

TEACHER GUIDE • ACTIVITY PACKET • STUDENT HANDOUT

The Mandate of Heaven

Five activities on China's dynasties — from a shattered vase to the Qing



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|---|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1 | New Ming Vase
“Junior” — the one that started it all | Music video • about 1 minute |
| 2 | Oracle Bones and the Shang Dynasty
Where Chinese civilization begins | Interactive lesson • map mouseovers |
| 3 | Zhou — Dynastic Cycle
The Mandate of Heaven | Interactive diagram • six-stage cycle |
| 4 | China — The Dynasties
From the Shang to the Qing | Interactive timeline • ten dynasties |
| 5 | The Shattered Vase
Chinese Dynasties Review Game | Review game • 12 questions |

Created by William S. Burton Jr.

How the Unit Fits Together

It all started with a vase. The **New Ming Vase** video (“Junior”) came first, and everything else in this packet grew out of it — a lesson on where Chinese civilization began, a diagram of how dynasties rise and fall, a timeline of ten dynasties, and finally a review game where students glue the vase back together one right answer at a time. Run them in order and the unit ends where it began.

	Activity	Purpose	Suggested time
1	New Ming Vase (Junior)	Hook — raise the question	5 min
2	Oracle Bones & the Shang	Geography and beginnings	20–30 min
3	Zhou — Dynastic Cycle	The Mandate of Heaven idea	20–30 min
4	China — The Dynasties	Ten dynasties and their gifts	30–40 min
5	The Shattered Vase	Review game / assessment	20–30 min

Times are estimates for one class. Activities 2–4 can each stand alone if you only have a day.

A Word from the Sages

Confucius and Sun Tzu appear behind the **Ask the Sages** button in these lessons. Before you start, they have a few thoughts on how to run the unit.

Confucius	A teacher who begins with a lecture loses the room. Begin with the vase. When it breaks, every student will want to know why it mattered.
Sun Tzu	Agreed. Every battle is won before it is fought. Let them see the broken vase first, and they will march through four lessons to fix it.
Confucius	When we reach the dynastic cycle, have them say it aloud. Strong, corrupt, disaster, lost Mandate, rebellion, new dynasty. Repetition is the mother of learning.
Sun Tzu	And then cover the boxes. If they can rebuild the cycle with nothing in front of them, they have taken the ground.
Confucius	On the timeline, give each table a dynasty to teach. One who teaches learns twice.
Sun Tzu	In the final game, divide them into armies. Twelve shards, two teams, and a scoreboard of crashes. Victory belongs to the side that studied.
Confucius	And the side that crashes the most?
Sun Tzu	Pays for the vase.

ACTIVITY 1 OF 5 · MUSIC VIDEO · ABOUT 1 MINUTE

New Ming Vase

“Junior” — the one that started it all

duelinghistory.com/music/Junior/



Screenshot shows the video player before play begins.

What it is

A short music video from the Music section of DuelingHistory.com. It is the spark for the whole unit: a priceless Ming vase, a very bad moment, and a lot of broken porcelain. The page ends with a red **Play The Shattered Vase →** button that leads straight into the review game.

How to use it in class

- Play it on the board at the start of the unit as the hook — before anyone has heard the words “dynasty” or “Mandate of Heaven.”
- Ask: *Why would anyone care so much about one vase?* Park the answers on the board and come back to them after Activity 4 (the Ming box).
- Replay it on review day, right before The Shattered Vase, so the game feels like a payoff.

Check for understanding

1. What dynasty is the vase named for?
2. Predict: what would make a vase from China worth so much hundreds of years later?

ACTIVITY 2 OF 5 · INTERACTIVE LESSON · MAP MOUSEOVERS

Oracle Bones and the Shang Dynasty

Where Chinese civilization beginsduelinghistory.com/history/ChinaDynasties/

Oracle Bones and the Shang Dynasty

Mouse over the above map for more information

The land between the Chang Jiang, or Yangtze River and the Huang He, or Yellow River has been known as China's heartland. This area has remained the center of Chinese civilization regardless of the change in ruling families. The first settlements were farming communities and around 2000 B.C. some of these settlements grew into cities.

