The First Emperor
from The Tomb Robbers
by DANIEL COHEN

Connect to Your Life

Life Without End  In the selection you are about to read, an early Chinese ruler searches for a secret that would let him live forever. What would be the advantages of living forever? What would be the disadvantages?

Build Background

HISTORY

Three dynasties, or ruling families, controlled ancient China from about 2000 to 256 B.C. In 256 B.C., the feudal state of Ch’in defeated the ruler of the Zhou (jō) dynasty. Ten years later a man named Cheng, the subject of this selection, became king of Ch’in. By 221 B.C., he had united all of China under the Ch’in dynasty.

Believing that he would live forever, and that his family’s reign would last 10,000 generations, the new ruler created a new title. He added shih (shē), meaning “first,” to huang ti (hwāng dē), meaning “emperor,” and called himself Ch’in Shih Huang Ti. The Ch’in dynasty survived only 15 years, but it began 2,000 years of rule by emperors. Throughout the following seven major dynasties, Chinese emperors were called huang ti. Imperial rule lasted until 1912, when China became a republic.

Focus Your Reading

LITERARY ANALYSIS  INFORMATIVE NONFICTION

The selection you are about to read is another example of informative nonfiction. It provides factual information about a historical figure—the first emperor of China. As you read, look for facts about the first emperor and his tomb.

ACTIVE READING  MAIN IDEA AND DETAILS

In informative nonfiction, you can figure out the writer’s most important points by identifying the main idea of each paragraph. The main idea may be stated at the beginning, middle, or end of the paragraph. It may also be unstated but suggested by details. As you read, note the main ideas and supporting details in at least five different paragraphs. Jot down this information in your

READER’S NOTEBOOK.

WORDS TO KNOW

Vocabulary Preview

consolidate  preservation  tyrant
immortality  proclaim  unparalleled
insignificant  reproduction  surpass
intricate
The First Emperor
from *The Tomb Robbers* by Daniel Cohen
There is what may turn out to be the greatest archaeological find of modern times, one that may ultimately outshine even the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamen. It is the tomb of the emperor Ch’in Shih Huang Ti. Now admittedly the name Ch’in Shih Huang Ti is not exactly a household word in the West. But then neither was Tutankhamen until 1922. The major difference is that while Tutankhamen himself was historically insignificant, Ch’in Shih Huang Ti was enormously important in Chinese history. In many respects he was really the founder of China.

The future emperor started out as the king of the small state Ch’in. At the time, the land was divided up among a number of small states, all constantly warring with one another. Ch’in was one of the smallest and weakest. Yet the king of Ch’in managed to overcome all his
rivals, and in the year 221 B.C. he proclaimed himself emperor of the land that we now know as China. From that date until the revolution of 1912, China was always ruled by an emperor. The name China itself comes from the name Ch‘in.

Shih Huang Ti ruled his empire with ferocious efficiency. He had the Great Wall of China built to keep out the northern barbarians. The Great Wall, which stretches some fifteen hundred miles, is a building project that rivals and perhaps surpasses the Great Pyramid. The Great Wall took thirty years to build and cost the lives of countless thousands of laborers. Today the Great Wall remains China’s number one tourist attraction.

As he grew older, Shih Huang Ti became obsessed with the prospect of his own death. He had survived several assassination attempts and was terrified of another. He traveled constantly between his 270 different palaces, so that no one could ever be sure where he was going to be. He never slept in the same room for two nights in a row. Anyone who revealed the emperor’s whereabouts was put to death along with his entire family.

Shih Huang Ti searched constantly for the secret of immortality. He became prey to a host of phony magicians and other fakers who promised much but could deliver nothing. The emperor heard that there were immortals living on some far-off islands, so he sent a huge fleet to find them. The commander of the fleet knew that if he failed in his mission, the emperor would put him to death. So the fleet simply never returned. It is said that the fleet found the island of Japan and stayed there to become the ancestors of the modern Japanese.

In his desire to stay alive, Shih Huang Ti did not neglect the probability that he would die someday. He began construction of an immense tomb in the Black Horse hills near one of his favorite summer palaces. The tomb’s construction took as long as the construction of the Great Wall—thirty years.

The emperor, of course, did die. Death came while he was visiting the eastern provinces. But his life had become so secretive that only a few high officials were aware of his death. They contrived to keep it a secret until they could consolidate their own power. The imperial procession headed back for the capital. Unfortunately, it was midsummer and the emperor’s body began to rot and stink. So one of the plotters arranged to have a cart of fish follow the immense imperial chariot to hide the odor of the decomposing corpse. Finally, news of the emperor’s death was made public. The body, or what was left of it, was buried in the tomb that he had been building for so long.

