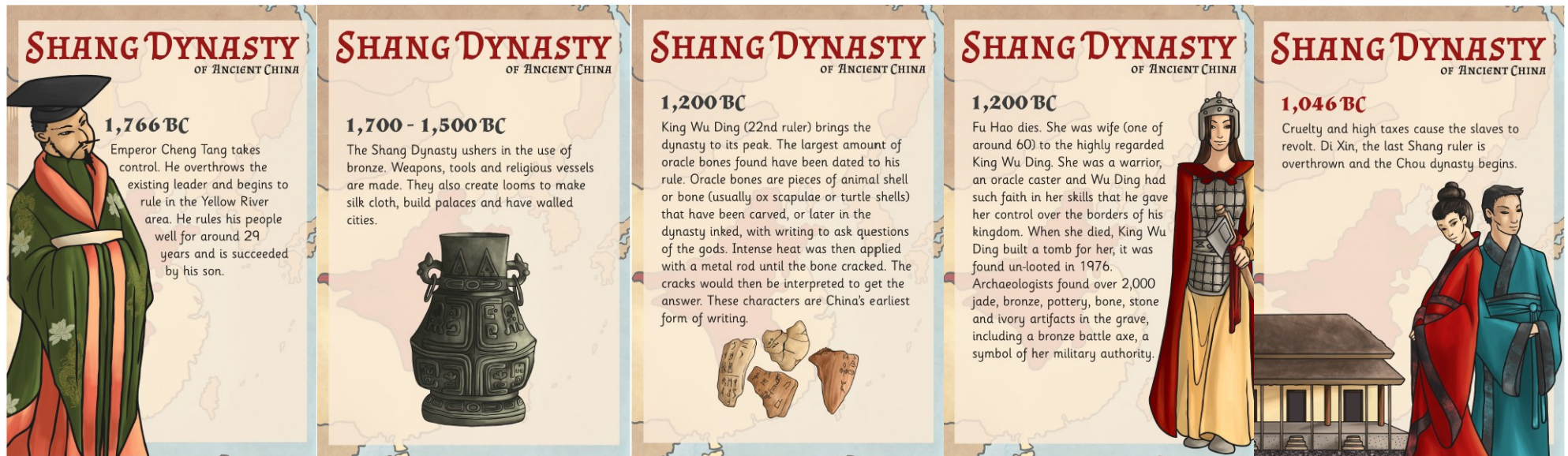


Lower Key Stage 2 - Forest Academy  
Knowledge organiser - The Shang Dynasty 1,766 BC - 1,046 BC



### The Shang Dynasty

The Shang Dynasty is the first historic dynasty of China. The river valley of the Yellow River provided a fertile area for this civilisation to develop. The area was forested and the Shang used wood to build their homes and public buildings; although little of this has survived. Fortunately royal and other tombs have provided many clues as to life under the Shang. Artefacts such as beautifully carved jade and stone, bronze ritual pots and weapons and domestic items such as the earliest glazed porcelain and woven silk provide evidence of their levels of craftsmanship and artistry.

The Yellow River was unpredictable and prone to flooding. The remains of mud walls tell us about the struggle to keep back the waters of the river during times of flooding. Shang cities were surrounded by defensive walls and gates.

Most of the written evidence we have about the Shang comes from oracle bones, although some bronze and pottery goods also have inscriptions.

The Shang used wheeled carts for transport in times of peace and chariots for hunting and during times of war. They also used canoes for local trade. Cowrie shells show they traded with coastal dwellers but they did not trade further afield. Roads enabled communication to be maintained between the city states.

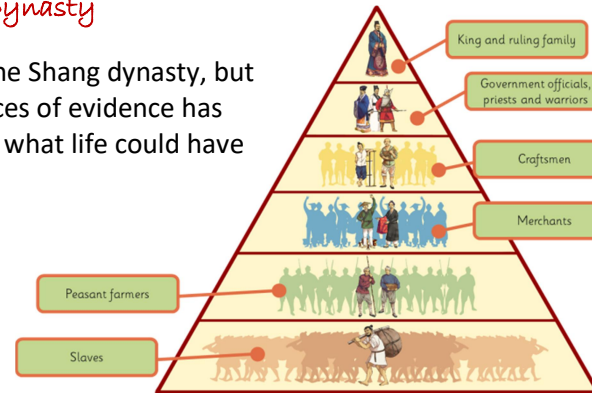
The Dynasty lasted for six hundred years and saw the reign of thirty emperors.

