The Mongol Empire

Source: World History for Us All (Big Era 5); principal author – Dr. Anne Chapman; she has been a history education consultant to the College Board, the Educational Testing Service, and the National Center for History in the Schools.

Creating an Empire

If you were setting out on a career of conquest, aiming to create an empire, which of the following would you be least willing to do without? Most willing to do without?

- A larger army than that of the people you are planning to attack
- A better trained, more obedient army than that of your opponents
- Charismatic (inspired, forceful) leadership
- Ideological (religious or other) support for aggression
- A stronger economy or more wealth than your opponents have
- Technological superiority in military hardware
- Safe, fast supply lines to your homeland
- Current, detailed intelligence about your opponents
- First-rate communications within your own army
- Something not on this list --what?

What are the five most important factors in building a successful empire and why did you choose each one?

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)
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Use the readings posted on my school website to answer the following questions about the Mongols.

Student Handout 1.1 Guided Reading Questions –
What Were the Mongol People Like In the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries?

1. What can you infer about the economy, ideology, and technology of the Mongols from the descriptions given?

2. Which of the Mongols’ characteristics that are described would make them likely to set out on a career of conquest?

3. Which of their characteristics would be helpful to them during their career of conquest?

4. Which of the descriptions would you be most willing to accept as accurate? Which would you be least willing to accept as accurate? Why?

Student Handout 1.2 Guided Reading Questions –
What was the Mongol Leader, Chinggis Great Khan, Really Like?

5. What characteristics of Chinggis shown by the documents would have been particularly helpful to him in his career of conquest? If you had to choose three characteristics as the most helpful, which would they be? Why?

6. What characteristics of Chinggis shown by the documents would have been particularly helpful to him in governing his empire? If you had to choose three characteristics as most helpful, which would they be? Why?
7. Which of the items of information above about Chinggis’s character would you question as to accuracy, and why?

8. How would you explain variations in the descriptions of what Chinggis was like?

9. In what ways could Mongol ideas about women’s position in society help the Mongols’ career of conquest?

10. Would you agree with Chinggis’s idea that severity is good, because it leads to stable government? Why or why not? Did the idea apply more in Chinggis’s time and place than today? Why or why not?

11. Which of the accounts do you consider most reliable, and why?

Student Handout 1.3 Guided Reading Questions –
*How Did Chinggis Turn a Pastoral Nomadic Society Into an Efficient War Machine?*

12. What features of Mongol social organization and way of life favored their success in conquest? In what ways?

13. What features of Mongol social organization and ways of life would have favored successful government of conquered territories? In what ways?

14. What features of Mongol social organization and ways of life would have made for difficulties in conquest and in subsequent government of conquered territories?
15. What problems was Chinggis trying to solve by setting up his army the way he did?

16. What features of Mongol society favored the possibility of mobilizing a large proportion of the population for a war effort?

17. In what ways might the diversity and mixing that Chinggis favored have been an advantage, and in what ways a handicap in the conquests and the running of his empire?

Student Handout 1.4 Guided Reading Questions –
*What was it Like to Live in the Mongol Homeland?*

18. What problems of logistics and provisioning might a Mongol army numbering 100,000 to 120,000 mounted soldiers be likely to encounter? Note: The Persian historian Juvaini estimated that the daily food ration for a few thousand Mongols assembled for a council meeting was 2000 wagon-loads of fermented mares’ milk and wine, 300 horses or oxen, and 3000 sheep.

19. How might the Mongols have solved their provisioning problems in the various regions where they fought?

20. What was the potential environmental impact of their provisioning needs?

21. What part might the natural and physical environment likely have played in the Mongols’ success at conquest.
22. What part does the environment still play in military planning in the twenty-first century?

Student Handout 1.5 Guided Reading Questions –
*Mongol Technology: Highly Effective Low Tech*

23. What features of Mongol technology are likely to have contributed to the success of their empire-building and how?

24. To what extent, and in what ways, was the Mongols’ technology connected to their pastoral nomadic way of life?

25. What were the Mongols’ most significant technological strengths? What are your reasons for considering them “significant”?

26. Which three of the following did the Mongols need most when fighting other pastoral nomads, and which three did they need the most when fighting against a settled, agricultural state:

- Bows and arrows
- Lance, battle-axe, and spear
- Armor
- Communication equipment
- Catapults, battering rams, and other siege equipment
- Technical advisors
Student Handout 1.6 Guided Reading Questions –
Shamans, Heaven, and the Ideology of Conquest

27. Did ideology cause the Mongols to launch their conquests? How? In what sense are you using the word “cause”? On what evidence are you basing your answer?

28. What part did ideology play in the success of Mongol empire-building?

29. Which Mongol beliefs would be an advantage and which would be a disadvantage in governing their multi-ethnic empire? Explain in what ways each of the beliefs you mentioned would be an advantage or a disadvantage.

30. Based on the evidence you have, would you agree with the idea that the Mongols’ success was due to their enemies’ weaknesses rather than to their own strengths? Explain your answer.