1. Great Pyramid: one of the largest pyramids built by the ancient Egyptians. It is made of more than 2 million stone blocks, each weighing about two tons. Each side of its base is longer than two football fields.
Stories about that tomb sound absolutely incredible. It was said to contain miniature reproductions of all the emperor's 270 palaces. A map of the entire empire with all the major rivers reproduced in mercury, which by some mechanical means was made to flow into a miniature ocean, was also part of the interior of the tomb. So was a reproduction of the stars and planets. According to legend, the burial chamber itself was filled with molten copper so that the emperor's remains were sealed inside a gigantic ingot.²

It was also said that loaded crossbows were set up all around the inside of the tomb and that anyone who did manage to penetrate the inner chambers would be shot full of arrows. But just to make sure that no one got that far, the pallbearers who had placed Shih Huang Ti's remains in the tomb were sealed inside with it. They were supposed to be the only ones who knew exactly how to get in and out of the intricate tomb. All of this was done to preserve the emperor's remains from the hands of tomb robbers. Did it work? We don't really know yet.

2. ingot (ɪŋˈɡɒt): a mass of metal shaped as a bar or block.
There are two contradictory stories about the tomb of Ch’in Shih Huang Ti. The first says that it was covered up with earth to make it resemble an ordinary hill and that its location has remained unknown for centuries.

But a more accurate legend holds that there never was any attempt to disguise the existence of the tomb. Ch’in Shih Huang Ti had been building it for years, and everybody knew where it was. After his death the tomb was surrounded by walls enclosing an area of about five hundred acres. This was to be the emperor’s “spirit city.” Inside the city were temples and all sorts of other sacred buildings and objects dedicated to the dead emperor.

Over the centuries the walls, the temples, indeed everything above ground was carried away by vandals. The top of the tomb was covered with earth and eventually came to resemble a large hill. Locally the hill is called Mount Li. But still the farmers who lived in the area had heard stories that Mount Li contained the tomb of Ch’in Shih Huang Ti or of some other important person.

In the spring of 1974 a peasant plowing a field near Mount Li uncovered a life-sized clay statue of a warrior. Further digging indicated that there was an entire army of statues beneath the ground. Though excavations are not yet complete, Chinese authorities believe that there are some six thousand life-sized clay statues of warriors, plus scores of life-sized statues of horses. Most of the statues are broken, but some are in an absolutely remarkable state of preservation. Each statue is finely made, and each shows a distinct individual, different from all the others.

This incredible collection is Shih Huang Ti’s “spirit army.” At one time Chinese kings practiced human sacrifice so that the victims could serve the dead king in the next world. Shih Huang Ti was willing to make do with the models. Men and horses were arranged in a military fashion in a three-acre underground chamber. The chamber may have been entered at some point. The roof certainly collapsed. But still the delicate figures have survived surprisingly well. Most of the damage was done when the roof caved in. That is why the Chinese archaeologists are so hopeful that when the tomb itself is excavated, it too will be found to have survived surprisingly well.

The Chinese are not rushing the excavations. They have only a limited number of trained people to do the job. After all, the tomb has been there for over two thousand years. A few more years won’t make much difference.

Though once denounced as a tyrant, Ch’in Shih Huang Ti is now regarded as a national hero. His name is a household word in China. The Chinese government knows that it may have an unparalleled ancient treasure on its hands, and it wants to do the job well. Over the next few years we should be hearing much more about this truly remarkable find.

WORDS TO KNOW

preservation (prəzh’ər-və′shən) n. the condition of being kept perfect or unchanged

tyrant (tə’trant) n. a cruel, unjust ruler

unparalleled (ən-pər’ə-ləld) adj. having no equal; unmatched
Connect to the Literature

1. What Do You Think?
   What were your thoughts as you finished reading this selection?

Comprehension Check
- Why is Shih Huang Ti called the first emperor of China?
- What two large-scale construction projects were carried out during his rule?
- When and how was the emperor's tomb discovered?

Think Critically

2. How would you describe Shih Huang Ti?
   Think About:
   • his attempts to achieve immortality
   • his accomplishments
   • his effects on those he ruled

3. ACTIVE READING MAIN IDEA AND DETAILS
   Look at the main ideas and supporting details you noted in your \( \text{READER'S NOTEBOOK} \). How do the details support the main ideas?

