Student Handout 7.8 John of Plano Carpini, *History of the Mongols* (Source 1)

**Background:** The Franciscan Friar John of Plano Carpini was sent in 1245 by Pope Innocent IV on a mission into the Eurasian steppe. The pope thought this mission could help to convert the Mongols to Latin (or Roman) Christianity. John of Plano Carpini was the first European person to visit the Mongols in their homeland. After he returned home to Europe, he wrote about what he had seen and learned about the Mongols.

**Directions:** Read the passage together as a class to get the gist of the description. What did John think about the Mongols, whom he called the Tartars?

[The Tartars] are extremely rich in animals, camels, oxen, sheep, goats; they have such a number of horses and mares that I do not believe there are so many in all the rest of the world; they do not have pigs or other farm animals. ... The men ... hunt and practice archery, for they are all, big and little, excellent archers, and their children begin as soon as they are two or three years old to ride and manage horses and to gallop on them, and they are given bows to suit their stature and are taught to shoot; ... Young girls and women ride and gallop on horseback with agility like the men. We even saw them carrying bows and arrows. Both the men and the women are able to endure long stretches of riding. ... They look after their horses very well, indeed they take the very greatest care of all their possessions. ... When they are going to make war, they send ahead an advance guard, and these carry nothing with them but their tents, horses and arms. They seize no plunder, burn no houses and slaughter no animals; they only wound and kill men or, if they can do nothing else, put them to flight. ... If they can avoid it, the Tartars do not like to fight hand to hand, but they wound and kill men and horses with their arrows; they only come to close quarters when men and horses have been weakened by arrows.

To get a deeper understanding of the passage, you will examine each section with tasks and questions.

**Section 1**

**Background:** The author uses a lot of very long sentences. However, he breaks sentences up into independent clauses by two methods: putting in semicolons (;) and putting in commas followed by conjunctions and and but. Additionally, the author uses many pronouns as references to other things. Both of these features can be very confusing. Use the directions to help you better understand the passages.

**Directions**

1. Draw a slash (/) over each semicolon (;) to separate independent clauses.
2. Underline the subject of each clause to identify who is doing something.
3. Fill in the blank after each pronoun with the subject that the pronoun refers to.
4. Answer the questions that follow the passage.

[The Tartars] are extremely rich in animals, camels, oxen, sheep, goats; they (______________ ) have such a number of horses and mares that I (______________) do not believe there are so many in all the rest of the world; they (__________________) do not have pigs or other farm animals. ...
Questions

1. List the animals the Tartars/Mongols have and how each of the animals can help the Tartars.

   Example: Camels – good for riding, milk, food

2. Considering the Tartars were nomads, why do you think they had the animals you listed in question 1, but not pigs or other farm animals?

3. What does John of Plano Carpini think of the Tartars’ animals? What words tell you that?

Section 2

Background: Again the author uses a very long sentence. Here he breaks it into independent clauses using comma + conjunction combination (, and or, but)

Directions

1. Draw a slash (/) over each comma + conjunction combination (, and or, but) to separate independent clauses.

2. Underline the subject of each clause to identify who is doing something.

3. Fill in the blank after each pronoun with the subject that the pronoun refers to.

4. Answer the questions that follow the passage.

The men … hunt and practice archery, for they (_________________) are all, big and little, excellent archers, and their (_________________) children begin as soon as they (_________________) are two or three years old to ride and manage horses and to gallop on them (_________________), and they (_________________) are given bows to suit their (_________________) stature and are taught to shoot;…

Young girls and women ride and gallop on horseback with agility like the men. We (_____________) even saw them (_____________) carrying bows and arrows. Both the men and the women are able to endure long stretches of riding. … They (_____________) look after their horses very well, indeed they (_____________) take the very greatest care of all their (_____________) possessions. …

Vocabulary

stature: how tall someone is; height
Questions

1. What are the children taught to do? At what age?

2. The third clause is written in passive voice: “they are given bows to suit their stature and are taught to shoot.” Passive voice is when the actor of the sentence is not mentioned but is only implied. With the passive voice it is hard to determine who gave the bows to the children and who taught the children to shoot. Make an inference: who do you think gave the bows to the children and taught them to shoot?

3. John specifically mentions young girls and women. How does he describe them? Given what you know about medieval Europe, do you think this was similar to or different from what would happen in Europe?

4. Why would it be so important for the Tartars/Mongols to be good at archery on horseback?

Section 3

Background: In this final section, the author uses both the combination of commas + conjunctions and semicolons.

Directions

1. Draw a slash (/) over each semicolon (;) and each comma + conjunction combination (, and or , but) to separate independent clauses.

2. Underline the subject of each clause to identify who is doing something.

3. Fill in the blank after each pronoun with the subject that the pronoun refers to.

4. Answer the questions that follow the passage.

When they (__________________) are going to make war, they (__________________) send ahead an advance guard, and these (__________________) carry nothing with them (__________________) but their (__________________) tents, horses and arms. They (__________________) seize no plunder, burn no houses and slaughter no animals; they (__________________) only wound and kill men or, if they (__________________) can do nothing else, put them (__________________) to flight. … If they (__________________) can avoid it, the Tartars do not like to fight hand to hand, but they (__________________) wound and kill men and horses with their (__________________) arrows; they (__________________) only come to close quarters when men and horses have been weakened by arrows.
Vocabulary

arms: weapons
plunder: loot; stolen money and valuable objects
close quarters: when you get close up to an enemy soldier and fight hand to hand

Questions

1. Why do you think the Tartars send ahead an advance guard? What is the advantage of carrying only tents, horses, and arms?

2. What do you think the author means when he says, “if they can do nothing else, put them to flight”?

3. Here John describes how the Tartars fight their enemies. Restate this in your own words. Make sure to address what they do and what they do not do.

Final Questions

1. Summarize the lifestyle of the Mongols as described by John of Plano Carpini.

2. How does this lifestyle help answer the investigative question, How did the Mongol Empire destroy states and increase the interconnection of Afroeurasia?