Lesson 2: China’s Past

Vocabulary

- **pictograph**: a picture that stands for a word
- **oracle bone**: a shell or bone used during the Shang dynasty to tell the future
- **province**: a region of a country
- **ancestor**: a family member who lived before a grandparent did
- **civil service**: the practice of using skills and talents to work in the government
- **middleman**: a person who goes between buyers and sellers

Picturing Chinese History

Chinese culture is the oldest culture that exists today. Chinese writing, art, and archaeological remains show how much the Chinese culture has stayed the same. The Chinese language is written in **pictographs**, or pictures that stand for words. The written language has stayed similar for centuries.

Ancient Voices

Chinese people told legends about people and the world. The stories show the importance of animals, agriculture, and inventions. Many legends come from the Xia period, about 2000–1700 B.C.

The Shang Dynasty

The first Chinese dynasty was the Shang dynasty, which began between 1760 and 1500 B.C. Most people in the Huang River Valley were farmers. Bronze was used to make tools, cups, weapons, and goods. **Oracle bones** were used to tell the future. The Shang people kept the first written records in China.

The Longest Dynasty

The Zhou dynasty began in 1027 B.C. It lasted more than 800 years. The early part of the Zhou was called Western Zhou. Most people were farmers. Some had slaves. Silk cloth was important to the economy.

Eastern Zhou Dynasties

The second part of the Zhou dynasty, the Eastern Zhou, lasted from about 770 B.C. to 221 B.C. Trade and the economy did well. Projects included flood control, irrigation, and canal building. Iron was used to make tools and weapons.

The First Emperor

In 221 B.C., the king of the strongest state became Shi Huangdi, or the “first emperor,” under the Qin dynasty. Qin was divided into 36 **provinces**, or states. The Great Wall of China was built to protect the empire from northern invaders. Builders connected defensive walls that had been built earlier. Systems of money and weights and measures were made the same in all regions. Shi Huangdi wanted to control what people talked about and studied. People wanted freedom and they fought against the emperor.

Han Dynasty

The Han dynasty lasted from 206 B.C. to A.D. 220. The first ruler, Han Gaozu, gave people more freedom. He allowed them to read any books they wanted. Han Gaozu’s name means “High Ancestor.” An **ancestor** is a relative who lived before a grandparent did. During the Han dynasty, roads were built. Trade goods were taxed. The first Chinese history book was written. **Civil service** was started. For the first time, anyone who passed a civil service test could work for the government. These advancements made China more unified.

Inventions

During the Han dynasty, porcelain, paper, and ink were invented. **Middlemen**, or people who go between buyers and sellers, traded these goods on the Silk Road.
Lesson 2: Review

1. **Summarize** Fill in the blank spaces with two details from the summary below.

   Civil service was introduced during the Han dynasty.

   The Han Dynasty was a period of great change and advancement.

2. Name some of the things that people may have done in their daily lives during the Zhou dynasty.

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3. How did Chinese culture become more unified during the Han dynasty?

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4. What inventions were made in China’s early history?

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5. **Critical Thinking: Make Inferences** Why do you think that Shi Huangdi wanted to connect the defensive walls into what became the Great Wall of China?

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