4. What kinds of information about Chinese history have archaeologists learned from the tomb so far?

5. Some archaeologists spend their lives searching for the remains of past civilizations. What do you think motivates them? In your opinion, do the time and effort equal the rewards?

Extend Interpretations

6. COMPARING TEXTS
   Now that you have read "The First Emperor," think back to "The Dog of Pompeii" (page 700) and "Tutankhamen" (page 718). Compare the ancient cultures of Pompeii, Egypt, and China as revealed by the artifacts described in each selection.

7. Connect to Life
   Many people would like to achieve a certain kind of immortality—that of having their names and achievements live on after their deaths. If you could choose one thing to be remembered by, centuries from now, what would it be?

Literary Analysis

INFORMATIVE NONFICTION
Magazine articles, newspaper articles, textbooks, and reference books are all types of informative nonfiction—writing that contains factual information. Informative nonfiction that is focused on history provides factual information about real events, places, and people from the past. The main purpose of informative nonfiction is to inform readers. In this selection, Daniel Cohen's main purpose is to inform readers about the first emperor of China and the excavation of his tomb.

Paired Activity
   What amazed you most about the first Chinese emperor? With a partner, go back through the selection and look for five facts that you think are interesting. Record these facts and share them with the class.
Writing
The Emperor's Traits Based on what you read about Ch'in Shih Huang Ti, write a description of this historical figure's character traits. What words describe him? Look back through the selection to find information that will help you answer this question. Begin your description with a clear statement about the emperor's traits. Support this statement with information from the selection. Place your description in your Working Portfolio.

Speaking & Listening
Asking Questions What questions do you have about the excavation of the emperor's tomb or about the life of the first emperor? Write a list of five open-ended questions—questions that can't be answered with a simple yes or no. Then read your questions to the class.

Research & Technology
Finding Answers Choose one of the questions you wrote for the Speaking & Listening activity and conduct research to find the answer. Use articles, books, and the Internet to find the information you need. Take notes and present your findings to the class. Be sure to note the sources you used to find the information.

Vocabulary
EXERCISE: RELATED WORDS On your paper, write the letter of the phrase that best explains the meaning of the boldfaced Word to Know.

1. A historically insignificant ruler was (a) important, (b) cruel, (c) not important.
2. The intricate security system of the tomb is thought to be (a) easy to get inside, (b) filled with cement, (c) complicated.
3. When Shih Huang Ti chose to proclaim himself emperor, he (a) was voted into the position, (b) won the title in a contest, (c) made himself emperor.
4. Obsessed with the thought of his death, the emperor sought immortality, (a) wanting to live forever, (b) needing more money, (c) hoping to die painlessly.
5. When officials consolidate power, each (a) gets a new job, (b) gets more power, (c) gets elected.
6. A small reproduction of the palace would look like (a) a miniature palace, (b) a blueprint, (c) a door key.
7. If the Great Wall did surpass all other monuments in its amount of stone, then it (a) used less stone, (b) used more stone, (c) used stone efficiently.
8. The preservation of the artifacts is amazing; they are (a) in terrific condition, (b) crumbling, (c) in a heap.
9. He was considered a tyrant because he could be (a) cruel, (b) lazy, (c) fair.
10. If the tomb is an unparalleled Chinese treasure, it is (a) unique in the world, (b) the oldest known, (c) a great treasure.
Grammar in Context: Compound-Complex Sentences

The sentence below uses information from Daniel Cohen's "The First Emperor." It is a compound-complex sentence.

While the emperor was in power, he had the Great Wall built, and he looked for a way to live forever.

A compound-complex sentence contains two or more independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses. In the sentence above, the words he had the Great Wall built and the words he looked for a way to live forever are both independent clauses—they can stand alone as sentences. The words While the emperor was in power is a dependent clause because it cannot stand alone.

A complex sentence has one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses.

While the emperor was in power, he had the Great Wall built.

Spooky Subjects Research for his popular books on ghost stories and superstitions led Cohen to creep around houses believed to be haunted and to spend "a damp and chilly night in an English churchyard." One of his most popular books is The Body Snatchers, a history of grave robbing. About his choice of spooky material, he says, "I don't really 'believe in' most of the subjects I write about, and I don't pretend to." With his wife, Susan Cohen, he has cowritten several popular books for teenagers on subjects ranging from movies to dinosaurs.

AUTHOR ACTIVITY

Amazing Burials Read a chapter from The Tomb Robbers to find out about another famous tomb. Share your findings in a report.