

Emperor Yu

WITNESS HISTORY  AUDIO**The Rewards of Devotion**

In very ancient times, relates a Chinese legend, floodwaters rose to the top of the highest hills. Yu, a hard-working official, labored for a decade to drain the waters, not going home once to see his family. As a reward for his selfless efforts, the emperor appointed Yu the next ruler of China.

“The emperor said, ‘Come, Yu. The inundating [flooding] waters filled me with dread, [but then] you realized all that you represented, and accomplished your task—thus showing your superiority to other men. . . . I see how great is your virtue, how admirable your vast achievements.’”

—*Books of Yu*

Focus Question What characteristics defined the civilization that developed in China under its early rulers?

Rise of Civilization in China

Objectives

- Understand how geography influenced early Chinese civilization.
- Analyze how Chinese culture took shape under the Shang and Zhou dynasties.
- Describe the religions and belief systems that developed in early China.
- List some achievements made in early China.

Terms, People, and Places

loess	philosophy
clan	filial piety
dynastic cycle	oracle bone
feudalism	character
Confucius	calligraphy
Laozi	

Note Taking

Reading Skill: Recognize Sequence Keep track of the sequence of events in early China by making an outline of the events in the order they occurred.

- | |
|-----|
| I. |
| A. |
| B. |
| II. |
| A. |
| B. |

The legend of Yu offers insights into early China. The Chinese depended so much on rivers for irrigation and transportation that they highly valued the ability to control floodwaters and to develop irrigation systems. The legend also shows how much the Chinese prized devotion to duty. Both themes played a key role in the development of Chinese civilization.

Geography Influences Civilization

Long distances and physical barriers separated China from Egypt, the Middle East, and India. This isolation contributed to the Chinese belief that China was the center of the earth and the sole source of civilization. These beliefs in turn led the ancient Chinese to call their land Zhongguo (jahng gwoh), or the Middle Kingdom.

Geographic Barriers Set China Apart To the west and southwest of China, brutal deserts and high mountain ranges—the Tian Shan (tyen shahn) and the Himalayas—blocked the easy movement of people. To the southeast, thick rainforests divided China from Southeast Asia. To the north awaited a forbidding desert, the Gobi. To the east lay the vast Pacific Ocean.

Despite these formidable barriers, the Chinese did have contact with the outside world. They traded with neighboring people and, in time, Chinese goods reached the Middle East and beyond. More often, the outsiders whom the Chinese encountered were nomadic invaders. Such conquerors, however, were usually absorbed into the advanced Chinese civilization.

China Includes Varied Regions As the Chinese expanded over an enormous area, their empire came to include many regions. The Chinese heartland lay along the east coast and the valleys of the Huang, or Yellow, River and the Chang River. In ancient times, as today, these fertile farming regions supported the largest populations. Then, as now, the rivers provided water for irrigation and served as transportation routes.

Beyond the heartland are the outlying regions of Xinjiang (shin jyahng) and Mongolia. These regions have harsh climates and rugged terrain. Until recent times, they were mostly occupied by nomads and subsistence farmers. Nomads repeatedly attacked and plundered Chinese cities. At times, however, powerful Chinese rulers conquered or made alliances with the people of these regions and another outlying region, Manchuria. China also extended its influence over the Himalayan region of Tibet, which the Chinese called Xizang (shih dzahng).

Settling Along the “River of Sorrows” Chinese history began in the Huang River valley, where Neolithic people learned to farm. As in other places, the need to control the flow of the river through large water projects probably led to the rise of a strong central government and the founding of what is sometimes called the Yellow River civilization.

The Huang River got its name from the **loess**, or fine windblown yellow soil, that it carries eastward from Siberia and Mongolia. Long ago, the Huang River earned a bitter nickname, “River of Sorrows.” As loess settles to the river bottom, it raises the water level. Chinese peasants labored constantly to build and repair dikes to prevent the river from overflowing. If the dikes broke, floodwaters burst over the land. Such disasters destroyed crops and brought mass starvation.

 **Checkpoint** In what different ways did people live in ancient China?

Geography Interactive
For: Audio guided tour
Web Code: nap-0341

Shang and Zhou Civilizations

Map Skills Today, China extends west from the Pacific Ocean deep into central Asia. Its first civilizations existed in the eastern part of the modern-day country.