Ask the Sages Back Next

What it is

An interactive lesson that starts with a map of China's heartland — the land between the Chang Jiang (Yangtze) and the Huang He (Yellow River). Students mouse over the map for more information, then click **Next** to move through the lesson on the Shang and their oracle bones. **Ask the Sages** brings in Confucius and Sun Tzu to read the text aloud.

How to use it in class

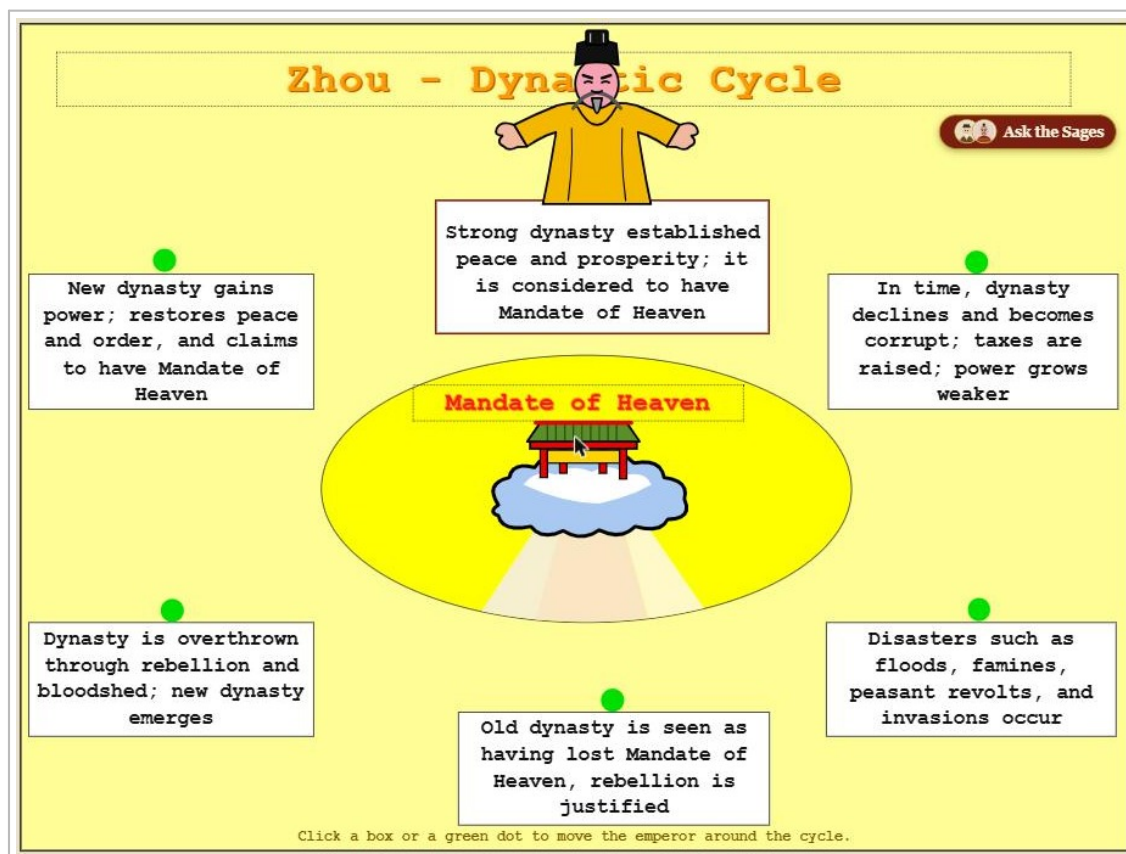
- Project the map and have students find both rivers before reading anything.
- Turn on **Ask the Sages** for struggling readers — Confucius reads the text word for word.
- Pair students and let one drive the mouse while the other records three facts per screen.

Check for understanding

1. Name the two rivers that frame China's heartland.
2. About when did the first farming settlements grow into cities?
3. What were oracle bones used for, and why do they matter to historians?

ACTIVITY 3 OF 5 · INTERACTIVE DIAGRAM · SIX-STAGE CYCLE

Zhou — Dynastic Cycle

The Mandate of Heavenduelinghistory.com/history/MandateofHeaven/

What it is

The heart of the unit. Students click a box or a green dot to walk the emperor around the six stages of the dynastic cycle: a strong dynasty holds the Mandate of Heaven, declines and grows corrupt, suffers disasters, is seen as having lost the Mandate, is overthrown, and a new dynasty rises to claim it.