The Shang are important because they left a legacy of Chinese culture. The role of the family and importance of ancestors remain central to Chinese culture today. Their artistry, with bronze in particular, continues to be admired for its beauty.



## Living in the Shang Dynasty

There are no photographs dating back to the Shang dynasty, but examination of a number of different sources of evidence has enabled an artist to draw pictures showing what life could have been like.



## Shang Artefacts

Looking at artefacts can give us clues about life in the past.

- What is this object and what do you think it was used for?
- Who do you think would have made the object and how?
- Who do you think would have used the object?
- What is the object made of?



## Shang religion

Looking carefully at the organisation and layout of Shang tombs and examining the objects found in them has helped us to understand a lot about the Shang views on life, death and the afterlife. Furthermore, the inscriptions on oracle bones provide written evidence describing their customs, practices and beliefs.



## The Tomb of Fu Hao

In 1976, a team of archaeologists made a remarkable discovery at the site of the ancient Shang capital, Yinxu, in modern day Anyang. They found the tomb of the Shang military general and high priestess, Fu Hao. Fu Hao's tomb is particularly important because it is the only Shang tomb that has been found intact.

## Dragon bones

The 19<sup>th</sup> century traditional Chinese medicine included the use of 'dragon bones', which were ground up and used in tonics and creams to treat illnesses and soothe wounds. These 'dragon bones' had been dug up and re-buried by Chinese farmers for thousands of years before their supposed medicinal benefits were exploited.

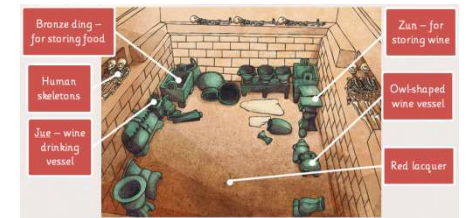
In 1889, a collector of Chinese bronzes called Wang Yirong bought a number of these 'dragon bones' from an antiques dealer. It was Wang who first realised that the 'dragon bones' might not actually be from dragons after all.



It is reported that when Wang was sick with malaria, he and his friend Liu E studied the dragon bones before they were ground into powder. They noticed that they had writing on them, which matched the writing on Wang's bronzes.

Further study revealed that the 'dragon bones' were in fact oracle bones, which were used in divination ceremonies by Shang priests and kings to foretell events in the future.

The discovery of Fu Hao's tomb had a significant impact on our knowledge and understanding of the Shang dynasty and some of its people. It helped archaeologists and historians develop a deeper appreciation of Shang history.



All of this was found inside Fu Hao's tomb:

- The remains of 6 dogs and 16 humans
- Over 420 bronze objects (including 130 weapons, 23 bells, 27 knives, 4 tigers and 4 mirrors). The total weight was 1.6 metric tons, a massive amount, showing how rich the family were
- Over 750 jade objects
- 63 stone objects
- 5 ivory objects
- Over 550 bone objects (mainly bone hairpins and some arrowheads)
- 11 pottery objects
- Almost 7000 cowrie shells



# Shang Dynasty Word Mat



Emperor  
Cheng Tang



bronze hu



man

woman

oracle bones



Ancient China



map



house



Fu Hao



soldier

Ancient China  
(1766 BC to 1046 BC)

# SHANG DYNASTY

Some Amazing  
Facts

## map



The Shang Dynasty is believed to be the oldest Chinese dynasty based on archaeological and documentary evidence.



## Bronze

Working with bronze became popular in the Shang Dynasty. This started The Bronze Age.

## Writing

Most Shang Dynasty writing was found to be on animal bones, turtle shells and bronze.



## oracle bones

## Emperors

The throne or kingship would go from brother to brother or brother to nephew, rather than father to son.



## Wars

Many people that fought in wars were just peasants, forced to leave their homes to walk alongside chariots.



## Human Sacrifice

The Shang people were believers in providing human sacrifices to the gods!