- 1. Locate** (a) Chang River (b) Gobi (c) Huang River (d) Anyang
- 2. Place** What physical features acted as obstacles to contact outside China?

- 3. Draw Inferences** In which directions from China do you think it was easiest for the Chinese to make contact with other people? Why?





Shang artists were famous for their bronze works, such as the mask and vessel shown here.

Vocabulary Builder

interacted—(in tur AKT ed) *vi.* was involved in communication, work, or social activity with someone else

China Begins to Take Shape Under the Shang Dynasty

About 1766 B.C., the first Chinese dynasty for which scholars have found solid evidence arose in a corner of northern China. This dynasty, the Shang, would dominate the region until about 1122 B.C.

Formation of Government Archaeologists have uncovered some of the large palaces and rich tombs of Shang rulers. The evidence indicates that from their walled capital city at Anyang, the Shang emerged to drive off nomads from the northern steppes and deserts. Shang kings probably controlled only a small area. Loyal princes and local nobles governed most of the land. They were likely the heads of important **clans**, or groups of families who claim a common ancestor.

In one Shang tomb, archaeologists discovered the burial place of Fu Hao (foo how), wife of the Shang king Wu Ding. Artifacts show that she owned land and helped to lead a large army against invaders. This evidence suggests that noblewomen may have had considerable status during the Shang period.

Social Classes Develop As in other early civilizations, the top level of Shang society included the royal family and a class of noble warriors. Shang warriors used leather armor, bronze weapons, and horse-drawn chariots. They may have learned of chariots from other Asian peoples with whom they interacted.

Early Chinese cities supported a class of artisans and merchants. Artisans produced goods for nobles, including bronze weapons, silk robes, and jade jewelry. Merchants exchanged food and crafts made by local artisans for salt, certain types of shells, and other goods not found in northeastern China.

The majority of people in Shang China were peasants. They clustered together in farming villages. Many lived in thatch-roofed pit houses whose earthen floors were dug several feet below the surrounding ground. Peasants led grueling lives. All family members worked in the fields, using stone tools to prepare the ground for planting or to harvest grain. When they were not in the fields, peasants had to repair the dikes. If war broke out between noble families, the men had to fight alongside their lords.

 **Checkpoint** How was China governed during the Shang dynasty?

The Zhou Dynasty Further Defines China

In 1122 B.C., the battle-hardened Zhou (joh) people marched out of their kingdom on the western frontier to overthrow the Shang. They set up the Zhou dynasty, which lasted until 256 B.C.

Receiving the Mandate of Heaven To justify their rebellion against the Shang, the Zhou promoted the idea of the Mandate of Heaven, or the divine right to rule. The cruelty of the last Shang king, they declared, had so outraged the gods that they had sent ruin on him. The gods then passed the Mandate of Heaven to the Zhou, who “treated the multitudes of the people well.”

The Chinese later expanded the idea of the Mandate of Heaven to explain the **dynastic cycle**, or the rise and fall of dynasties. As long as a dynasty provided good government, it enjoyed the Mandate of Heaven. If the rulers became weak or corrupt, the Chinese believed that heaven would withdraw its support. Floods, famine, or other catastrophes were signs that a dynasty had lost the favor of heaven. In the resulting chaos, an ambitious leader might seize power and set up a new dynasty. His success and strong government showed the people that the new dynasty had won the Mandate of Heaven. The dynastic cycle would then begin again.

Establishing a Feudal State The Zhou rewarded their supporters by granting them control over different regions. Thus, under the Zhou, China developed into a feudal state. **Feudalism** (FYOOD ul iz um) was a system of government in which local lords governed their own lands but owed military service and other forms of support to the ruler.

In theory, Zhou kings ruled China for more than 850 years. For about 250 of those years, they actually did enjoy great power and prestige. After the 800s B.C., however, feudal lords exercised the real power and profited from the lands worked by peasants within their domains.

Spurring Economic Growth During the Zhou period, China's economy grew. Knowledge of ironworking reached China in the 600s B.C. As iron axes and ox-drawn iron plows replaced stone, wood, and bronze tools, farmers produced more food. Peasants also began to grow new crops, such as soybeans. Some feudal lords organized large-scale irrigation works, making farming even more productive.

WITNESS HISTORY VIDEO

Watch *Discovering Ancient Shang China* on the **Witness History Discovery School™** video program to learn more about archaeologists' investigations of Shang China.



