Alexander the Great
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Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.) was the King of Macedonia who, through military campaigns, created an empire that spanned from Greece and Egypt all the way east to India. After his death, his successors would rule four empires, including the Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt that ended with Cleopatra. The Roman Republic would conquer some of Alexander's most famous lands, including Egypt, Macedonia, and Greece, between 146 and 27 B.C. As you read, take notes on Alexander's achievements during his life and his effect on the world even after his death.

Was Alexander the Great really great?

A great conqueror, in 13 short years he amassed the largest empire in the entire ancient world—an empire that covered two million square miles. And he did this without the benefit of modern technology and weaponry. In his day, troop movements were primarily on foot, and communications were face to face. Not bad for a kid who became the King of Macedon at the age of 20.

In his youth, Alexander was trained by some of the greatest tutors and scholars of the era. The famous Greek philosopher Aristotle was Alexander's personal tutor from age 14 to 16, and the two corresponded for the rest of Alexander's life.

Many of Alexander's accomplishments were made possible by his father, Philip II of Macedon. Macedon, which existed roughly where the modern country of Macedonia lies today, was a kingdom that lay geographically north of the Greek city-states.

In 338 B.C., King Philip of Macedon invaded and conquered the Greek city-states. Philip took advantage of the fact that the Greek city-states were divided by years of squabbling and fighting. Philip succeeded in doing what years of fighting between city-states had not done—he united Greece. Alexander was a major asset in the campaign, having helped turn the tide of battle in the decisive Macedonian victory at Chaeronea that year. At only 18, Alexander already had a skilled military mind.

1. **Amass** *(verb)*: to collect
2. **Correspond** *(verb)*: to write and communicate to (someone)
3. **Decisive** *(adjective)*: influential; conclusive
Conquering the World

Philip’s next goal was to defeat Greece’s age-old enemy to the east: Persia. For years, the massive Persian Empire threatened the very existence of the Greek way of life. But before he was able to pursue his second goal, Philip was assassinated.  

When his son, Alexander, took the throne in 336 B.C., he vowed to complete the plans of his father. In 334 B.C., Alexander invaded Persia, which lay across the Aegean Sea in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey).

After three grueling years of warfare and three decisive battles, Alexander smashed the Persian armies at the Tigris River and conquered the mighty Persian Empire, including the legendary city of Babylon. For many Greeks, this victory marked a moment of sweet revenge against a bitter foe.

At this point, at the age of 25, Alexander ruled an expansive empire. Nevertheless, his ambitions were not satisfied. While fighting the Persians, Alexander conquered Egypt and founded a city at the mouth of the Nile River. This city, which he named Alexandria after himself, became a cosmopolitan, diverse, bustling center of trade, the arts, and ideas.

But Alexander was not done. He continued his campaign, driving farther east, until he reached India and the Indus River in 326 B.C. At this point, his exhausted troops refused to fight further. They told Alexander that a truly great leader knows when it is time to stop fighting.

Without the support of his army, Alexander had no choice but to turn back and begin consolidating and organizing his far-flung empire. On his way home, Alexander died from disease in 323 B.C. His great empire was divided among his four strongest generals, who would go on to create empires and dynasties that lasted until conquered by the Roman Empire.

Alexander in Hindsight

Alexander’s legacy is seen in his nickname alone: “Alexander the Great.” The famous conqueror would influence future leaders including Julius Caesar of Rome and Napoleon. Alexander himself would adopt the myth that he was the son of Zeus.

4. **Assassinate** (verb): to kill
5. **Grueling** (adjective): difficult
6. The Tigris River is a major river that runs through ancient Mesopotamia, in modern-day Turkey and Iraq.
7. Babylon was a major city located between the famous Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in ancient Mesopotamia. It is one of the first large cities of one of the world’s first major civilizations.
8. **Expansive** (adjective): wide; extensive
9. The Nile River is a major river that runs from East Africa north through Sudan and Egypt and empties into the Mediterranean Sea.
10. sophisticated
11. **Consolidate** (verb): to unite or strengthen
12. Alexander’s four generals were Ptolemy, who created the Ptolemaic Empire in Egypt, Seleucus who founded the Seleucid Empire in the Middle East and India, Cassander who ruled as King of Macedon, and Antigonus who replaced Cassander.
13. Julius Caesar (100-44 B.C.) was a Roman general and leader who was central to the demise of the Roman Republic and rise of the Roman Empire under his adopted son, Augustus (also called Octavian). He and his peer, Pompey, were both influenced by Alexander the Great.
Alexander the Great's legacy is both far-reaching and profound. First, his father was able to unite the Greek city-states, and Alexander destroyed the Persian Empire forever. Wherever Alexander traveled, he instructed his team of scientists to record and analyze local plants, animals, geography, and weather, learning about his new empire while spreading the scientific principles of his tutor Aristotle. And finally, Alexander's conquests spread Greek culture, also known as Hellenism, across his empire.

