

Fall of the Qin Dynasty Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question:
What caused the fall of the Qin dynasty?

Materials:

- Qin Dynasty PowerPoint
- Copies of Qin Dynasty Documents A-C
- Copies of Qin Dynasty Graphic Organizer
- Copies of Qin Dynasty Guiding Questions

Plan of Instruction:

1. Introduction: PowerPoint

- a. Slide 1: Title slide.
- b. Slide 2: The Rise of Qin. *In the 5th century BCE, the Zhou dynasty held no effective control over ancient China. Fighting among the states of the territory intensified, marking the beginning of the Warring States Period. In this period, the seven major states attempted to conquer one another as well as the minor states.*

Note: Press the arrow key or spacebar button to see how Qin expanded.

One of the warring states, Qin, had the advantage of controlling two of the most fertile regions of ancient China. The centuries of warfare between the Qin and their northern nomadic neighbors made the Qin army skilled and strong. The Qin ministers enacted new political reforms that brought stability to the state, which led farmers to migrate there, further enriching the economy.

- c. Slide 3: The First Emperor. *Zhao Zheng became king of Qin in 246 BCE. When he was twenty-seven years old, he began military campaigns to conquer the other remaining states. After two hundred years of war, Zhao Zheng conquered all the states in twenty-five years. All of the states of ancient China were unified under the control of a central government, the Qin dynasty. Zhao Zheng took the title Qin Shi Huang, which is often translated as First Emperor.*

Note: You might wish to return to Slide 2 to see how rapidly Qin expanded during Zhao Zheng's campaigns in 247-221 BCE.

- d. Slide 4: Legalism. *The reforms Qin ministers had enacted to strengthen and stabilize the state were modeled on the new political philosophy of Legalism. Once Qin Shi Huang's armies had conquered the other states, he applied*

Legalist policies to the rest of the empire. One of the most important Legalist philosophers was Han Fei. Read this quote from Han Fei describing Legalism. According to this quote, what seem to be the main principles of Legalism?

Students should note that Legalism emphasized clearly stated laws, strict adherence to those laws, and harsh punishments for anyone that disobeyed.

- e. Slide 5: Qin Dynasty. *Qin Shi Huang further unified the empire by standardizing units of measurements, currency, the length of cart axles (to improve transport on roads), and Chinese script. The photo on the right is of a plaque inscribed with seal script, the official script of the dynasty. The Qin dynasty also ordered massive construction projects, such as the development of a road system and canals, the unification of various northern states' walls (which would become what is now known as the Great Wall of China), and the creation of the Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor. On the left we see a portion of the Great Wall first built under Qin and rebuilt during the Ming dynasty more than a thousand years later. Beyond these reforms and projects, the Qin model of central government influenced governments in China for centuries, and it's believed that the Western name for China comes from the name Qin.*
 - f. Slide 6: Fall of Qin. *Despite these achievements, the Qin dynasty lasted only fifteen years, just three years after the death of Qin Shi Huang in 210 BCE. Pictured here are some of the estimated 8,000 terracotta soldiers that guard the tomb of the First Emperor.*
 - g. Slide 7: Central Historical Question. *Today we are going to read a series of documents to answer the question: What caused the fall of the Qin dynasty?*
2. Hand out Document A, Graphic Organizer, and Guiding Questions. Have students read Document A and complete the corresponding sections of the Guiding Questions and the Graphic Organizer.
 3. After students have completed the Guiding Questions and Graphic Organizer, ask them to share their responses. Students should note that the textbook reports that Qin Shi Huang instituted a series of harsh policies, including the burning of books and forced labor gangs. Moreover, he took away power from local lords. The textbook suggests that anger about these policies led to opposition in many parts of society, which likely contributed to the fall of the dynasty. However, it is important for students to note that the textbook does not explicitly say that this is what caused the fall of the Qin dynasty.
 4. Hand out Document B and have students complete the corresponding sections of the Guiding Questions and the Graphic Organizer.

5. After students have completed the Guiding Questions and Graphic Organizer, ask them to share their responses. It is important for students to pay careful attention to this document's source information. They need to note that Jia Yi was a Confucian poet and a Han statesman. The persecution of Confucian scholars under the Qin dynasty and his connection to the Han dynasty may have negatively shaped how Jia Yi portrayed the fall of the Qin dynasty.

Students should also note that Document B provides a slightly different answer to the Central Historical Question than the textbook. Jia Yi suggests that the Qin dynasty fell as a result of the incompetence of the second emperor. However, Jia Yi corroborates the textbook's description of the brutal rule of the Qin that led to public opposition.

6. Hand out Documents C and have students complete the corresponding sections of the Guiding Questions and the Graphic Organizer.
7. After students have completed the Guiding Questions and Graphic Organizer, ask them to share their responses. Students should note that the newspaper article provides a very different answer to the Central Historical Question. It claims that the Qin dynasty fell because it was not sufficiently harsh against opposition groups. Like Document B, students need to pay careful attention to the source information of this document. They need to understand that this article was written during the Cultural Revolution, when there was heavy government censorship and repression. Students must consider the article's claim that the Qin dynasty was not sufficiently harsh as a reflection of contemporary Chinese politics.
8. Discussion: *How do the documents corroborate one another? What contradictions did you notice across documents? Why might each document be useful evidence to understand the fall of the Qin dynasty? What are the weaknesses of each document as evidence of the fall of the Qin Dynasty?*
9. Final Question: Students use evidence from the Graphic Organizer to determine which document they believe is the most reliable source of information about the fall of the Qin Dynasty.

Explain to students that it is likely that they will have different answers from each other. This is part of history. Different people can arrive at different conclusions. What's important is to have historical evidence to support your claims.

Citations

Document A

Farah & Karls, *World History: The Human Experience*, (New York: Glencoe McGraw-Hill, 2001), p. 222.

Document B

Jia Yi (200-168? BCE), "The Faults of Qin." In *Sources of Chinese Tradition: Volume 1: From Earliest Times to 1600*, ed. De Bary, W.T. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 229-230.

Document C

T'an Hsiao-Wen, "A Refutation of Some Confucian Fallacies Concerning the Causes of the Downfall of the Ch'in Dyansty," *Kuang-ming jih-pao (Enlightenment Daily)*, September 1, 1974, Beijing. In *The Politics of Historiography: The First Emperor of China*, ed. Yu-ning, Li, (White Plains, NY: International Arts and Sciences Press, Inc., 1975), pp. 192-201.