History Interactive

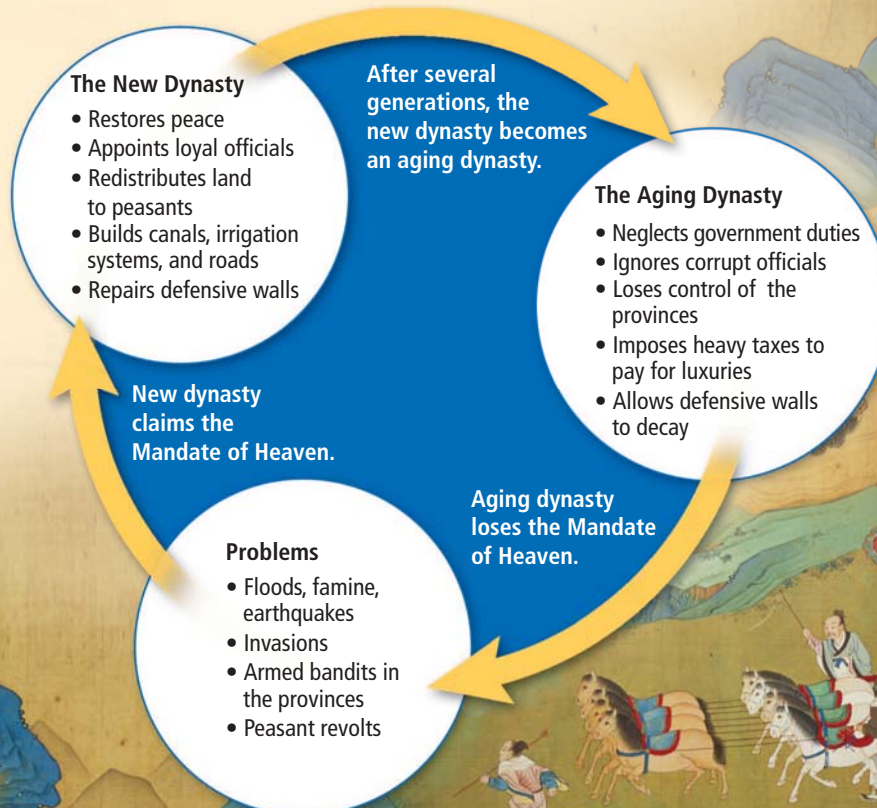
For: Interactive diagram
Web Code: nap-0342

Dynastic Rule in China

Dynasties ruled China for most of its history until 1912. The Chinese believed that dynasties could gain or lose the Mandate of Heaven, depending on how wisely an emperor ruled. A Zhou emperor is shown here in his chariot. *According to the diagram, how did a new dynasty try to repair the problems left by an aging dynasty?*

Dynasties of China	
Dynasty	Dates
Shang	1766 B.C.–1122 B.C.
Zhou	1122 B.C.–256 B.C.
Qin	221 B.C.–206 B.C.
Han	202 B.C.–A.D. 220
Sui	A.D. 581–A.D. 618
Tang	A.D. 618–A.D. 907
Song	A.D. 960–A.D. 1279
Ming	A.D. 1368–A.D. 1644
Qing	A.D. 1644–A.D. 1911


The Dynastic Cycle



Commerce expanded, too. The Chinese began to use money for the first time. Chinese copper coins were made with holes in the center so that they could be strung on cords. This early form of a money economy made trade easier. Merchants also benefited from new roads and canals that feudal lords constructed.

Economic expansion led to an increase in China's population. People from the Huang River heartland advanced into central China and soon began to farm the immense Chang River basin. As well, feudal nobles expanded their territories and encouraged peasants to settle in the conquered territories.

Zhou Dynasty Ends By 256 B.C., China was a large, wealthy, and highly developed center of civilization. Yet the Zhou dynasty was too weak to control feudal lords who ignored the emperor and battled one another in savage wars. Out of these wars rose a ruthless leader who was determined to impose political unity. His triumphs brought an end to the Zhou dynasty and ushered in the Qin (chin) dynasty, which you will read about in the next section.

 **Checkpoint** Explain three ways that China expanded during the Zhou dynasty.

Religious Beliefs Develop in Early China

By Shang times, the Chinese had developed complex religious beliefs, many of which continued to be practiced for thousands of years. The early Chinese prayed to many gods and nature spirits. Chief among them was the supreme god, Shang Di (shahng dee). The king was seen as the link between the people and Shang Di.