How to use it in class

- Walk the emperor around the full cycle once as a whole class, reading each box aloud.
- Cover the boxes and have students rebuild the order from memory on sticky notes.
- Connect it to today: what do people point to when they say a government has “lost its way”?

Check for understanding

1. List the six stages of the dynastic cycle in order.
2. Why did Chinese people believe rebellion could be justified?
3. How could a new dynasty “prove” it had the Mandate of Heaven?

ACTIVITY 4 OF 5 · INTERACTIVE TIMELINE · TEN DYNASTIES

China — The Dynasties

From the Shang to the Qingduelinghistory.com/history/ChineseDynastiesToPresent/

China - The Dynasties

Watch the Mandate of Heaven pass from dynasty to dynasty

Ask the Sages

Shang c. 1600 - 1046 BCE First recorded dynasty, along the Yellow River. Kings asked their ancestors questions on oracle bones - the earliest Chinese writing.	Zhou 1046 - 256 BCE Overthrew the Shang and claimed the Mandate of Heaven. Longest dynasty. Lords ruled lands for the king in a feudal system.	Qin 221 - 206 BCE Shi Huangdi, the First Emperor, united China. One writing system, one money, one set of weights. Began the Great Wall.	Han 206 BCE - 220 CE A golden age. Confucian ideas guided government. Paper was invented, and the Silk Road carried trade to the west.	Sui 581 - 618 CE Reunited China after nearly 400 years of division. Built the Grand Canal to link the north and south.
Qing 1644 - 1912 The Manchus ruled China's last dynasty and its largest territory. Defeated in the Opium Wars, it ended in 1912 when China became a republic.	Ming 1368 - 1644 Chinese rule returned. The Forbidden City was built, the Great Wall rebuilt in brick and stone, and Zheng He's fleets sailed to Africa.	Yuan 1271 - 1368 The Mongols under Kublai Khan conquered China - the first foreign rulers of all China. Marco Polo visited the court.	Song 960 - 1279 An age of invention: movable type printing, the magnetic compass for sailing, paper money, and gunpowder weapons.	Tang 618 - 907 Another golden age. Civil service exams grew. Poets wrote, woodblock printing spread, and Empress Wu ruled in her own name.

Click a box or a green dot to move the emperor through the dynasties.

What it is

Watch the Mandate of Heaven pass from dynasty to dynasty. Students click a box or a green dot to move the emperor along a snake-shaped timeline of ten dynasties — Shang, Zhou, Qin, Han, Sui, Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing — each with dates and the big ideas that dynasty gave the world.

How to use it in class

- Assign each table one or two dynasties to teach back to the class in 60 seconds.
- Have students sort the contributions into categories: government, inventions, trade, building.
- Stop on the Ming box and return to the question from Activity 1 about the vase.

Check for understanding

1. Which dynasty first united China, and who was its emperor?
2. Name two inventions from the Song dynasty.
3. Which two dynasties were ruled by outsiders, and who were they?

ACTIVITY 5 OF 5 · REVIEW GAME · 12 QUESTIONS

The Shattered Vase

Chinese Dynasties Review Gameduelinghistory.com/duels/ShatteredVase/

What it is

Master Lin, kiln master of Jingdezhen, needs help: his Ming meiping vase has shattered into 12 shards. Students click a numbered circle and answer his question. A right answer drops a glowing shard into the Shard Tray, and students drag it onto its matching outline to glue it back. A wrong answer sends something crashing, but they keep their shards. Turn on **Narrator** and Master Lin reads each question aloud.

How to use it in class

- Run it whole-class on the board: teams take turns choosing a numbered circle.
- Keep score with the on-screen Shards and Crashes counters — fewest crashes wins.
- Use the ► **Watch the Ming Vase video** button to loop back to Activity 1 as a victory lap.

Check for understanding

1. Which question gave your team the most trouble, and what is the right answer?
2. Write one new question Master Lin could ask about the Mandate of Heaven.

Dynasty Quick Reference

Drawn from the **China — The Dynasties** timeline (Activity 4). Print it as a study sheet, or cut the rows apart for a sort-in-order challenge.

