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# Ancient China

*Mr. Donn and Maxie's Always Something You Can Use  
Series*

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## ANCIENT CHINA

### Introduction

**Subject:** Ancient China

**Level/Length:** This unit was written with sixth graders in mind, but can easily be adapted for grades 5–9. The unit is presented in eighteen sections including the final activity; some sections are mini-units and will take longer than one class period to complete. Lessons are based on a 55-minute class period or they can be adjusted to fit any time frame. As written, time frame needed to complete this unit: 5-6 weeks.

**Unit description:** This unit covers 11,000 years of ancient Chinese history (8000 years quite quickly) and explores the Xia, Shang, Chou/Zhou, Ch'in/Qin, Han, and T'ang Dynasties, along with beliefs, inventions and daily life. Activities are varied and include classifying, abstracting, map work, writing, reading, speaking, researching, interpreting, presenting, and other higher level thinking activities.

**Rationale:** In view of the latest Government guidelines on education with “no child left behind,” this unit was developed to meet standards applicable in most states. Lessons are designed to address various learning styles and can be adapted for *all* students' abilities.

## ANCIENT CHINA

### Setting up the Room

With this unit, there is little need to set up much of the room in advance. Travel poster or maps will brighten the room until student work is posted. Throughout the unit, the students will be creating several things to post on the classroom walls or bulletin boards including Dragon Timelines, Great Wall Graffiti, Poetry Kites and a Chinese Calendar.

We would encourage you to set up a word wall and something special above the door leading into your classroom.

#### WORD WALL

*Design:* This is consistent for all units, but each has its own look. We suggest the outside shape of a Chinese lantern or a section of the Great Wall. Place new words as you discover them in the unit on your word wall.

Once a week, have the kids pick a word, any word, define it, and use it in a sentence. Use the word wall to fill in short periods of time throughout the unit. Direct the kids to select any five words from the word wall, and create a news article. Or select any six words to form a group and be able to define the group. (Examples: buildings, words that begin with *a*.)

**DOOR INTO THE CLASSROOM:** On the hallway side of the door into your classroom, use construction paper to frame your doorway, creating an entrance to ancient China. We suggest the use of a Chinese roof design posted on the wall over your doorway. This design is uniquely Chinese. Chinese roofs have an “A” design with the bottom of the “A” flipped up. The ancient Chinese believed that if they constructed their roofs with the base flipped up that no evil spirits could land on their roof.

## SECTION ONE: Introduction, Map

Introduction – Mulan

China's Natural Barriers

Map

Time frame: 2 class periods (55 minutes each)

### Preparation:

- Daily Question. Use overhead or write question on the chalkboard.  
(This is a student writing activity. Students are to write answers to daily questions in their notebooks upon arrival.)
- Disney Movie *Mulan*
- VHS or DVD player
- Reproducibles:  
*Story of Mulan*  
*China's Natural Barriers*  
*Map of China*

**Daily Question:** What is a natural barrier?

**Open Class:** Welcome honorable students to ancient China! (Bow a few times.)

Today we begin our study of Ancient China.

**Background Activity:** Mulan

Introduce China with the story of the real Mulan.

- Say: Mulan is the story of a girl's love for her father, a girl willing to risk her life and to meet life's challenges with courage and humor.
- Read the story aloud to your class. *Story of Mulan*

Then show clips of *Mulan* by Disney.

Include

- Ancestor Worship
- Dragons
- Emperors
- Great Wall
- Bureaucracy

**Activity: China's Natural Barriers**

*Say:* Many people, besides the Huns from the north, tried to conquer China. The ancient Chinese built the Great Wall to protect themselves. We will learn more about the Great Wall as we continue our study of ancient China. Certainly, the Great Wall helped to keep out invaders. But what truly helped to keep China isolated from the rest of the early world was their geography.

*Ask:* What is a natural barrier? Does anyone remember? (Get an answer.) China had lots of natural barriers.

Group Activity: Give each group one of China's natural barriers to research using materials you provide and/or their textbook. We have also included a sheet of information in this unit, if you choose to use it. Have each group report to the class on their assigned barrier. The barriers that ring China include: Himalayan Mountains, Mount Everest, Gobi Desert, Taklamakan Desert (Sea of Death), plus whatever other geographic features you would like to include under China's natural barriers.

**Class Activity: Map of Ancient China**

Hand out map of ancient China. Put a copy on the overhead. Add major map labels together. Check to make sure everyone is adding these on his or her map. If time permits, allow the students to color their maps, to finish your class time period.

**Close Class:** Honorable students, thank you for coming. (Bow several times.)

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_  
DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
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PERIOD: \_\_\_\_\_

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### China's Natural Barriers

Ancient China was isolated from much of the ancient world because of its geography. It wasn't until around 200 B.C.E. that China was aware of any of the other civilizations around the Mediterranean, like the ancient Roman and the ancient Greeks. For thousands of years, the ancient Chinese thought they were pretty much alone on the planet, except for the barbarians to the north, the Mongols. China's natural barriers to the west, south and east helped to protect the ancient Chinese people from invasion.

