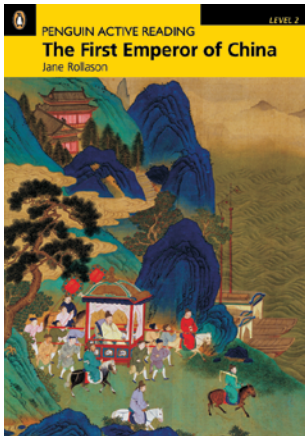




The First Emperor of China

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Summary

Two hundred and fifty years before Christ, the area known today as China was a collection of warring kingdoms, the most powerful of which was the Qin. King Ying Zheng of Qin, using his superior force, took control of the other kingdoms and united them through a common language and an efficient, but dictatorial, system of government. He was the First Emperor of China. The story also recounts attempts made on the emperor's life, the massive building projects he undertook, such as the construction of the Great Wall of China, and his descent into madness as a result of drinking too much mercury. Within each chapter there are also short accounts of the lives of ordinary people living in the empire, the life of one of his wives and an account of the discovery of the terracotta soldiers the emperor had built to protect him from his enemies in the afterlife.

Chapter 1: In 246 BC, China did not exist as a country. It was composed of warring kingdoms and the strongest of these was the kingdom of Qin. A young boy, Ying Zheng, is told that his father, the king of the kingdom of Qin, has died and that he is to be the new king. However, as he is too young to govern, his mother and the prime minister, Lu Buwei, govern for him. A man called Li Si travels from the kingdom of Chu to Qin and is appointed as a teacher to the young king. When Ying Zheng becomes twenty, and of age to be king, Lu Buwei is worried he will lose control. Suddenly Ying Zheng's grandmother dies, possibly murdered by Lu Buwei, meaning the young king has to wait six months before governing. Ying Zheng's mother has two sons by her lover, Lao Ai, and Lu Buwei plans to appoint one of them as the boy king. However, Li Si also wants to be prime minister and he joins forces with Ying Zheng.

Haung's story: Huang is a farmer, who has to give all his produce to the army.

Chapter 2: Lao Ai decides to kill Ying Zheng. His army attacks the king's men but are defeated and Lao Ai is executed. Ying Zheng's mother is spared, but when she tells the king that Lu Buwei had introduced her to her lover, the king exiles him to the south of the kingdom, where he commits suicide by drinking poison. Ying Zheng now has a very powerful army. He takes control of the kingdoms of Zhao and Han, killing many prisoners, and prepares to attack Yan.

Gao's story: Gao is a sixteen year old boy who is going to fight in the army for two years.

Chapter 3: The king of Yan recruits Jing Ke to kill King Zheng with a poisoned knife. Jing Ke arrives at Zheng's palace carrying with him the head of Fan Yuchi, an enemy of the king, and the knife hidden in a map of Yan. He tries to stab the king but is stopped by the king's doctor. Zheng conquers many kingdoms, until in 221 BC, Qin becomes China, and Zheng its First Emperor. He is renamed Qin Shi Huangdi. He and Li Si change the old system of government. From then on, people do not get good jobs just because of their family. Now they have to be clever and work hard. Also, they introduce a common language and money. But the king has many enemies and people try to kill him several times. The first is Jing Ke, but later a famous musician and then a group of three men try and fail. The emperor makes five journeys throughout his empire and leaves stones on mountains telling the people about himself.

Xia's story: Xia is the tenth wife of the emperor and she has a son. She doesn't have a very happy life because she is continually moving in an attempt to escape her husband's enemies.

Chapter 4: Some scholars do not like the way Zheng and Li Si are running the empire. They preferred the old ways and the teachings of Confucius. Zheng orders all the old books to be burnt and his soldiers kill many scholars. Li Si and Zheng introduce many laws and severe punishments for breaking them. His men spy on everyone, looking for enemies of the kingdom. Zheng embarks on a building policy, constructing palaces, roads, bridges and the Great Wall, which stretches 5,000 kilometres over the north of the country. He also makes Xianyang the most important city in the kingdom.



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Ehuang's story: Ehuang is a prisoner of the Qin. He is working on the construction of the Great Wall. His life is a hard and dangerous one.

Chapter 5: The emperor is increasingly worried about dying and sends his doctor to bring back life-giving herbs from the island of Penglai, where, legend has it, nobody ever dies. The doctor doesn't return. His other doctors recommend that he drink mercury as they believe the gods also drink it. He drinks it over a period of seven years and begins to go mad. He is afraid of meeting his enemies in the next world and so begins to build a huge tomb complex which he intends to fill with 8,000 terracotta soldiers. He dies before it is finished, but the tomb and the soldiers survive to this day.

Yang Peiyan's story: Yang Peiyan is a farmer. In 1974, he and his brothers are digging in the ground to find water when they unearth what they think are pieces of old plates and cups but are in fact the remains of the terracotta army.

Chapter 6: The mercury is slowly killing the emperor. He has a dream which tells him he must kill a large fish in order to become the sea-god. Before his death the emperor writes to his oldest son, Fu Su, telling him that he is to be the second emperor. Li Si wants the youngest son, Hu Hai, to be emperor, and so burns the letter and announces Hu Hai to be the new emperor. Zheng is buried in his tomb in Xianyang, along with his wives and other people involved in the construction of the tomb. Eight years of fighting then follow. All of Zheng's family are killed and the Han become controllers. They destroy much of Zheng's tomb and the terracotta soldiers. The legacy Zheng left behind was that he united China and introduced a system of government that was adopted by many subsequent leaders. The chapter ends with a summary of important dates in the story.

