Name _____ Date _____

Ancient China: Dynasties and the Mandate of Heaven

Directions: As you read about China's early dynasties, pay close attention to the words and names in bold. The questions ask what they mean and how to use them.

China's Early Dynasties

Dynasties Along the Huang He

Much of early Chinese civilization grew up along the **Huang He**, or Yellow River. The river is named for the yellow silt it carries. Its floods spread rich soil, but they also destroyed many villages and took many lives. These floods earned the river the name "China's Sorrow."

A **dynasty** is a series of rulers from the same family. The Shang dynasty ruled from about 1600 to 1046 BCE. Shang kings asked about the future, such as whether a harvest would be good. Experts heated **oracle bones**, pieces of ox bone or turtle shell, until they cracked, then read the cracks as answers. Questions and answers carved on these bones are among the oldest known Chinese writing.

In about 1046 BCE, the Zhou overthrew the Shang. The Zhou taught that Heaven gave a good ruler the right to rule, an idea called the **Mandate of Heaven**. They said the cruel last Shang king had lost it. In this view, floods, famines and revolts were signs that a ruler had lost Heaven's support. Later Chinese historians described a pattern of dynasties rising, weakening and being replaced, often called the **dynastic cycle**.

Later, Zhou kings lost power, and China split into warring states. In 221 BCE, the state of Qin conquered the others and united China. Its king took the title **Shihuangdi**, meaning "First Emperor." He set one standard for writing, coins and weights. He also linked older walls in the north. Most of the Great Wall standing today was built more than 1,500 years later, under the Ming.

1. Complete the sentences about two dynasties of early China.

Word bank
Qin • Ming • Shang • Zhou

In about 1046 BCE, the _____ overthrew the Shang dynasty. In 221 BCE, the state of _____ united China.

2. Match each bold word or name from the passage about early China to its meaning.
Write the letter of the matching answer on each line.

1. _____ Huang He
2. _____ dynasty
3. _____ oracle bones
4. _____ Mandate of Heaven
5. _____ dynastic cycle
6. _____ Shihuangdi

Choices for question 2

A. a series of rulers who come from the same family
B. the idea that Heaven gave a good ruler the right to rule
C. a pattern of dynasties rising, weakening and being replaced
D. pieces of bone or shell heated until they cracked, to seek answers about the future
E. a river named for the yellow silt it carries
F. the title, meaning First Emperor, taken by the Qin king who united China
G. a group of rival states that fought one another
H. a wall built to guard China's northern border

3. Why has the Huang He been called "China's Sorrow"?
A. It carried no silt or soil at all.
B. Its water was too salty to drink.
C. It flowed through a desert with no farms.
D. Its floods destroyed many villages and took many lives.

4. Suppose a dynasty suffered years of famine and a large revolt. What might people who believed in the Mandate of Heaven conclude?
A. The famine had nothing to do with the ruler.
B. The ruler may have lost Heaven's support.
C. The ruler had proved that Heaven was pleased with him.
D. The ruler would now rule forever.

5. How did the Zhou use the idea of the Mandate of Heaven?
A. To set one standard for coins and weights
B. To decide which bones to use for questions about the future
C. To explain why they had the right to overthrow the Shang
D. To choose which crops farmers should plant

6. The Qin dynasty fell only about 15 years after uniting China, and the Han dynasty took its place. Which term from the passage describes this kind of change?
A. oracle bones B. Great Wall C. Huang He D. dynastic cycle

7. Which statement about the oracle bones of the Shang matches the passage?

A. They were clay tablets pressed with a reed.

B. Their carvings are among the oldest known Chinese writing.

C. No one has ever been able to read their carvings.

D. They were used to record the laws of the Zhou.

8. What was China like just before the Qin united it in 221 BCE?

A. It was split into warring states.

B. It had no rulers or states at all.

C. It was ruled peacefully by the Shang.

D. It was one empire ruled by the Ming.

9. Shihuangdi set one standard for writing, coins and weights. How would this most likely help him rule a large empire?

A. It would end all trade between regions.

B. People everywhere could read the same orders and use the same coins.

C. It would make the floods of the Huang He smaller.

D. Each region could keep its own money and writing.

10. Which statement about the Great Wall of China matches the passage?

A. Shihuangdi built the whole wall that stands today.

B. The wall was finished in a single year.

C. The Qin linked older walls, but most of the wall standing today was built under the Ming.

D. The Shang built the wall to hold back the Huang He.