History

The Shang Dynasty

Place in Time

World History Timeline

Here are some of the other great civilisations of the world. What is special about them? Can you complete the comparison chart to show what you know?

The Shang Dynasty

The Shang dynasty (ruled by the Shang family) was located in ancient China. The civilisation lasted from around 1600 BC until 1046 BC.

We know lots about the Shang dynasty from archaeological remains and written documents. Chinese legend says that the founder of the Shang Dynasty, Cheng Tang, overthrew the Xia dynasty to take power, but there is no definite proof of the Xia dynasty's existence.

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Shang Dynasty Map

Whole Class

Did you find all the features and label them correctly? Let's check.

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1600 BC

Cheng Tang founds the Shang dynasty after overthrowing the legendary Xia dynasty.

Shang Life

In around 1600 BC, King Cheng Tang took power and the Shang dynasty began. Cheng Tang had the support of 40 other kingdoms when he came to power.

There are no photographs dating back to the Shang dynasty, but examination of a number of different sources of evidence has enabled an artist to draw pictures showing what life could have been like.

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Shang's Social Hierarchy

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Shang's Social Hierarchy

Shang Religion Presentations

You are going to work in groups to look at an aspect of Shang religion in more detail and create a presentation about it. However, it is very important to remember that all aspects were closely linked and together made up the full belief system, so some of the information in the different presentations will overlap.

- The Role of the King
- Ceremonies and Sacrifices
- Family and Ancestor Worship
- Gods
- Tombs and Burial Customs

You teacher will tell you which presentation to work on.
Use the information on your planning sheet to help you get started.

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1400 - 1200 BC

The earliest found examples of Chinese writing are dated to around this time.

Discovery of the Shang Dynasty

You may not be surprised to learn that the existence of the Shang dynasty was not fully proved until AD 1928!

An interest in finding the source of the legendary ‘dragon bones’ of ancient China led a team of archaeologists to perform a dig in Xiaotun, near Anyang. It was there that the foundations of an ancient royal city were unearthed and the existence of a great ancient civilisation began to be made clearer.

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Looking in Detail

Whole Class

Dagger

- This is a Shang dagger blade made from bronze. The bronze turns a greenish colour when it reacts with the oxygen in the air.
- It has a dragon head pattern inscribed on it in the place where it would have been attached to a handle.
- The dagger could have been used by a Shang warrior in battle, or in ritual ceremonies.

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Looking in Detail

Whole Class

Jue

- This item is called a jue and it is made from bronze.
- It was used for serving or heating up wine.
- Jues were used during special ceremonies by important Shang people.
- This jue has a handle for pouring and two sticking up parts which could have been used for lifting the vessel off the heat.

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Looking in Detail

Mask

- This is a mask believed to represent a legendary king of the Shu state called Cancong.
- It is made out of bronze.
- The mask features protruding eyes and ears which were originally painted black. The lips were originally painted red.
- The mask would probably have been used for decorative or ritual purposes. It would have been too heavy to actually wear.

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