Conquerors: Alexander the Great: Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 6-8 | **Curriculum Focus:** Ancient History | **Lesson Duration:** Two class periods

Program Description

Alexander the Great's triumphs over the Persian and Egyptian empires are some of the most spectacular campaigns of conquest and exploration in history. But what inner conflicts drove this great military leader? Follow the story of a man who assumed power at the age of 22 and died at 33, planning his next expedition across North Africa and Europe.

Video Comprehension Questions

- What was the military goal that Alexander inherited from his father, Philip of Macedon? (*Philip of Macedon, Alexander's father, instilled in his son the will to avenge his country's honor and punish Persia for its attacks on Greece 150 years earlier, by reclaiming the land for Greece.*)
- How did Alexander's exposure to Aristotle shape the young man's future as a military leader? (*Aristotle tutored Alexander in observation, logic, reasoning, and thinking ahead – all important qualities that molded Alexander into the one of the greatest strategists in military history.*)
- What proposition did Alexander offer upon his arrival in Athens? (*Alexander challenged the Greeks to band together to support him with soldiers, ships, and supplies. If they did this, he would launch a war to liberate Greek cities in Anatolia that had been occupied by the Persians.*)
- What is the phalanx strategy and how did Alexander apply it in battle? (*Alexander's phalanx formation created row after row of heavily armed soldiers into a solid wall of power that attacked the enemy head-on in the battle at Issus. The Persian soldiers fell in waves and Darius, their leader, retreated.*)
- Why was the battle between Alexander and Darius at Issus a significant turning point for Alexander? (*Alexander's victory at Issus proved to be an important turning point for him due to Darius' overconfidence. Darius had been so sure of his own victory that he brought his wife, mother, and children along to savor the victory he expected. After Darius' defeat and unsoldierly retreat, his abandoned family members, particularly his mother, became important allies of Alexander.*)
- What did Alexander do with the massive wealth he acquired from his victories? How did this make him popular among his soldiers? (*Alexander, who may have become the richest man in history as a result of his conquests, paid his loyal soldiers and generals handsomely. His generosity made him popular among his soldiers. Then he used the bulk of his wealth to build 10 grand cities, planting the seeds of Greek civilization far and wide over an empire unprecedented in size. The Greek influence in these cities has had a lasting impact on the cultural complexion of these lands.*)

- What unfinished business did Alexander leave behind at the time of his death? (*At the time of his untimely death of malaria at the age of 33, Alexander had been planning a full-blown expedition into Arabia.)*
- How did Alexander's accomplishments leave an important military legacy for future leaders? (*The concept of creating a huge empire, never before attained to the degree Alexander achieved, was emulated in later years by such leaders as Caesar and Napoleon*.)

Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

Students will understand:

- As we learn about the people who made history, we can infer their answers and attitudes to questions.
- Press conferences, talk shows, and interviews follow conventions of format and language.

Materials

- *Conquerors: Alexander the Great* video and VCR, or DVD and DVD player
- Tapes of recent television or radio news programs (press conferences, talk shows)
- Recent interviews of heads of state published in newspapers and magazines

Procedures

1. Ask students to imagine Alexander the Great living in today's media age. What would we see and hear in a media event featuring Alexander? Tell students that they are going to generate an imaginary news event featuring Alexander the Great.
2. Before students begin, suggest that they view or read one or more examples of current news conferences, talk shows, or interviews with heads of state or other high-level diplomats. Alternatively, you may want the class to watch news programs that you have videotaped and to read interviews in periodicals you bring in. Then lead a discussion that analyzes what the students have watched or read. Help students identify the types of questions and discussions that the news media customarily put forth in our day and age.
3. Direct students working in small groups to select one of the following scenarios to flesh out. To prompt students' thinking, each scenario is accompanied by questions.

   Scenario A: Alexander conducting an empire-wide televised news conference at a critical point in his reign

   - What questions might reporters ask?
   - How will Alexander respond?

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Scenario B: Alexander and Darius appearing together as guests on a television talk show after the battle at Gaugamela

- How will the conqueror and the defeated rival treat each other?
- What issues will cause fireworks between them?
- What role will the show's host play?