Dynasty	Dates	What it gave us
Shang	c. 1600 – 1046 BCE	First recorded dynasty, along the Yellow River. Oracle bones — the earliest Chinese writing.
Zhou	1046 – 256 BCE	Overthrew the Shang, claimed the Mandate of Heaven. Longest dynasty; feudal system.
Qin	221 – 206 BCE	Shi Huangdi united China: one writing system, one money, one set of weights. Began the Great Wall.
Han	206 BCE – 220 CE	Golden age. Confucian government, paper invented, Silk Road trade to the west.
Sui	581 – 618 CE	Reunited China after nearly 400 years of division. Built the Grand Canal.
Tang	618 – 907	Golden age. Civil service exams, poetry, woodblock printing, Empress Wu.
Song	960 – 1279	Movable type, magnetic compass, paper money, gunpowder weapons.
Yuan	1271 – 1368	Mongols under Kublai Khan — first foreign rulers of all China. Marco Polo visits.
Ming	1368 – 1644	Chinese rule returns. Forbidden City, Great Wall rebuilt in brick and stone, Zheng He's fleets.
Qing	1644 – 1912	Manchus; last and largest dynasty. Opium Wars; ends in 1912 when China becomes a republic.

The Dynastic Cycle in Six Steps

1. Strong dynasty establishes peace and prosperity; it is considered to have the Mandate of Heaven.
2. In time, the dynasty declines and becomes corrupt; taxes are raised; power grows weaker.
3. Disasters such as floods, famines, peasant revolts, and invasions occur.
4. The old dynasty is seen as having lost the Mandate of Heaven; rebellion is justified.
5. The dynasty is overthrown through rebellion and bloodshed; a new dynasty emerges.
6. The new dynasty gains power, restores peace and order, and claims the Mandate of Heaven.

STUDENT HANDOUT

The Mandate of Heaven

Name _____ Date _____ Period _____

Scan each code (or type the link) and complete the activities in order. Answer the questions as you go.

**1. New Ming Vase**
duelinghistory.com/music/Junior/

Watch the video.

What dynasty is the vase named for? _____

**2. Oracle Bones and the Shang Dynasty**
duelinghistory.com/history/ChinaDynasties/

Mouse over the map, then click Next through the lesson.

The two rivers of China's heartland: _____ and _____

**3. Zhou — Dynastic Cycle**
duelinghistory.com/history/MandateofHeaven/

Move the emperor around all six stages.

 The six stages: 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____
 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____
**4. China — The Dynasties**
duelinghistory.com/history/ChineseDynastiesToPresent/

Move the emperor through all ten dynasties.

Dynasty that first united China: _____ Dynasty that built the Forbidden City: _____

**5. The Shattered Vase**
duelinghistory.com/duels/ShatteredVase/

Answer Master Lin's questions and rebuild the vase.

Shards restored: ____ / 12 Crashes: ____ Hardest question: _____

Think it through: In your own words, what was the Mandate of Heaven, and how did it help explain why dynasties rose and fell?

Answer Key

For the student handout and the activity-page questions.

Activity 1

- The Ming dynasty (1368–1644).
- Prediction answers will vary — look for age, rarity, skill of the potters, and the fame of Ming porcelain.

Activity 2

- The Chang Jiang (Yangtze River) and the Huang He (Yellow River).
- Around 2000 B.C.
- Shang kings asked their ancestors questions on oracle bones; they are the earliest Chinese writing.

Activity 3

- Strong dynasty with the Mandate → decline and corruption → disasters → Mandate lost, rebellion justified → overthrow → new dynasty claims the Mandate.
- Disasters and corruption were read as signs that Heaven had withdrawn its approval.
- By restoring peace and order — success itself was the proof.

Activity 4

- The Qin dynasty, under Shi Huangdi, the First Emperor.
- Any two: movable type printing, the magnetic compass, paper money, gunpowder weapons.
- The Yuan (Mongols under Kublai Khan) and the Qing (Manchus).
- Handout: Qin first united China; the Ming built the Forbidden City.

Activity 5

- Answers will vary by team. Student-written questions should be answerable from Activities 2–4.

All five activities are free at duelinghistory.com. Find more in the History, Duels, and Music sections.