Gods as great as Shang Di, the Chinese believed, would not respond to the pleas of mere mortals. Only the spirits of the greatest people, such as the ancestors of the king, could possibly get the ear of the gods. Thus, the prayers of rulers and nobles to their ancestors were thought to serve the community as a whole, ensuring such benefits as good harvests or victory in war.

At first, only the royal family and other nobles had ancestors important enough to influence the gods. Gradually, other classes shared in these rituals. The Chinese called on the spirits of their ancestors to bring good fortune to the family. To honor their ancestors' spirits, they offered them sacrifices of food and other necessities. When westerners reached China, they mistakenly called this practice "ancestor worship."

 **Checkpoint** What did early Chinese communities do to ensure good harvests?

Two Major Belief Systems Take Root in Zhou China

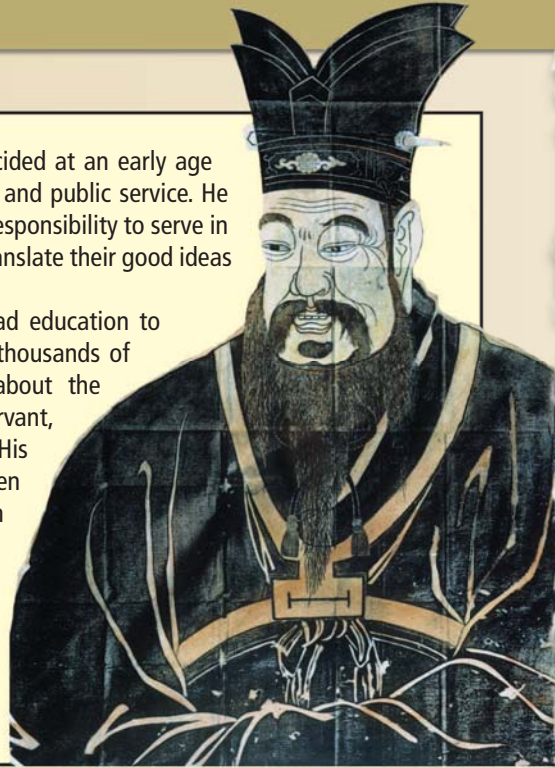
During the late Zhou period, when war and social changes were disrupting old ways of life, new belief systems developed that would form the basis of China's culture and government for centuries to come. Thinkers such as **Confucius** (known by the Chinese as Kong Fuzi) and **Laozi** (LOW dzuh) put forward ideas on how to restore social order and maintain harmony with nature.

BIOGRAPHY

Confucius

Confucius (551 B.C.–479 B.C.) decided at an early age to dedicate himself to education and public service. He felt that educated people had a responsibility to serve in government so that they could translate their good ideas into action.

As a teacher, Confucius spread education to both rich and poor. He inspired thousands of followers with his guidelines about the proper way to live. As a public servant, he did not fare so well, however. His high standards of conduct often brought him into conflict with corrupt officials. According to Confucius, “The superior man understands righteousness. The inferior man understands profit.” **Why do you think people were inspired by Confucius’ teachings?**



The Master said, If out of the three hundred *Songs* I had to take one phrase to cover all my teaching, I would say ‘Let there be no evil in your thoughts.’

Tzu-kung asked about the true gentleman. The Master said, He does not preach what he practices till he has practiced what he preaches.

The Master said, Yu, shall I teach you what knowledge is? When you know a thing, to recognize that you know it, and when you do not know a thing, to recognize that you do not know it. That is knowledge.

—*Analects*

Confucius Spreads His Wisdom Confucius was born in 551 B.C. to a noble but poor family. A brilliant scholar, Confucius hoped to become an adviser to a local ruler. He studied ancient texts to learn the rules of conduct that had guided the ancestors. For years, he wandered from court to court talking to rulers about how to govern. Unable to find a permanent government position, he turned to teaching. As his reputation for wisdom grew, he attracted many students. Like two other influential thinkers who lived about the same time—Siddhartha Gautama in India and Socrates in Greece—Confucius never wrote down his ideas. Rather, his students collected many of his sayings in the *Analects*.