Scenario C: Alexander close to death, granting an interview to a writer for the Inquiring Macedonian

- What kind of publication is the Inquiring Macedonian?
- What accomplishments is Alexander proud of?
- What regrets about his life does Alexander have?
- What are Alexander's parting words to the world

4. Using the content and tone of the models they have examined, students should now flesh out their scenarios in writing. Each group should produce one of the following, depending on the scenario they chose:
    - **Scenario A:** A made-up transcript of an Alexander the Great news conference (with indications of where and when the conference occurs and who asks the questions)
    - **Scenario B:** A made-up transcript of a TV talk show in which a host, who must be identified by students, engages Alexander and Darius at the same time
    - **Scenario C:** A made-up interview in question-and-answer format or a report based on an interview that Alexander grants the day before he dies
5. Have each group read or perform its written product for the rest of the class.

Discussion Questions

1. Homer's *The Iliad* profoundly inspired Alexander. He carried a copy of *The Iliad* with him into every battle and tried to live by its theme of "might tempered by mercy." Discuss what this theme means. Give examples of other events in history or current events when might was—or should have been—tempered by mercy.
2. Alexander was relatively young for a leader of such huge power and influence. Could a leader his age succeed today? Can you name a young leader in the military or in other areas? Would people take him seriously? Explain why or why not.
3. Once Alexander conquered Egypt, he was crowned pharaoh and regarded as a divine leader, descended from the gods. Research other leaders, past and present, who have been regarded as divine, and evaluate the impact such a belief has had on these rulers and their people.
4. The number of leaders in world history who have been called "the Great" is very small. What unique qualities in Alexander's personality and heritage contributed to his "greatness" and popularity? Discuss the status of leadership in today's world. Do we have a similar or different definition of "greatness" for today's leaders?

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5. During his 20,000-mile campaign, Alexander spread Greek culture throughout his conquests. Explain the strategy and methods he used to accomplish this, and evaluate the lasting effect of his efforts.
6. One significant by-product of Alexander's reign was the establishment of Greek as a universal language throughout the empire. Historians say that a single, universally spoken language helped to simplify commerce, education, and daily communication in the vast empire Alexander created. In the 20th century, people often disagree over whether a single national language is still a beneficial concept in modern countries. Debate the advantages and disadvantages of having a national language today.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Student's written scenario includes many substantive questions about real events in the life of Alexander and corresponding answers that would be characteristic of Alexander; conversational style; varied sentence structures; mature word choice.
- 2 points: Student's written scenario includes some substantive questions about real events in the life of Alexander and answers that are not at odds with history; acceptable style, sentence structure, and word choice.
- 1 point: Student's written scenario lacks adequate questions and answers; poor style, sentence structure, and word choice.

Vocabulary

Achilles' heel

Definition: A vulnerable point.

Context: Disaster finally found the indestructible Alexander's Achilles' heel when he fell victim to malaria.

barbaric

Definition: Possessing or characteristic of a cultural level more complex than primitive savagery but less sophisticated than advanced civilization.

Context: The civilization that the Greeks scorned as barbaric was actually more advanced and sophisticated than their own.

culture

Definition: The customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group.

Context: In his conquests, Alexander planted the seeds of a culture full of vitality and new ideas and left in his wake the roots of a new civilization.

divine

Definition: Of, relating to, or proceeding directly from God or a god.

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Context: Because his Egyptian subjects believe pharaohs are descended from gods, they believe Alexander to be divine.

heir

Definition: One who inherits or is entitled to succeed to a hereditary rank, title, or office.

Context: The son of a warrior king, Alexander was heir to a powerful throne.

invincible

Definition: Incapable of being conquered, overcome, or subdued.

Context: After his major conquest at Thebes, the Oracle of Delphi pronounces Alexander invincible.

monsoon

Definition: The season of the southwest monsoon in India and adjacent areas that is characterized by very heavy rainfall.

Context: The incessant rains of the monsoon are the last straw, and the soldiers refuse to go farther.

oracle

Definition: A person (such as a priestess of ancient Greece) through whom a deity is believed to speak.

Context: Among ancient Greeks and Romans, an oracle was a spiritualist who received and transmitted messages from the gods. Probably the most famous of all oracles, the Oracle at Delphi was situated on the slope of Mount Parnassus.

subjugation

Definition: The act of subduing or conquering.

Context: Alexander's conquest goes far beyond mere subjugation; he intends to colonize the East, extending culture and civilization.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)
McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- World History— Classical Traditions, Major Religions, and Giant Empires: Understands how Aegean civilization emerged and how interrelations developed among people of the eastern Mediterranean and Southwest Asia from 600 to 200 B.C.
- Geography—Places and Regions: Understands the concept of regions.

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- Geography—Human Systems: Understands the forces of cooperation and conflict that shape the divisions of Earth's surface.

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching social studies. To view the standards online, go to http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/.

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Time, Continuity, and Change
- People, Places, and Environment

Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html

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