main goal. Genghis Khan first secured his western flank by a tough campaign against the **Tangut** kingdom of **Xixia**, a northwestern border state of China, and then fell upon the Jin empire of northern China in 1211. In 1214 he allowed himself to be bought off, temporarily, with a huge amount of booty, but in 1215 operations were resumed, and **Beijing** was taken. Subsequently, the more systematic subjugation of northern China was in the hands of his general Muqali. Genghis Khan himself was compelled to turn aside from China and carry out the conquest of **Khwārezm**. This war was provoked by the governor of the city of Otrar, who massacred a caravan of Muslim merchants who were under Genghis Khan’s protection. The Khwārezm-Shāh refused satisfaction. War with Khwārezm would doubtless have come sooner or later, but now it could not be deferred. It was in this war that the Mongols earned their reputation for savagery and terror. City after city was stormed, the inhabitants massacred or forced to serve as advance troops for the Mongols against their own people. Fields and gardens were laid waste and irrigation works destroyed as Genghis Khan pursued his **implacable vengeance** against the royal house of Khwārezm. He finally withdrew in 1223 and did not lead his armies into war again until the final campaign against Xixia in 1226–27. He died on August 18, 1227.

ASSESSMENT

As far as can be judged from the **disparate** sources, Genghis Khan’s personality was a complex one. He had great physical strength, tenacity of purpose, and an unbreakable will. He was not obstinate and would listen to advice from others, including his wives and mother. He was flexible. He could deceive but was not petty. He had a sense of the value of loyalty, unlike Toghril or Jamuka. Enemies guilty of treachery toward their lords could expect short shrift from him, but he would exploit their treachery at the same time. He was religiously minded, carried along by his sense of a divine mission, and in moments of crisis he would reverently worship the Eternal Blue Heaven, the supreme deity of the Mongols. So much is true of his early life. The picture becomes less harmonious as he moves out of his familiar sphere and comes into contact with the strange, settled world beyond the steppe. At first he could not see beyond the immediate

gains to be got from massacre and rapine and, at times, was consumed by a passion for revenge. Yet all his life he could attract the loyalties of men willing to serve him, both fellow nomads and civilized men from the settled world. His fame could even persuade the aged Daoist sage [Changchun](#) (Qiu Chuji) to journey the length of Asia to discourse upon religious matters. He was above all adaptable, a man who could learn.

Organization, [discipline](#), mobility, and ruthlessness of purpose were the fundamental factors in his military successes. Massacres of defeated populations, with the resultant terror, were weapons he regularly used. His practice of summoning cities to surrender and of organizing the methodical slaughter of those who did not submit has been described as psychological warfare; but, although it was undoubtedly policy to sap resistance by fostering terror, massacre was used for its own sake. Mongol practice, especially in the war against Khwārezm, was to send agents to demoralize and divide the garrison and populace of an enemy city, mixing threats with promises. The Mongols' reputation for frightfulness often paralyzed their captives, who allowed themselves to be killed when resistance or flight was not impossible. Indeed, the Mongols were unaccountable. Resistance brought certain destruction, but at [Balkh](#), now in [Afghanistan](#), the population was slaughtered in spite of a prompt surrender, for tactical reasons.

The achievements of Genghis Khan were grandiose. He united all the nomadic tribes, and with numerically inferior armies he defeated great empires, such as Khwārezm and the even more powerful Jin state. Yet he did not exhaust his people. He chose his successor, his son [Ögödei](#), with great care, ensured that his other sons would obey Ögödei, and passed on to him an army and a state in full vigour. At the time of his death, Genghis Khan had conquered the land mass extending from Beijing to the [Caspian Sea](#), and his generals had raided [Persia](#) and Russia. His successors would extend their power over the whole of [China](#), Persia, and most of Russia. They did what he did not achieve and perhaps never really intended—that is, to weld their conquests into a tightly organized empire. The destruction brought about by Genghis Khan survives in popular memory, but far more significant, these conquests were but the first stage of the Mongol Empire, the greatest continental empire of [medieval](#) and modern times.

Charles R. Bawden

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Student Worksheet

Name: _____ Class: _____

Genghis Khan Hero or Villain T-bar Investigation Worksheet

Positives	Negatives

Resources

Name: _____ Class: _____

Genghis Khan's personality

Did you know?