Because Alexander did not force Greek culture upon his conquered peoples, they more readily accepted his rule and paid his taxes. Even further, they turned to Hellenism by choice. In fact, Alexander's reign marked the beginning of a new era known as the Hellenistic Age because of the powerful influence that Greek culture had on other people. Without Alexander's ambition, Greek ideas and culture might well have remained confined to Greece. However, little else united his conquered lands besides Hellenism, since Alexander did not set up common institutions throughout his empire.

Many historians see Alexander the Great in a different light. Although Alexander was both intelligent and handsome, he also had a darker side. He possessed a ferocious temper and from time to time would arbitrarily murder close advisors and even friends. Also, toward the end of his many campaigns, he senselessly slaughtered thousands whose only crime was being in his way.

But whether or not Alexander the Great was really great is up to each individual to decide.

14. Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) was a French military and political leader who rose to power during the French Revolution and declared himself Emperor of France from 1804-1814. He built a large empire, even invading Egypt simply because his idol, Alexander the Great, had done so as well.
15. Zeus is the king of the Greek gods.
16. **Profound (adjective):** very great or intense
17. **Confine (verb):** to limit or restrict
18. **Ferocious (adjective):** fierce or cruel
19. **Arbitrary (adjective):** without a logical cause or reason
Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. Which statement best describes the relationship between Phillip II of Macedon and his son, Alexander the Great?
   A. Alexander rose to prominence in an effort to avenge his murdered father, Phillip II.
   B. Phillip II laid the groundwork for Alexander’s military successes in Egypt and Mesopotamia.
   C. Phillip II educated his son to become a great ruler and Alexander followed in his father’s footsteps by expanding the Macedonian Empire from Greece to Persia and beyond.
   D. Alexander assassinated his father in order to seize the Macedonian throne and gain the glory of Phillip’s planned invasions of Persia for himself.

2. How does the Greek’s history with the Persians help us understand Alexander’s “greatness?”
   A. Alexander was smarter, as a Macedonian, than all the Greeks that came before him because he was able to defeat the Persians when the Greeks couldn’t.
   B. Alexander made himself a hero to the Greeks by crushing their old enemy and bully, Persia, thereby establishing his military legacy and status as ruler of the Greeks.
   C. Past Greek wars with Persia had weakened the Persian Empire, paving the way for Alexander’s victory at destroying the Persian Empire.
   D. Alexander did not destroy the Persians for glory or to expand his empire, but just to keep the Greeks safe from future invasion from their old enemy.

3. PART A: Which statement best summarizes the central idea of the text?
   A. Alexander the Great built an extensive empire that helped spread Hellenism throughout the world.
   B. Alexander the Great was a great conqueror but not as affective of a ruler, leading to his early death.
   C. Alexander the Great was only great because his successors kept his empire together and running for hundreds of years.
   D. While greatness is subjective, Alexander the Great should not be called “the great” because he was an angry and cruel leader.

4. PART B: Which phrase from the text best supports the answers to Part A?
   A. “They told Alexander that a truly great leader knows when it is time to stop fighting.” (Paragraph 10)
   B. “His great empire was divided among his four strongest generals, who would go on to create empires and dynasties that lasted until conquered by the Roman Empire.” (Paragraph 11)
   C. “Without Alexander’s ambition, Greek ideas and culture might well have remained confined to Greece.” (Paragraph 14)
   D. “Also, toward the end of his many campaigns, he senselessly slaughtered thousands whose only crime was being in his way.” (Paragraph 15)
5. Explain the author's main purpose in writing this article. Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. Do you believe that greatness is defined by goodness or influence? Would you define Alexander the Great as a great conqueror? Leader? Ruler? Would you call him a hero? Why or why not?

2. Alexander spent most of his time ruling his empire from the battlefield. How do you think his constant exposure to war affected his ambitions and strategies? Do you think his followers were right to demand he stop conquering and begin ruling his vast empire?

3. Alexander the Great’s empire was short-lived in its entirety, but the regions he conquered felt the effects of Hellenism for centuries. How do you think Alexander succeeded in creating this social change? What effects have these changes had on the world as we know it today? Cite evidence from the text, your personal experience, and other literature, art, and history in your answer.

4. How did Alexander use war to change the world? Does war still affect society today? Cite evidence from the text, your personal experience, and other literature, art, and history in your answer.