Unlike the Buddha, Confucius took little interest in spiritual matters such as salvation. Instead, he developed a **philosophy**, or system of ideas, that was concerned with worldly goals, especially those of ensuring social order and good government.

Five Relationships Shape Behavior Confucius taught that harmony resulted when people accepted their place in society. He stressed five key relationships: ruler to subject, parent to child, husband to wife, elder brother to younger brother, and friend to friend. Confucius believed that, except for friendship, none of these relationships were equal. For example, he felt that older people were superior to younger ones and men were superior to women.

According to Confucius, everyone had duties and responsibilities. Superiors should care for their inferiors and set a good example, while inferiors owed loyalty and obedience to their superiors. Correct behavior, Confucius believed, would bring order and stability. Confucius put **filial piety**, or respect for parents, above all other duties. Other Confucian values included honesty, hard work, and concern for others. “Do not do to others,” he declared, “what you do not wish yourself.”

Confucius also taught that it was a ruler's responsibility to provide good government. In return, the people would be respectful and loyal subjects. Confucius said the best ruler was a virtuous one who led people by good example. In addition, Confucius believed that government leaders and officials should be well educated. "By nature, men are pretty much alike," he said. "It is learning and practice that set them apart." He urged rulers to take the advice of wise, educated men.

Confucianism Has Great Influence In the centuries after Confucius died, his ideas influenced many aspects of Chinese life. Chinese rulers relied on Confucian ideas and chose Confucian scholars as officials. The Confucian emphasis on filial piety bolstered traditional customs such as reverence for ancestors. Confucianism also introduced a long-lasting Chinese belief that the universe reflected a delicate balance between two forces, yin and yang. Yin was linked to Earth, darkness, and female forces, while yang stood for heaven, light, and male forces. To the Chinese, the well-being of the universe depended on maintaining balance between yin and yang. For example, the king should make the proper sacrifices to heaven while also taking practical steps to rule well.

As Chinese civilization spread, hundreds of millions of people in Korea, Japan, and Vietnam accepted Confucian beliefs. Nearly one third of the world's population came under the influence of these ideas.

Daoism Teaches Harmony With Nature Laozi, or "Old Master," is said to have lived at the time of Confucius and to have founded a philosophy called Daoism (DOW iz um). Although little is known about Laozi, he has been credited with writing the *Dao De Jing* (dow duh jing), or *The Way of Virtue*, a book that had enormous influence on Chinese life.

Unlike Confucianism, Daoism was not concerned with bringing order to human affairs. Instead, Daoists sought to live in harmony with nature. Laozi stressed that people should look beyond everyday cares to focus on the Dao, or "the way" of the universe. The Dao, he explained, was hard to understand fully or put into words. Thus he taught, "Those who know the Dao do not speak of it. Those who speak of it do not know it." To know the Dao, one should reject conflict and strife. Daoists stressed the simple ways of nature and the virtue of yielding. Water, they pointed out, does not resist, but rather yields to outside pressure—yet it is an unstoppable force.

Many Daoists turned from the "unnatural" ways of society. Some became hermits, artists, or poets. Daoists viewed government as unnatural and, therefore, the cause of many problems. "If the people are difficult to govern," Laozi declared, "it is because those in authority are too fond of action." To Daoists, the best government was one that governed the least.

Confucianism and Daoism Change and Blend Although scholars kept to Daoism's original teachings, the philosophy also evolved into a popular religion with gods, goddesses, and magical practices. Chinese peasants turned to Daoist priests for charms to protect them from unseen forces. In addition, people gradually blended Confucian and Daoist teachings. Although the two belief systems differed, people took beliefs and practices from each. Confucianism showed them how to behave. Daoism influenced their view of the natural world.

 **Checkpoint** Explain the different ways in which Confucianism and Daoism taught that people should live their lives.



To show the harmony of yin and yang, the Chinese have traditionally depicted them as two halves of a circle, one dark and one light.

Achievements Abound in Early China

The people of Shang and Zhou China are known for numerous cultural achievements. For example, Shang astronomers studied the movement of planets and recorded eclipses of the sun. Their findings helped them develop an accurate calendar with $365\frac{1}{4}$ days. In addition, the Chinese also improved the art and technology of bronze-making, producing stunning bronze weapons and ritual vessels covered with intricate decorations.

