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**Alexander the Great & Hellenism**

**DIRECTIONS: Actively read about Alexander the Great and the spread of Hellenistic culture. Determine the pros and cons of Hellenism and assimilation.**

The long war between Athens and Sparta made both countries weak and tired. King Phillip of Macedonia (another part of Greece) noticed this and wanted to take over. He attacked Greece and little by little, took it over. When Phillip was assassinated (murder of a public figure) in 336 BCE, his son Alexander became the king. Alexander was only 20 when he became king. He had a great education and was taught philosophy as well as military tactics. Most of Alexander’s time was spent on the battlefield, which helped to expand his Empire. Although his empire would eventually crumble, he made changes across the Mediterranean world and the Middle East for centuries.

Alexander determined to conquer both Greece and Persia, and combine them into an empire that would rival any other empire anywhere in the world. Before the age of 30, Alexander led his army 11,000 miles, founding over 70 cities and creating and empire that stretched across 3 continents and covered over 2 million square miles. Today, Alexander’s empire would include Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and parts of India. For the next 13 years Alexander, now known as Alexander the Great, marched his troops from battle to battle, conquering more and more territory. If the people he ruled went against him, he would act with violence. For example, when the people of Thebes went against him, Alexander ordered that the city be burned to the ground and its people killed or sold into slavery. His empire linked together to create an international network of trade and commerce (business). Alexander said, *“I am not afraid of an army lions led by sheep, am afraid of an army of sheep lead by lions.”*

Alexander had built an empire that stretched from Greece all the way to India. That brief but thorough empire-building campaign changed the world: It spread Greek ideas and culture from the Eastern Mediterranean to Asia. Historians call this era the “Hellenistic period.” (The word “Hellenistic” comes from the word Hellazein, which means “to speak Greek or identify with the Greeks.”) It lasted from the death of Alexander in 323 B.C. until 31 B.C., when Roman troops conquered the last of the territories that the Macedonian king had once ruled. Alexander founded many new cities, mostly named after him. Greek soldiers, traders, artisans (skilled workers) settled in these cities. From Egypt to the borders of India, these people built Greek temples, filled with Greek statues, and held athletic contests they had in Greece. Local people **assimilated**, or absorbed, Greek ideas. In turn, Greek settlers adopted local customs. As a result, blending of eastern and western cultures occurred (sharing of Greek culture and non-Greek culture). Alexander encouraged this blending when he married a Persian woman and insisted his soldiers to follow his example. He had adopted many Persian customs. After his death, a new culture came about that blended Greek, Persian, Egyptian, & Indian influences. Alexander was known for adopting foreign customers in order to rule his millions of ethnically diverse groups of people.

People, and goods, moved fluidly around the Hellenistic kingdoms. Almost everyone in the former Alexandrian empire spoke and read the same language: koine, or “the common tongue,” a kind of colloquial (slang) Greek. Koine was a unifying cultural force: No matter where a person came from, he could communicate with anyone in this multicultural Hellenistic world. At the same time, many people felt alienated in this new political and cultural landscape. Once upon a time, citizens had been closely involved with the workings of the democratic city-states; now, they lived in impersonal empires governed by professional. Bureaucrats (government officials) In Hellenistic art and literature, this alienation expressed itself in a rejection of the collective demos ( all Greek people) and an emphasis on the individual. For example, sculptures and paintings represented actual people rather than gods or idealized “types.” At the same time, many people joined “mystery religions,” like the cults of the goddesses Isis and Fortune, which promised their followers immortality and individual wealth.

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| **PROS OF HELLENISM AND ASSIMILATION** | **CONS OF HELLENISM AND ASSIMILATION** |
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**The enduring issue this best associates with is (check all that apply)**

* **CULTURAL DIFFUSION**
* **HUMAN RIGHTS**
* **IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENT ON HUMANS**
* **POWER**
* **SCARCITY**
* **TECHNOLOGY**