The Early Han Dynasty

So much opposition was generated to the Qin’s legalist measures, demands for military service, and public works projects that it was overthrown by the Han dynasty in 206. Despite the Qin’s strict laws and harsh punishments, the Han kept certain aspects of Qin society like the bureaucracy and meritocracy. A **bureaucracy** is a system of government in which most of the important decisions are made by state officials rather than by elected representatives. All Han government officials earned their jobs on **merit**, or ability. The Han were known for their highly centralized and stable government. In an effort to restore order among the population, the first emperor Liu Bang lowered taxes and removed the harsh legalist policies. He focused on people’s immediate needs and gave large plots of land to supporters. His policies created strong foundations for the Han Dynasty which lasted from 206 B.C.E. to 220 C.E.

**Directions:** Answer the questions below using the reading and your knowledge of social studies.

1. What aspects of Qin Dynasty remained in the Han Dynasty? Which ones changed?

2. Compare the maps below. What are some changes you noticed? What do you think the reasons for these changes are?

3. How did the Han restore order in China?
Guided Notes: The Han Dynasty

Han rulers left their stamp on all areas of Chinese life. Most Chinese call themselves “the people of the Han.”

Confucianism
- In 140 BC, ________________________ took the throne and shifted the country’s focus back to a ________________________.
- ________________________ became the official government philosophy.
- All government officials had to be ______________________________________.
  - A scholar-official was expected to match the Confucian ideal of a gentleman.
  - Officials were expected to be courteous, dignified, and knowledgeable in history, music, poetry, and Confucian teachings.
  - Wudi built a university that taught Confucian ideals, and awarded his officials with higher rank if they were familiar with Confucian principles.

Civil Service Examinations
- Han emperors believed that ________________________ rather than through family background or connections.
- To find the most qualified officials, an exam system was established known as ________________________.
  - Exams were given at the local, provincial, and national levels.
  - To pass the exam, candidates studied the Confucian classics and customs.
  - ________________________. Despite the equal opportunity, education was costly which meant most officials came from ________________________.
  - This system was used for over 2,000 years and kept ________________________ ________________________.

Social Classes of the Han
- ________________________.
- ________________________.
  - Four social classes existed during the Han:
    - ________________________: The Emperor, his court, and his scholars.
    - ________________________: The peasants, who made life work on a daily basis.
    - ________________________: The artisans, who produced items for daily life and some luxury goods.
    - ________________________: The merchants, who bought and sold what others made. This was viewed as the lowest class because merchants made money from making money. This did not follow Confucian thought.

Men and Women
- ________________________. China had a ________________________ society.
- Rulers had to obey their elders too; it was a crime to disobey.
- Some men gained jobs based on the respect they showed to elders.
- It was rare for a woman to receive an education. ________________________
  - ________________________.
  - Girls were not valued as highly as boys, however women could influence their sons’ families.
Han Achievements

• Art from the Han Dynasty is known for realistic scenes from everyday life, ________________, and depictions of religious figures and Confucian scholars.
• ____________________________ by grinding plant fibers into a paste and then setting the paste out to dry in sheets. Later they rolled the dried pulp into scrolls.
• _________________________________. Some poems were written to be sang.
• The ____________________________ was created which uses the position of the shadows cast by the sun to tell the time of day.
• The ____________________________ was created to measure the strength of an earthquake. Chinese scientists believed that the movement of the earth was a sign of evil times.
• ____________________________ was created. It is the practice of inserting needles into the skin to cure disease or relieve pain. This practice is still widely used today.

Directions: Complete the questions below using your notes.

1. How would these changes in Chinese society during the Han Dynasty lead the Han to earn the title of the “Golden Age of China”? Explain.

2. What surprised you about the early Han Dynasty?
Document Analysis of Classical China

Directions: Answer the questions based off of the documents below. Make sure to read each document carefully, annotate, and analyze the information presented.

Document 1


August was King Wen,  
continuously bright and reverent.  
Great, indeed, was the Mandate of Heaven.  
There were Shang’s grandsons and sons,  
Shang’s grandsons and sons.  
Was their number not a hundred thousand?  
But the High God gave his Mandate,  
and they bowed down to Zhou.

1. Describe the historical context of the document.

2. What values and limitations are present in this document for someone studying the Zhou Dynasty.

Document 2

Source: An ancient Chinese poet (name unknown) described how Shi Huangdi crushed his rivals (221 B.C.E.)

“Cracking his long whip, he drove the universe before him, swallowing up the eastern and western Zhou and overthrowing the feudal lords. He ascended to the highest position...and his might shook the four seas.”

3. Describe the historical context of the document.

4. What values and limitations are present in this document for someone studying the Qin Dynasty.
Document 3
Source: Big History: From the Big Bang to the Present by Cynthia Stokes Brown, 2007.

“The silk that constituted China’s chief export remained a mystery fabric to Greeks and Romans for many years. They heard many possible explanations, such as that it was made from bark on trees. Not until the mid-sixth century did the Byzantine emperor learn from two monks that the cloth was a product of silkworms feeding on mulberry leaves.

... Christian priests used purple silk embroidered with gold silk thread for their vestments... By the time of the Roman Emperor Augustus (27 BCE – 14 CE), trade between China and the west was firmly established and silk was the most sought after commodity in Egypt, Greece, and, especially, in Rome. Romans valued silk at its weight in gold. Politicians tried to ban the sale of silk because Romans were spending all of their money on it instead of buying Roman goods and products of more use.”

5. Describe the historical context of the document.

6. What values and limitations are present in this document for someone studying the Han Dynasty.

Document 4
Source: Aramco World, May/June, 1999 (adapted)

In China, during the Han Dynasty, papermaking and the invention of printing led to the duplication of important religious texts, government documents, instructional texts, and literature that helped fueled an increase in literacy, learning, and the sharing of knowledge. Papermaking was kept a secret, but eventually spread west.

7. What values and limitations are present in this document for someone studying the Han Dynasty.