Genghis Khan believed that Heaven had commissioned him to establish a world empire

Simplicity

It is not entirely clear what Genghis Khan's personality was truly like, but his personality and character were doubtlessly molded by the many hardships he faced when he was young, and in unifying the Mongol nation. Genghis appeared to fully embrace the Mongol people's [nomadic](#) way of life, and did not try to change their customs or beliefs. As he aged, he seemed to become increasingly aware of the consequences of numerous victories and expansion of the Mongol Empire, including the possibility that succeeding generations might choose to live a sedentary lifestyle. According to quotations attributed to him in his later years, he urged future leaders to follow the *Yasa*, and to refrain from surrounding themselves with wealth and pleasure. He was known to share his wealth with his people and awarded subjects who participated in campaigns handsomely.

Honesty and loyalty

He seemed to highly value honesty and loyalty from his subjects. Genghis put trust in his generals, such as Muqali, Jebe and Subudei, and gave them free rein in battles. He allowed them to make decisions on their own when they embarked on campaigns very far from the [Mongol Empire](#) capital Karakorum. An example of Genghis Khan's perception of loyalty is written, in *The Secret History of the Mongols*, that one of his main military generals, Jebe, had been his enemy. When Jebe was captured, he agreed to fight for Genghis if he spared his life or would die if that was what he wished. The man who became known as Genghis spared Jebe's life and made him part of his team.

Accounts of his life are marked by a series of betrayals and conspiracies. These include rifts with his early allies such as Jamuka and Wang Khan and problems with the most important shaman. At the end of his life, he reportedly was considering an attack against his son Jochi. There is little reason to believe all of these were genuine. This may suggest a degree of paranoia in Genghis Khan's personality based on his earlier experiences.

Genghis believed that Eternal Heaven, or *Tengri*, had commissioned him to establish a world empire. This explained his wrath towards those who resisted conquest; they were rebelling against heaven itself.^[11]

Spirituality

Toward the later part of his life, Genghis became interested in the ancient Buddhist and [Daoist](#) religions. The Daoist monk Ch'ang Ch'un, who rejected invitations from Sung and Jin leaders, traveled more than five thousand kilometers to meet Genghis close to the [Afghanistan](#) border. The first question Genghis asked him was if the monk had some secret medicine that could make

him immortal. The monk's negative answer disheartened Genghis, and he rapidly lost interest in the monk. He also passed a decree exempting all followers of Daoist religion from paying any taxes. This made the Daoists very powerful at the expense of Buddhists.

Genghis was, by and large, tolerant of the multiple religions he encountered during the conquests as long as the people were obedient. However, all of his campaigns caused wanton and deliberate destruction of places of worship. Religious groups were persecuted only if they resisted or opposed his empire.

Perceptions of Genghis Khan's legacy

Positive perception of Genghis Khan

Views of Genghis Khan range from very positive to very negative. He is especially highly regarded in [Mongolia](#). In addition to the pride Mongolians take in the memory of a once great empire, they remember Genghis for reinforcing many Mongol traditions and for providing stability for the Mongol nation at a time of great uncertainty as a result of both internal factors and outside influences. He also brought in cultural change and helped create a writing system for the Mongolian language based on existing Uyghur script.

Mongolian writers tend to gloss over his treatment of enemies. However, as de Hartog argues, Genghis Khan was not crueler—only more successful—than other rulers of the time. Following Mongolia's repudiation of communism in the early 1990s, Genghis became a symbol of the nation, which some call "Genghis Khan's Mongolia" or "Genghis' nation." Mongolians have given his name to many products, streets, buildings, and other places.

Genghis Khan is also counted as a “national hero” in China, presumably by including [Mongolia](#) within China's wider geo-political sphere, which Mongolians resent. Similarly, he is a heroic figure in [Turkey](#), while in such countries as [Persia](#) and [Hungary](#) Genghis and the Mongols are generally described as causing considerable damage and destruction.

Consequences of Mongol conquest



There are many differing views on the amount of destruction Genghis Khan and his armies caused. The peoples who suffered the most during Genghis Khan's conquests, like the Persians and the Han Chinese, usually stress the negative aspects of the conquest and some modern scholars argue that their [historians](#) exaggerate the numbers of deaths. However, such historians produce virtually all the documents available to modern scholars and it is hard to establish a firm basis for any alternative view. Certainly, his legacy includes incidents of mass slaughter. Yet, contrary to the popular European perception, it also includes unifying, under a stable and peaceful rule, a huge territory, in which merit could earn promotion and religious liberty was in the main upheld, at a time when such a thing was non-existent in Europe.

The vast spread of the Mongolian Empire no doubt is one of the significant contributing factors to the widespread distribution today of the Mongolian blue spot, a birthmark appearing on the buttocks or back of young children^[12] in what some have estimated to be more than two-thirds of the human population.