

Who  
was

# Genghis



# Who is Genghis Khan?



This hand-colored woodcut depicts Genghis Khan leading the Mongols into battle.

## This feared ruler founded the largest land empire in history

By KATHY WILMORE

**G**enghis Khan (*JENG-gis KON*) has what you might call a nasty reputation. More than 700 years after his death, he is still remembered as a very bad guy. His image is that of a barbarian, a notorious villain. Like Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan led thousands of warriors into one battle after another, conquering lands and peoples far beyond his homeland. Both men were brilliant generals who built vast empires. Yet history often remembers Alexander as heroic, and Genghis Khan as bloodthirsty.

Who was Genghis Khan, and why does he have such a terrible reputation?

### Early Struggles

According to an old saying, "History is written by the victors." That is often true, but not in Genghis Khan's case. If his people wrote anything about him during his lifetime, it has been lost. The first known account of his



GRANGER COLLECTION; MAP: JIM McMAHON/MAPMAN®

## TIME LINE

# Genghis Khan and the Mongols

- c. 1162 Temujin (later Genghis Khan) is born.
- c. 1172 Temujin's father is killed, and his family banished from their clan.
- c. 1172-1200 Temujin gains power as he battles some clans and unites others.
- 1206 Mongols declare Temujin Genghis Khan, "Universal Ruler." Mongolia becomes a united state.
- 1207-1209 Genghis Khan organizes his forces and begins to devise a code of laws.
- 1209-1215 Genghis Khan attacks China, getting as far south as Beijing. He also conquers land as far west as Lake Balkhash (in modern-day Kazakhstan).
- 1220 Mongol troops conquer Samarkand and Bukhara.
- 1221-1226 Genghis Khan and his armies extend the empire to the Caspian Sea in the west, Pakistan and the Himalayas in the south, North Korea in the east, and Lake Baikal in the north.
- 1227 Genghis Khan dies.
- 1229-1264 Genghis Khan's sons and grandsons extend the empire.
- 1368 The rising power of China's Ming Dynasty breaks the family's control, bringing about the end of the Mongol Empire.

life was written almost a century later, in *The Secret History of the Mongols*. That is the only record we have of Genghis Khan from the Mongols' point of view. Everything else we know about him, we learned from the people he conquered.

One lost fact is Genghis Khan's birth date. The years usually given are 1155, 1162, and 1167. In Mongolia, the land of his birth, 1162 is most commonly accepted.

There is no doubt that struggle and bloodshed formed him. Shortly before he was born, his father, Yesugei (*YUH-soo-guy*), killed a man from an enemy tribe. Yesugei and his wife named their first son Temujin (*TEM-yoo-jin*) after that vanquished rival.

### Losing His Place

At the time of Temujin's birth, most Mongols were nomadic hunter-gatherers who herded sheep and horses. They traveled in clusters of tribal **clans** (family groups) and sub-clans. Many Mongols, women as well as men, were excellent horseback riders and hunters, and experts with bows and arrows. However, those skills were not just applied to hunting. Bloody clashes between clans were common. Mongols also fought with peoples of bordering lands, such as Tatar tribes to the northeast and the Chinese to the south.

Temujin's people, the Borjigin (*BOR-juh-gin*), formed one of the most powerful Mongol clans.

Yesugei was the **khan** (chief) of a Borjigin subclan. But when Temujin was about 10, Yesugei was killed by Tatars. Normally, a khan's oldest son took his place, but the people refused to follow the boy. They chose another khan and forced Temujin, along with his mother and brothers, out of the clan.

Being abandoned by one's clan was a death sentence. Rival clans and roving bandits were a constant threat, and conditions in the semi-arid mountains were harsh. But Temujin managed to help keep his mother and brothers alive. Growing stronger with each battle for survival, he had a greater goal—to regain his rightful place as a Borjigin chief.

### Forging an Empire

In the years that followed, Temujin fought for power. Each victory meant more people willing to accept him as their leader. At times, he allied himself with some clans to defeat others. As his power grew, Temujin overcame clan after clan, tribe after tribe—even the mighty Tatars.

Temujin always made sure that no enemy could attack him from behind. After winning a fierce battle, he and his warriors killed all remaining adults and older children. Temujin then scattered the surviving young children among his own people, so they would lose their tribal identity.

By 1206, Temujin had surpassed his boyhood goal. He had power over



Genghis Khan—  
history's greatest  
general or a murderous  
barbarian?

nearly every clan, tribe, and kingdom in Mongolia. That year, Mongol chiefs gathered at a huge meeting of khans. The khans declared Temujin *Genghis Khan*, meaning “Universal Ruler” or “Supreme Chief.”