Background and themes

Warfare: The theme of war runs through the book. Not only do we learn about the conquests of the Qin empire against the other empires, but also about several attempts by individuals to assassinate the emperor. There are also accounts from the ordinary people who were caught up in the conflict, either because they were prisoners, made to be soldiers, or farmers having to give their produce to support the war effort.

Superstitions and myths: There are a couple of examples of superstitious beliefs having an effect on real life events. The emperor believes in life after death, hence his taking to drinking mercury, and in the power of dreams.

Dictatorship: Although the emperor changed some things for the better, and did succeed in unifying the separate kingdoms, he was undoubtedly a ruthless governor. Any resistance to his internal reforms was savagely crushed and his treatment of defeated enemies extremely harsh.

Law and order: The First Emperor removed the old system of government that was based on nepotism and the rule of the scholars, and replaced it with a system of laws. Although some laws were over-restrictive, the system he put in place did establish order, and was to last for many years after his death.

Discussion activities

Before reading

- Discuss:** In small groups ask the students to make a list of all the important kings and queens and other important people in the history of their country and/or the world. Then ask them to discuss the following questions: *When did they live? How long did they live? What famous things did they do? When did they die? Who was the best and who was the worst?*

Chapter 1

While reading (p. 2, after 'From 475 BC to 221 BC, they were all at war.')

- Research and write:** Put the following film titles on the board: *300, Gladiator, Troy, The Lord of the Rings*. Tell them they are all films which feature a war in ancient times. Put the students in pairs and ask each pair to choose one film. Then the students look for information on the Internet about their chosen film and write a summary. They then read out their summaries and discuss the films. Get them to talk about the ones they have seen, giving their opinions and about the ones they would like to see.

After reading

- Write and guess:** Write *The kingdom of Qin was in the east.* on the board. Elicit which word is wrong from the students (west not east). Now students choose a sentence from Chapter 1 and rewrite it changing one word. Students interact, reading out their sentences and the other students have to identify and correct the mistake.



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Chapter 2

While reading (p. 9, after 'They asked him questions and then killed him and his family.')

- 4 **Role play:** Put the students in pairs and tell them they are going to act out a conversation between one of the king's soldiers and Lao Ai. Encourage the students to be inventive when thinking about the questions and answers. See Discussion activities key for an example beginning to the conversation.

After reading

- 5 **Pair work:** Write the following words on the board: *half-brothers, south, poison, strong, bridges, old ways, sixteen*. Ask the students to talk and write in pairs to say how these words were used in Chapter 1, without looking back at the book.

Chapter 3

Before reading

- 6 **Predict:** Tell the students they are going to read about Ying Zheng's wife, Xia. Put them in small groups and ask them to predict the answers to the following questions: *Is she Zheng's first wife? If not, what number wife is she? Has she got any sons or daughters? If she has, how many has she got? How many son's and/or daughters does the emperor have? Where does she live? There are pictures of things on the walls in her rooms. What are the pictures of? What colour is the colour of the Ying family? What number is the number of the family? How many horses has she got?*

After reading

- 7 **Write and guess:** Put students in pairs and ask them to choose a short paragraph from Chapter 3. Tell them to write it again, making five changes to words in the text. Students then read out their paragraphs to the other students, who have to identify the mistakes.
- 8 **Discuss and role play:** Remind the students that the emperor has many wives. Ask them to discuss whether it is a good thing for a man to have a lot of wives or a woman a lot of husbands. Then put the students in groups of three and ask them to act out the following role play. Two of the students are the emperor's wives and one is the emperor. Try to make the conversation interesting. See Discussion activities key for an example start to the conversation.

Chapter 4

While reading (p. 21, after 'A law for everything.')

- 9 **Discuss and write:** Put the following laws on the board: *No school or work on Mondays. Children don't have to pay for chocolate. A free house for everybody*. Put the students in pairs and ask them to discuss if these are good laws or bad. Then tell them they are now the king of their country and they must write five more laws. The pairs then read out their suggestions and the class decide if they are good or bad laws.

After reading

- 10 **Write:** Tell the students they are Ehuang and they are going to write a letter to their family telling them what life is like working on the wall. Tell them to include the information in the text but to rewrite it and then include the following information: *What do you eat? Where do you sleep? How many hours a day do you work? What do you talk to your friends about?*

Chapter 5

Before reading

- 11 **Group work:** Tell the students that the emperor believes he is going to another world when he dies. Put the students in small groups and ask them to imagine what this world would be like and to talk about the following questions: *What can you see there? Will your friends and family be there? Where will you live? What will you do every day? Will you watch TV and listen to music? What food will you eat? Will you meet Emperor Zheng there or any other famous people? Which other famous person would you like to meet? Could you come back to this world?*

After reading

- 12 **Draw:** Tell the students they are going to draw a palace where they are going to go when they die. In pairs, the students think of all the things and rooms they would like to see in the palace and then they have to draw it, labelling all the things. The class votes for the best drawing.

Chapter 6

Before reading

- 13 **Write and say:** Tell the students that the emperor has a dream about a large fish. Ask the students to write down a dream they have had or they can invent a dream. It can be a good dream or a bad dream. Then the students read out what they have written and the class have to decide if it is true or false.

After reading

- 14 **Quiz game:** Put the students in groups of three and ask them to study the list of important dates at the end of the book. Allow them about five minutes. Then they close their books and the teacher asks them 22 questions, one for each important date. For example: *Who died in 208 BC?* The students can consult each other and then they write down their answers. A point is given for each correct answer and the team with the most points is the winner.