Empire-Building in Afro-Eurasia Unit 4 Overview: World History II, 10th Grade

Driving Concept 4: Empires and Power Structures (1500–1750)

Through this driving concept, students will analyze the creation and evolution of power structures and political entities throughout Eurasia and Africa in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. Students will also explore global trade and the growth of a global economy as well as the impact and influence on societies and people. Students will evaluate the exploitation of people for the benefit of accumulating wealth at the expense of human lives and the environment. During this driving concept, students will continue to apply historical thinking skills, explain how historians reconstruct the lives of non-elite individuals in different empires and evaluate the reliability and limitations of different types of historical evidence.

Essential Question

How did various empires across Afro-Eurasia use belief systems, bureaucracy, and military force to expand authority?

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About This Unit

Unit 4: Empire-Building in Afro-Eurasia (1500–1750) explores how early modern empires across Afro-Eurasia expanded and consolidated power through military strength, administrative systems, and ideological control. Building on earlier studies of global state formation, the unit introduces students to the Tokugawa, Qing, Mughal, and Ottoman Empires, prompting comparative analysis of the diverse methods used to govern vast and multiethnic populations. The unit begins by examining how the Tokugawa and Qing states centralized authority through social hierarchies, Confucian values, and isolationist or accommodationist policies. Students then investigate the Mughal and Ottoman empires—two Islamic "gunpowder" states—by analyzing how military innovation, religious tolerance or repression, and complex bureaucracy contributed to expansion and stability. The unit culminates in a Curated Research Paper, where students analyze how the roles and experiences of women in feudal Japan changed over time, using evidence to consider how historical narratives are constructed and how women exercised power within systems of social constraint.

Use the Best Practices Repository for information on implementing every strategy and lesson activity!

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Priority Standards	
2.28	Analyze the factors that led to the expansion and consolidation of the Tokugawa Shogunate in Japan, and evaluate the role of social hierarchy, centralized bureaucracy and isolationism in centralizing and maintaining power.
2.29	Analyze the factors that led to the expansion and consolidation of the Qing Dynasty in China, and evaluate the role of policies toward ethnic and cultural diversity in centralizing and maintaining power.
2.30	Analyze the factors that led to the expansion and consolidation of the Mughal Empire in India, and evaluate the role of religious tolerance, centralized administration and military power in centralizing and maintaining power.
2.31	Analyze the factors that led to the expansion and consolidation of the Ottoman Empire, including the role of religion, arts and architecture in centralizing and maintaining power.
2.34	Compare the ways in which women exercised power during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries within different empires.

Additional Standards	
2.24	Analyze primary sources to explain how Chinese and Japanese elites regarded Jesuit missionaries and the impact of Chinese and Japanese culture and politics on the reception of Christianity.
2.38	Evaluate the reliability and limitations of different source material in reconstructing the lives of non-elite individuals in at least two different empires.

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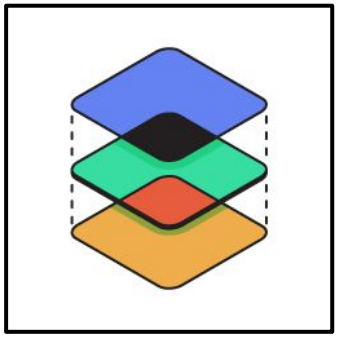
Unit Preview		
Subtopic(s)	***Compelling Question***	***Standard(s)***
State-Building in East Asia	How did governments in early modern East Asia gain and maintain power?	2.24, 2.28, 2.29, 2.34
Expansion of Gunpowder Empires	To what extent should the Mughals and Ottoman be considered inclusive empires?	2.30, 2.31
Assessment: Curated Research Paper		All Unit Standards



Unit Focus Skill: Comparison

Thinking historically means identifying both the similarities and the differences between the people, places, events, and ideas studied in history.

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State-Building in East Asia: Topic Overview

	LESSON 1 (60 MINS)	LESSON 2 (120 MINS)	LESSON 3 (90 MINS)
SUPPORTING QUESTION	How did the Tokugawa Shogunate strengthen and maintain its control over Japan?	In what ways did Tokugawa social and legal structures limit women's roles and how did women exert agency in spite of these challenges?	What factors most contributed to the Qing Dynasty's ability to expand and maintain power over multiple ethnic groups?
STANDARD(S)	2.24, 2.28	2.28, 2.34	2.29
FOCUS SKILL(S)	Contextualization Causation	Evaluating Evidence Comparison	Contextualization Evaluating Evidence Causation
DO FIRST	Frayer: Shogunate Notice, Wonder, Think	Frayer: Samurai Video Reflection	Frayer: Manchu Empire A-Z Guide
ACTIVITY 1 - LAUNCH	Inquiry Journal Topic 1: Supporting Questions	Introduction to Image Analysis	Guided Notes
ACTIVITY 2 - PRACTICE	"What is the Context?" - Tokugawa Shogunate Reading	Image Analysis: Women in Feudal Japan	Document Analysis
ACTIVITY 3 - EXHIBIT	Document Analysis Stations	†Document Analysis - Great Learning for Women - (THINKS)	Four Corners
CONCLUSION	Exit Ticket: Triangle, Square, Circle	Comparison Graphic Organizer	Unit 4 Inquiry Journal Topic 1: Compelling Question