Genghis Khan had great physical strength, determination, and **charisma** (magnetic appeal). But the key to his power lay in convincing rival tribes to set aside old grudges long enough to defeat a common foe. Without an “other” as enemy, Mongols would start fighting among themselves again. He had to keep them busy.

By 1209, Genghis Khan commanded an immense fighting force. Mongol armies were organized in units of 10; 100; 1,000; and 10,000

soldiers. A **tumen**, or division, was 10,000 soldiers. Genghis Khan had about 10 tumens. In 1211, he led them against an old enemy, the Jin Empire of northern China. The Mongols and the Chinese had a long history of clashes and invasions.

While keeping up the attack on China, Genghis Khan defended his other borders by pushing westward. Over the next two decades, he and his generals burst across western Asia. By 1227, the year Genghis Khan died, he had conquered an area that stretched across central Asia—from the Sea of Japan to the Caspian Sea (*see map*). His sons and grandsons made it larger still. At its height, the Mongol Empire was the largest **contiguous** (connected) land empire ever.

### Staying Power

There is no doubt that Genghis Khan and his armies were fierce and ruthless attackers, particularly by modern standards. Yet accounts by the people he defeated are not always reliable. For instance, they often described his armies as being much larger than could have been possible.

Bloody invasions for land and power were not unusual in the history of those regions. What set Genghis Khan apart were the stunning swiftness of his horseback riders and the brilliance of his tactics. Always thinking, always learning, he adapted his style of attack as needed. A camp or small town could be taken with a sudden storm of horsemen. A large city might require a long siege.

The code of laws he put in place during his conquests ensured an orderly passage of power to his sons and grandsons. Thus, Genghis Khan's empire lasted longer than that of Alexander the Great.

Who was Genghis Khan? Despite all we know about him, that remains an unanswered question. At least one fact, however, is indisputable: He built one of the greatest empires of all time. **JS**

### Your Turn

**THINK ABOUT IT**  
What methods did Genghis Khan use to maintain and extend his power?

## AMERICAN HISTORY PLAY **The Last Best Hope, pp. 12-15**

### ■ OBJECTIVE

Students should understand

- what the Emancipation Proclamation was and why Abraham Lincoln issued it.

### ■ WORD TO KNOW

**proclamation:** the formal, public announcement of an official plan, policy, or idea

### ■ TEACHING STRATEGY

Ask students: "What freed America's slaves—the Emancipation Proclamation or an amendment to the Constitution?" Allow them to discuss which they think is correct and why. After they read the play, ask and discuss the same question.

### ■ BACKGROUND

Although Abraham Lincoln was personally opposed to slavery, he believed that the Civil War was about the Union—whether the United States would be held together as one nation, or split into two. He struggled to balance the issue of slavery against other factors that might affect the outcome of the war.

### ■ CRITICAL THINKING

**COMPREHENSION:** *Why does Secretary of State William Seward advise President Lincoln not to announce the Emancipation Proclamation until the North has "a firm military victory"?* (Seward wanted Lincoln to make his announcement from a position of strength, rather than of weakness or desperation.)

**MAKING INFERENCES:** *What did President Lincoln mean when he said that slavery would "die a natural death" if left where it was?* (Lincoln believed the institution of slavery to be so wrong that eventually people in every state would refuse to support or otherwise accept it.)

### ■ ACTIVITY

Have students look up, then discuss, the unofficial holiday of Juneteenth. (It commemorates June 19, 1865, the day slaves in Texas finally learned of the Emancipation Proclamation.) Why did the news take so long to reach them? What did they do when they heard it?

## STANDARDS

### SOCIAL STUDIES, GRADES 5-8

- Power, authority, and governance: How President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in an effort to preserve the Union and win the Civil War.
- Time, continuity, and change: How the issue of states' rights and slavery divided the country, leading to the secession of several Southern states, and later to the American Civil War.

## RESOURCES

### PRINT

- Freedman, Russell, *Lincoln: A Photobiography* (Clarion Books, 1987). Grades 7-8.
- Ford, Carin T., *Lincoln, Slavery, and the Emancipation Proclamation* (Enslow Publishers, Inc., 2004). Grades 7-8.

### WEB SITES

- The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum  
[alincoln-library.com](http://alincoln-library.com)

## WORLD HISTORY **Who Was Genghis Khan? pp. 16-19**

### ■ OBJECTIVE

Students should understand

- Genghis Khan rose to power to unify the various nomadic tribes of Mongolia in the late 1100s, and later set out to conquer other lands and peoples across Asia.

