Nomads of the Asian Steppe

- The Eurasian steppe is a vast grassland serving as a trade route and as a pasture for nomads.

What conditions on the steppe may have discouraged agriculture?

- Lack of rainfall,
- Windy conditions,
- Temperature extremes.

Nomads of the Asian Steppe

- Steppe nomads are pastoralists who move in seasonal patterns and live in clans.
  - Fat meat and mare's milk, clothing of skins and wool, lived in yurts.
  - Keeping claim to land that was not permanently occupied was difficult.
  - Based on a common ancestor, a clan moves to new pastures together, raids neighbors, and fights off invaders (often with fellow clans).
Nomads of the Asian Steppe

• Steppe nomads trade with settled communities but also raid them
  – Trade horses for items they lack, such as grain, metal, cloth, and tea
  – Accustomed to scarcity and hardship, they were tough and sometimes tempted by luxuries of settled peoples
  – Organized into larger groups and invaded larger states, sometimes settling in conquered lands

Defending the Frontier

How might a strong, organized empire defend its frontier?

• Defensive walls
• Border armies
• Maintaining loyalty of army and civil servants

Rise of the Mongols

• Mongol clans unite under the leadership of Genghis Khan and conquer Central Asia
  – 1206 he assumes the title Genghis Khan
  – His first goal was China but turned to the Islamic region after invading the northern Jinn
    “In retribution for every hair on the heads it seemed that a hundred thousand rolled in the dust.”
    – court historian
  – 1221 Central Asia was under Mongol control
Rise of the Mongols

• Genghis Kan, a brilliant organizer and strategist, uses new weapons, technology, and terror to overwhelm his enemies
  – Cavalry wore silk undergarments to protect from arrows that pierce their armor
  – Leaders had mobile yurts – the Mongol army was like a moving city
  – If the city gates were not opened to his people, he would kill everybody

Mongol Empire

• Mongol conquests create the largest empire yet known
• Over time (by 1260), the empire is divided into four kingdoms (ruled by Genghis’ descendants)
  1. Khanate of the great Khan (Mongolia and China)
  2. Khanate of Chagatai (Central Asia)
  3. Ilkhanate (Persia)
  4. Khanate of the Golden Horde (Russia)
Mongol Empire

- After conquering an area, Mongols often adopt many aspects of the local culture
- *Pax Mongolia* – a period of peace encourages trade and cultural exchange between Europe and Asia
Mongol Empire Leaders

- **Genghiz Khan** – Conquered China in early 1200s
- **Kublai Khan** – Extended Mongol control over most of Asia, Russia and eastern Europe in Hungary. Traded extensively with the West. Entertained Marco Polo.

Kublai Khan Conquers China

- Kublai Khan becomes the first foreigner to rule China
- Khan founds the Yuan dynasty, moves his capital to China, and opens the country to trade with foreign countries
- Mongols fail to conquer Japan, which contributes to the weakening of the empire

*The invasion was ended by a typhoon (cyclone)*

Typhoons are cyclones in the Northwest Pacific. Hurricanes are cyclones in the Northeast Pacific and Atlantic.
Mongol Rule in China

- Mongols use Chinese institutions and foreign administrators to rule China
- Kublai Khan leads China to renewed economic prosperity and encourages foreigners to visit China
- Europe learns of China’s achievements through Marco polo

Why do you think Kublai Khan employed Marco? He trusted foreigners more and Polo new many languages in addition to being an experienced traveler.

End of Mongol Rule

- Fruitless wars, taxation, and overspending set the stage for Mongol decline
- After the death of Kublai Khan, Chinese rebels finally overthrow the Mongols
- Although the Mongol rulers are gone, they have influenced cultures from Europe to Asia
- Chinese ideas spread across Eurasia (plague)