#### Dangerous Deserts:

- Gobi Desert: The Gobi Desert is one of the driest deserts in the world. Compared to the horrors of the Taklamakan Desert, however, the Gobi is a paradise. In the Gobi, there is at least the hope of water, although water (an oasis) is very rare.
- Taklamakan Desert: This desert is called the Sea of Death from which no one escapes. The Taklamakan is the second largest desert in the world. It offers poisonous snakes, frequent sandstorms, boiling days, freezing nights, and intense water shortage. A very brave explorer did cross this desert on foot relatively recently. In 1998, just a few years ago, Carla Perrotti, a 51-year-old Italian woman, crossed this desert. She walked over 200 miles in 24 days, alone.

#### Numerous Mountains: China has some of the highest mountain ranges in the world.

- Himalayas: The Himalayas are one of the mountain ranges in China. These rugged mountains are home to the ten highest mountain peaks in the world.
- Mount Everest is the highest mountain in the world. It is actually in Tibet, not in China, and is located close to the border between these two countries.

#### Vast Seas:

- China Sea
- Yellow Sea
- Pacific Ocean

### **Two Major River Systems: “The Great Sorrow”**

**All the rivers of ancient China were called The Great Sorrow because during the flood season all the towns along the river would be destroyed. Each year, they rebuilt.**

- The Huang He (Yellow River) is about 3000 miles long, about the distance from New York to California. The river ends at the Yellow Sea. Civilization in ancient China began along this river because the soil is fertile.
- Yangtze (Long River) is the third longest river in the world. It’s nearly 4000 miles long. It also ends at the Yellow Sea. At its lowest, the Yangtze is about 25 feet deep. When the snow melts, it gets about 160 feet deep. This river flows through some of China’s best farmland. People have always built their homes and towns high above the river, because of annual flooding.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_  
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### MAP OF CHINA

China (largest country in Asia)  
Asia (largest of the 7 continent)  
Mongolia  
Gobi Desert  
Taklamakan Desert (Sea of Death, second largest desert in the world)  
Himalayas (this mountain range includes the ten highest mountain peaks in the world)  
Hwang He (Yellow River)  
Yangtze River (Long River, the third longest river in the world)  
Yellow Sea  
China Sea  
Mount Everest (highest mountain in the world, border of China and Nepal)





NAME: \_\_\_\_\_  
DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
CLASS: \_\_\_\_\_  
PERIOD: \_\_\_\_\_

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## The True Story of Mulan

In Han times, or perhaps Sui times, but certainly before T'ang times, there lived a young girl named Mulan. She might be a girl, but she was the daughter of a general. Her father had taught her to use a sword and ride a horse. Oh why oh why had she not been born a boy, Mulan thought angrily to herself.

Mulan sighed heavily. Everywhere she looked in the village, she saw posted a scroll with a list of names. On each list was her father's name. That made Mulan very sad. Faced with the threat of war, each family had to send one man to strengthen the army. In Mulan's family, the man chosen to go was her father.

Mulan's father was a retired and famous general. He was too old to fight, but too honorable not to go. Mulan had no older brother to send in his place. Her younger brother was a wonderful boy, brave and strong, but he was much too young to be selected.

If only she were a boy, Mulan thought to herself. It would be so simple. Girls did not fight in wars. An idea grew in Mulan's mind. Could she do it? She had to. Mulan knew her father would die if he went to war again. That day, she bought a horse.

The next morning, Mulan stole her father's armor and crept silently from home, disguised as a man. She reported for duty to the military leader. The leader had never met her father. Besides, he had his hands full, marching the men from all the villages to the camp.

Mulan fought for many years, some say as many as ten years. In all that time, no one knew she was not a man. When the war ended, Mulan was called before the emperor to receive a special award for her incredible courage. The emperor offered Mulan a job that would make her rich beyond her dreams. But Mulan wished to return home to her family. She asked for a good horse instead which was immediately granted.

Her family was so happy to see her. Her father was frail, but alive. Her brother had grown into a wonderful young man. Without regret, Mulan gave her warrior's clothes to her little brother, and dressed in the clothes of a woman. She wrapped her hair in the style of the day. She added rouge to her cheeks. When she joined her family to watch the sun set, the warrior Mulan had transformed into a beautiful young woman.

Not long after, some of her friends, who had served with Mulan, came to visit. Their eyes grew large when they saw the beautiful woman before them. Only then did her story spread across China, to inspire young girls everywhere. If you love enough and have courage enough, you can accomplish anything, no matter how impossible it might seem to others.