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Expansion of Gunpowder Empires: Topic Overview

	LESSON 4 (60 MINS)	LESSON 5 (60 MINS)
SUPPORTING QUESTION	How did the Mughals balance religious diversity with political unity?	How do historians interpret the balance between tolerance and control in the Ottoman approach to governance?
STANDARD(S)	2.30	2.31
FOCUS SKILL(S)	Contextualization Comparison	Contextualization Evaluating Arguments Comparison
DO FIRST	Frayer: Zamindars Give One, Get One	Frayer: Janissaries Anticipatory Guide
ACTIVITY 1 - LAUNCH	Inquiry Journal Topic 1: Supporting Questions	Guided Notes
ACTIVITY 2 - PRACTICE	“What is the Context?” - The Mughal Empire Reading	†Document Analysis - Rietbergen or Lopasic - (EVALUATING ARGUMENTS)
ACTIVITY 3 - EXHIBIT	Partner Document Analysis Comparison Graphic Organizer	Review Anticipatory Guide (Optional)
CONCLUSION	Exit Ticket: Write & Draw	Unit 4 Inquiry Journal Topic 2: Compelling Question

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Assessment: Topic Overview

	LESSON 6 (60 MINS)	†LESSON 7 (210 MINS)	LESSON 8 (60 MINS)
SUPPORTING QUESTION	***Place-Based Lesson Extension*** *See page 8 for lesson options and view Best Practice Repository for additional information about implementation*	How did the status of women change over time in medieval and early modern Japan?	In what ways does reflection and revision support growth as a historical thinker and communicator?
STANDARD(S)		2.34, 2.38	2.34, 2.38
FOCUS SKILL(S)		Contextualization Continuity & Change Over Time	Evaluating Arguments Evaluating Evidence
DO FIRST		Women in Feudal Japan CRP Introduction	Frayer: Revision Video Reflection
ACTIVITY 1 - LAUNCH		Contextualization and Relevance of Women in Feudal Japan	Classwide Data Review
ACTIVITY 2 - PRACTICE		Document Analysis & Essay Outline	Essay Reflection Graphic Organizer
ACTIVITY 3 - EXHIBIT		Essay Creation	Essay Revision and Resubmission
CONCLUSION		CRP Self-Assessment and Essay Submission	Exit Ticket: Quickwrite

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Place Based Lesson Extension

	LESSON 6 (60 MINS)
SUPPORTING QUESTION	
STANDARD(S)	
FOCUS SKILL(S)	
DO FIRST	
OPTION 1 - PODCAST	
OPTION 2 - SYNCHRONOUS PRESENTATION	
OPTION 3 - FIELD TRIP	
CONCLUSION	Unit 4 Inquiry Journal Essential Question

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Unit Commentary:

Unit 4: Empire-Building in Afro-Eurasia (1500–1750) challenges students to compare how early modern empires across the Afro-Eurasian world expanded, consolidated, and maintained power over diverse populations. The unit centers on the historical thinking skill of comparison, guiding students to evaluate how empires used military force, religious policy, and administrative systems to establish authority and legitimacy in distinct regional contexts.

Topic 1 introduces the Qing Dynasty in China and the Tokugawa Shogunate in Japan, emphasizing how each state employed centralized bureaucracy and cultural traditions to reinforce political control. Students analyze how Qing leaders integrated ethnic minorities while asserting Confucian norms, and how Tokugawa leaders relied on a rigid social hierarchy and selective isolation to preserve internal order. Through source analysis and contextual reading, students evaluate the balance between continuity and change within these imperial systems.

Topic 2 turns to the Islamic gunpowder empires—the Mughals in India and the Ottomans in the eastern Mediterranean. Students explore how each empire leveraged military innovation, architectural grandeur, and religious policy to unify diverse subjects and expand territorial reach. Using visual and textual sources, students consider how rulers such as Akbar and Suleiman balanced tolerance with control, and how state institutions like the devshirme or zamindari systems supported imperial stability.

The unit concludes with a Curated Research Paper, where students analyze the lives of women in feudal Japan to evaluate patterns of continuity and change over time. Drawing on primary and secondary sources, students investigate how political structures, social class, and cultural expectations shaped women's roles. Through focused research and guided writing, students assess how women exercised influence, faced limitations, and navigated shifting systems of power across centuries.

Throughout the unit, students practice comparison, contextualization, and evaluating evidence to develop a more nuanced understanding of empire-building in the early modern era. By analyzing patterns of governance and diversity management across regions, students gain insight into both the common strategies and distinct challenges of sustaining power across vast and varied territories.

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Suggested Readings and Helpful Resources:

For information on:

Unit Pedagogical Resources:

- What is Comparison? Guide
- What is Comparison? Video

Museum Component:

- Field Trip: The National Museum of Asian Art
  - Exhibit → Looking Out, Looking In: Art in Late Imperial China

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