### ■ WORDS TO KNOW

**barbarian:** uncivilized, as from an outside destabilizing or conquering force • **charisma:** a special charm or appeal • **khan:** a chief of a Mongol clan or subclan

### ■ TEACHING STRATEGY

Ask students if they have ever heard the name Genghis Khan. If so, what impression do they have of him? If they haven't heard of him, ask what the word *barbarian* means to them. After they have read the article, ask whether that label fits Genghis Khan or not.

### ■ BACKGROUND

Despite his reputation as a barbarian, Genghis Khan is credited with promoting trade, creat-

ing a vast postal system, and spreading the use of a universal alphabet.

### ■ CRITICAL THINKING

**NOTING DETAILS:** *What was the key to Genghis Khan's success in uniting the Mongol tribes?* (He encouraged some tribes to form alliances against a common enemy. When an enemy tribe was defeated, it either joined his forces or was wiped out.)

**TO DISCUSS:** *What is meant by the adage "History is written by the victors"? How might winning or losing affect how people and events are described?* (Answers will vary.)

### ■ ACTIVITY

**COMPARATIVE HISTORY:** Have students read brief encyclopedia entries on Alexander the Great and Charlemagne. How did they build their empires? How long did the process take? How long did their empires last? How do those empires and the Mongol Empire compare?

## STANDARDS

### SOCIAL STUDIES, GRADES 5-8

- Time, continuity, and change: How Genghis Khan's reputation as a bloodthirsty villain eclipses recognition of his accomplishments as founder of the Mongol Empire.
- Power, authority, and governance: How Genghis Khan grew up to become one of history's most accomplished military leaders.

## RESOURCES

### PRINT

- Nicolle, David, *The Mongol Warlords* (Book Sales, 2004). Grades 7-8.
- Taylor, Robert, *Life in Genghis Khan's Mongolia* (Lucent Books, 2000). Grades 5-8.

### WEB SITES

- National Geographic—Genghis Khan  
[nationalgeographic.com/genghis/index.html](http://nationalgeographic.com/genghis/index.html)
- Treasures of Inner Mongolia  
[www.pma.edmonton.ab.ca/vexhibit/genghis/intro.htm](http://www.pma.edmonton.ab.ca/vexhibit/genghis/intro.htm)

### North Korea Map, p. 9

- China, Russia, and South Korea
- Pyongyang
- 39°N, 126°E
- Korea Strait
- Yalu River
- Kaesong
- Nangnim Mountains
- 120–130 miles
- three
- 14

### Word Match, p. 15

- E; 2. D; 3. A; 4. B; 5. C

### GeoSkills, p. 20-21

- archipelago
- plain
- plateau
- Cape
- sound
- gulf
- lake
- tributary
- isthmus
- peninsula

### Political Cartoon, p. 24

- The two players appear gargantuan, with oversize muscles that are almost grotesque—especially for the mental challenges of chess.
- The chess players represent those athletes who abuse steroids in order to help improve their level of play and their physical conditioning.
- Steroid abuse can cause a person to become overly aggressive and violent. The chess players, in addition to appearing freakishly large, are scowling at each other. One player violently slams a chess piece onto the board, exerting way too much energy as he announces, "CHECK!"
- Answers will vary. Students may say that steroids destroy the notion of fair play in sports and competition. Players are using an unnatural advantage in order to win.

- Answers will vary. Students may say that the cartoonist thinks steroids are physically dangerous, as represented by the gargantuan and violent chess players. They may also infer a belief that steroid abuse is representative of the win-at-all-costs attitude that is prevalent in sports, competition, and American culture.

### News IQ, p. 24

- C; 2. D; 3. A; 4. B; 5. C

### Crossword, p. 24

1	F	2	L	3	A	4	G	5	S	6	O	7	N	8	S
9	R	A	V	E				10	T	R	A	P			
11	E	S		12	M	I	A		14	V	A				
15	E	T	D			17	S	T	A	Y	S				
			19	I	E			21	E	B					
22	H	A	N	D	S			25	E	S	T				
28	O	B		29	E	A	R		31	E	R				
32	P	L	A	N				34	A	T	E	E			
36	E	E	L	S				37	T	A	K	E			

### Quick Quiz, p. T-5

- A
- C
- B
- B
- A
- A
- C
- C
- A
- E
- Opinion
- False; the phrase is merely "an old saying" (sometimes attributed to Winston Churchill).
- True
- False; the Mongols did not use rifles and cannons in battle. They were excellent horseback riders and experts with bows and arrows.
- False; Genghis Khan's empire

lasted long after his death. He created a code of laws that ensured an orderly passage of power to his sons and grandsons.