Discovering the Secret of Silk-making By 2640 B.C., the Chinese had made a discovery with extremely long-lasting impact: they had learned how to make silk thread from the cocoons of silkworms. Soon, the Chinese were cultivating both silkworms and the mulberry trees on which they fed. Women did the laborious work of tending the silkworms and processing the cocoons into thread. They then wove silk threads into a smooth cloth that was colored with brilliant dyes.

Only royalty and nobles could afford robes made from this luxurious silk. In time, silk became China's most valuable export. To protect their control of this profitable trade item, the Chinese kept the process of silk-making a secret for many hundreds of years.

● INFOGRAPHIC

The Secrets of Making Silk

Long viewed as a luxurious fabric, silk was a special commodity manufactured only in China for many hundreds of years. The ancient Chinese could not have begun to produce the fine fabric had they not discovered the special relationship between a tiny creature—the silkworm—and a small tree—the mulberry. Silkworms were so important to the Chinese that they used jade, a precious stone, to carve their likeness (above).



▲ This Chinese painting shows women combing out the silk threads (at left) after unwinding them from the cocoon and then inspecting the silk cloth (at right).

▼ Swath of silk fabric, about 2,000 years old

The silkworm is actually a caterpillar. As it spins a cocoon (below), it produces a thin fiber—silk. But it won't produce any silk if it hasn't feasted on the leaves of a mulberry tree (at left). ▼



Thinking Critically

- 1. Determine Relevance** Why do you think the Chinese kept the technology of making silk secret for so long?
- 2. Draw Inferences** How does silk-making show that even highly developed civilizations can be reliant on the environment?



The Chinese have written with characters such as these (at top) since the time of their invention through to today. A calligrapher might use a brush like this one (above).

Establishing a Complex System of Writing Written Chinese took shape at least 4,000 years ago, if not earlier. Some of the oldest examples are found on **oracle bones**. These are animal bones or turtle shells on which Shang priests wrote questions addressed to the gods or to the spirit of an ancestor. Priests then heated each bone or shell until it cracked. They believed that by interpreting the pattern of cracks, they could provide answers or advice from the ancestors.

Over time, a writing system evolved that includes tens of thousands of **characters**, or written symbols. Each character represents a whole word or idea. To write a character requires a number of different brush or pen strokes. In the past century, the Chinese have simplified their characters, but Chinese remains one of the most difficult languages to learn to read and write. A person must memorize several thousand characters to read a newspaper. By contrast, languages such as English or Arabic, which are based on an alphabet, contain only about two dozen symbols that represent basic sounds.

Although it was complex, this written language fostered unity in early China. People in different parts of China often could not understand one another's spoken language, but they all used the same system of writing. Not surprisingly, in earlier times, only the well-to-do could afford the years of study needed to master the skills of reading and writing. Working with brush and ink, Chinese scholars later turned writing into an elegant art form called **calligraphy**.

Creating the First Books Under the Zhou, the Chinese made the first books. They bound thin strips of wood or bamboo together and then carefully drew characters on the flat surface with a brush and ink. Among the greatest Zhou works is the lovely *Book of Songs*. Many of its poems describe such events in the lives of farming people as planting and harvesting. Others praise kings or describe court ceremonies. The book also includes tender or sad love songs.

 **Checkpoint** For what purpose did writing begin in China?

SECTION 4 Assessment

Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-quiz with vocabulary practice
Web Code: naa-0341

Terms, People, and Places

1. Place each of the key terms at the beginning of the section into one of the following categories: politics, culture, or geography. Write a sentence for each term explaining your choice.

Note Taking

2. **Reading Skill: Recognize Sequence** Use your completed chart to answer the Focus Question: What characteristics defined the civilization that developed in China under its early rulers?

Comprehension and Critical Thinking

3. **Summarize** What geographic challenges did China's early rulers face when trying to unite China or make alliances with peoples outside of China?
4. **Synthesize Information** What were the characteristics of the Shang and Zhou government and social structure?
5. **Analyze Information** What aspects of Confucianism and Daoism do you think contributed to their long-lasting influence?
6. **Draw Inferences** How do the various cultural developments of early China still affect the lives of people today?

Writing About History

Quick Write: Gather Details On some essay tests, you may be asked to show causes and effects. Before you write a response, you may find it useful to gather details about the topic, and then create a graphic organizer to sort out the causes and related effects. Gather details about China's isolation during its early history. Then create a graphic organizer that presents the causes of the isolation and predicts its effects.