

Teacher's Notes: **Imperial Geography - World Empires Matching Activity**

Overview: Without necessarily learning historic details, students match maps of historic empires with brief verbal descriptions of geographic position. In doing so, they realize that political entities roughly the size of the modern United States were not uncommon in the past. Students should be encouraged to make generalizations about latitude (a narrow range) and longitude (eastern hemisphere).

GLCE: 6G111, 411, 432, 442

Common Core links: ELA

Related Discipline: History

Time: ½ to 1 class period

Setup: One setup is to ask about a current “historical” movie or Oscar rerun – from Ben Hur to the Last Samurai, movies often featured historic empires as dramatic settings. Another setup is to note that several US-sized empires have existed in the past, and they have fallen for a variety of reasons that might be worth investigating (politicians are fond of making warnings about parallels!) Note that the goal of this activity is not to “do” the history of empires – it is to get a feel for the geographic setting of some famous empires that students will study in future history classes

Procedure: Version D (Difficult) requires prior knowledge about these empires – it can be used to assess understanding in a world history class. Version E (Easy) has its focus on spatial thinking and spatial vocabulary – it can reinforce knowledge of continent names while introducing students to the geographic position of several key empires. Model the interpretation of a geographic description – e.g., the Han Dynasty was a powerful empire that had its core area in north China but eventually ruled over a large area in East Asia. Students should have access to a political map of the world (or our simplified MGA political base map) in order to identify modern countries that are in the same area as ancient empires. These modern countries often have ruins, economic patterns, political institutions, and other cultural traits that originated in the empires (for example, people in Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Romania, and part of Belgium and Switzerland all speak “Romance languages” that trace their roots to Latin, the language of the Roman Empire).

Answers:

H – Persia (Iran, Turkey, Iraq)

C – Caliphate (Saudi Arabia, Spain, Egypt, Iran, etc.)

B – Han (China)

E – Mongol (Mongolia, China, Central Asia “stans”)

G – Maurya (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh)

A – Mali/Songhai (Mali, Niger, Senegal, etc.)

F – Roman (Italy, France, Greece, Israel, etc.)

D – Inca (Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Chile)

Debrief: Reassure students that the goal is not to memorize a lot of details about these empires – our goal is to build a solid mental map so that future studies are well grounded. Why do we want to know this? Because modern events, such as trade connections and terrorist attacks often have roots that can be traced to the empires that formerly ruled over large parts of the earth.

It is also worth emphasizing that the core areas of many empires occupy a narrow range of latitude, in the so-called “middle latitudes” between the hot rainforests and deserts of the equatorial and tropical regions and the cold forests and tundras of the arctic regions.

Vocabulary: empire map pattern core area extent archaeology collapse

Extensions: The data table has information about dates, area, and population of various empires.

The clickable map of world empires allows teachers and/or students to view empires alone or in combinations of any two, three, etc. They can also add layers of information that show things like mountains, rivers, or cropland. Students can examine the map patterns and try to identify physical barriers that made contact between empires difficult (e.g. the Himalaya mountains between the Mauryan, Gupta, and Delhi empires of South Asia (India) and the various dynasties of East Asia (China). Students can also look for places where empires might have fought (e.g. the prolonged struggles between the Roman Empire and the Parthian successor to the Persian empires in Southwest Asia, or the complex relations between Mongol hordes and the Chinese people in East Asia and the Islamic governments in Central and Southwest Asia).