### Skills Master, p. T-6

- The Declaration of Independence
- The Union and Confederate soldiers who died at the Battle of Gettysburg on July 1-3, 1863.
- Lincoln refers to this date in the first sentence: "Four score and seven years ago . . ." This phrase indicates that the speech Lincoln is about to deliver comes 87 years after the U.S. had declared its independence.
- Lincoln refers to the American Revolutionary War, a conflict that created a nation that the current war

- was threatening to tear apart.
- The conflict was testing whether a democracy "conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal" could survive.
- The Civil War was still being fought at the time of Lincoln's speech.
- No. Lincoln says, "The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here . . ."
- Lincoln was referring to the cause of preserving the Union.
- Soldiers willingly fought to save the Union and preserve an ideal. Many gave their lives for the cause.
- He meant that in a democratic system elected officials are chosen from and by a free citizenry to carry out the wishes of the majority.

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**WORLD: INSIDE NORTH KOREA, PAGES 6-9**

■ Write the letter of the correct answer on the line provided.

- \_\_\_ 1. Who is the current leader of North Korea?
  - A. Kim Jong Il
  - B. Roh Muh-hyun
  - C. Kim Il Sung
- \_\_\_ 2. Which of the following are examples of North Korean propaganda?
  - A. Artwork depicting North Koreans killing American soldiers.
  - B. Recordings of patriotic songs and speeches broadcast on loudspeakers.
  - C. Both A and B are correct.
- \_\_\_ 3. Why is it difficult for foreign visitors to know the personal opinions of the North Korean people?
  - A. No Westerners speak the Korean language.
  - B. The government does not allow foreigners and ordinary North Koreans to interact.
  - C. All North Koreans distrust Westerners.
- \_\_\_ 4. Why do most North Koreans suffer from dietary deficiencies?
  - A. The World Food Programme forbids food donations into the country.
  - B. Drought, sanctions, and bad government policies have resulted in food shortages.
  - C. The tsunami disaster in December destroyed many North Korean farms.
- \_\_\_ 5. Why are there strained relations between the governments of North Korea and the U.S.?
  - A. The U.S. is concerned about North Korea's development of nuclear weapons.
  - B. North Korea refuses to allow food and medical donations to enter the country.
  - C. Both A and B are correct.

**USA: STARING DOWN STEROIDS, PAGES 10-11**

■ Select the letter of the word, phrase, or number that best completes each sentence.

- \_\_\_ 6. Doctors legally prescribe anabolic steroids to \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. treat certain illnesses
  - B. help athletes improve their performance
  - C. trick the body into producing more cells
- \_\_\_ 7. The testing policy of \_\_\_\_\_ was recently revised to include tougher penalties for steroid abuse.
  - A. the National Collegiate Athletic Association
  - B. the National Football League
  - C. Major League Baseball
- \_\_\_ 8. People who abuse steroids face an increased risk of \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. cancer, heart disease, and infertility

- \_\_\_ 9. Some people believe athletes who abuse steroids are cheating because \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. those athletes are gaining an unfair advantage over others
  - B. only well-paid athletes can afford to purchase steroids
  - C. the drug is only sold in the U.S.
- \_\_\_ 10. One proposed remedy to curb steroid abuse among teens involves \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. drug testing for high school athletes
  - B. charging higher taxes for sales of steroids
  - C. having Barry Bonds and Jason Giambi talk to teens about the dangers of drug abuse

**AMERICAN HISTORY PLAY: THE LAST BEST HOPE, PAGES 12-15**

■ Match the clue in the left column with the answer in the right column.

- |                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| ___ 11. Kentucky        | A. when the American Civil War started                               |
| ___ 12. South Carolina  | B. a slave state that stayed in the Union                            |
| ___ 13. January 1, 1863 | C. state where the first battle of the American Civil War was fought |
| ___ 14. April 12, 1861  | D. date the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect               |
| ___ 15. Virginia        | E. where the capital of the Confederate States was located           |

**WORLD HISTORY: WHO WAS GENGHIS KHAN? PAGES 16-19**

■ Decide whether each sentence is true, false, or an opinion. Rewrite a correct version of any false statement on a separate sheet of paper.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. Genghis Khan should be remembered as a man who achieved great things.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. "History is written by the victors" was first said by one of Genghis Khan's sons.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. Much of what is known about Genghis Khan comes from the accounts of the people he conquered.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. The Mongols were the first people to use rifles and cannons in warfare.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. Genghis Khan's empire fell to foreign invaders shortly after his death.