

History

Lesson 1

Enquiry: How did the Mongols create a world Empire?

Who was Genghis Khan?

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Who was Genghis Khan?

In 1167 AD, a boy called Temujin was born in a small tent in the middle of the Asian steppe. According to legend, the baby was holding a blood clot in his hand, a sign of the chaos he would bring to the world when he grew up. A few years later, this boy would receive the title “Genghis Khan”, meaning “Universal Ruler”. By the time of his death in 1227 AD, this man ruled one of the largest **empires** to have ever existed, stretching from the Pacific Ocean in the East to the borders of Europe in the West.



The nomadic world

Temujin was born and grew up in an area of Asia called **the steppe** — a part of the world where trees don't grow and the temperature can range from -55°C in winter to 45°C in summer. This extreme **climate** made farming very difficult. Therefore the people who lived on the steppe could not grow crops and relied on animals for food. This meant they had to constantly move to wherever there was grass so their animals could graze. This is known as a **nomadic** lifestyle. Instead of living in villages and towns, the Mongol tribes were always on the move. Lots of animals were important to the Mongolian nomadic lifestyle, but horses were essential as they allowed the Mongols to travel large distances.



Warring tribes

Temujin's world was made up of warring **tribes** of nomads, who were constantly fighting over animals and access to grassland and water for their animals. When he was only nine years old, Temujin's father was poisoned by a rival tribal chief. This put Temujin in a dangerous situation as he had to learn to survive on the steppe alone. Eventually, Temujin managed to take back control of his father's tribe. To succeed, Temujin had to be **ruthless**: he killed his rivals, including his own brother.



Uniting the tribes

Temujin then managed to do something that had never been achieved before on the steppe: he united all the other Mongol tribes under his leadership. He did this by being both ruthless and generous. He slaughtered rival tribes who refused to obey him. But he also gave his defeated enemies important positions in his army if they promised to be loyal. The more successful he was, the more **loot** he gained; the more loot he gained, the more popular he became. And the more popular he became, the stronger his armies grew. In 1206, after he had defeated all his rivals in Mongolia, he was given the title Genghis Khan, meaning Universal Ruler.



Glossary

An empire: a state where one person or country rules other people or countries by force

The steppe: a region of grassland with extreme temperatures making farming impossible

A climate: the types of weather common to an area

A nomad: a person who doesn't live in the same place all the time

A tribe: a group of people with similar interests and a common leader

Loot: animals, food and treasure taken from a defeated enemy

Ruthless: willingness to use violence and other methods to achieve your goals



Comprehension Questions

1. What does Genghis Khan mean?
2. Why was the steppe a difficult place to live?
3. What is a nomad?
4. Why was Temujin such an effective leader?
5. Why do you think horses played such an important part of Mongol life?

