

A historical biography

1 Look at the photo and read the biography. Why is Tamerlane famous?

- ☐ He was richer than Genghis Khan and Alexander the Great.
- ☐ He became the leader of Mongolia.
- ☐ He loved to fight.

2 Read the biography again. Choose the correct answers.

- 1 People are likely to ...
 - ☐ have heard of Genghis Khan.
 - ☐ know how famous Tamerlane was.
 - ☐ ask questions about historical conquerors.
- 2 Tamerlane came from ...
 - ☐ Central Asia.
 - ☐ a vast empire.
 - ☐ an important family.
- 3 Tamerlane's ambition was to ...
 - ☐ fight for 35 years.
 - ☐ build a city for artists.
 - ☐ rule the world.
- 4 Tamerlane died before he ...
 - ☐ conquered Persia.
 - ☐ grew old.
 - ☐ had the opportunity to conquer China.
- 5 Despite his disability, Tamerlane ...
 - ☐ walked many miles.
 - ☐ inspired loyalty in his soldiers.
 - ☐ was defeated.

3 Answer the questions about the text.

- 1 How big was the area that Tamerlane conquered?
- 2 How did Tamerlane start his career?
- 3 What interested Tamerlane apart from warfare and how did he show this?
- 4 Which things tell us that Tamerlane had some good characteristics as well as bad?
- 5 Apart from his physical disabilities, what was unusual about Tamerlane's appearance?

Tamerlane

Who was he?

If asked about famous conquerors from history, most people can name a few facts about Genghis Khan or Alexander the Great. But how many people have heard of Tamerlane? Tamerlane rose from nothing to become a mighty and ruthless leader. His armies were feared throughout Asia, Africa and Europe. By the time he died, he had established a vast empire stretching from Damascus to Delhi. However, only 100 years later, his empire had collapsed.



What was his background?

Unlike Alexander the Great, Tamerlane was not of noble birth. He came from an ordinary family. He began life as a sheep-stealer and bandit in the mountains of Central Asia. He was born in 1336 in a village in Transoxiana, 80 km from Samarkand, in what is now Uzbekistan. At the age of eight or nine, he and his mother and brothers were taken as prisoners to Samarkand by an invading army. This was the start of his fighting career. At just 24 years old Tamerlane became the head of his tribe, and in a few years, he became the leader of Mongolia.

What were his achievements?

Tamerlane made Samarkand his capital city and built a fabulous marble palace there. He had a great interest in art and he often spared the lives of artisans from across his empire so that they could work in the city and make it more beautiful. But he didn't spend much time at home. He was determined to make himself master of Central Asia. 'As there is but one God in heaven, there should be but one ruler on Earth,' he declared. He conquered Persia and Mesopotamia, invaded Russia, Georgia, India, Syria and Turkey. He died in 1405 aged 69, on his way to fight the emperor of China. After 35 years of constant warfare, Tamerlane remained undefeated.

What was he like?

He was a man who was clearly born to fight and loved to win. Despite having physical disabilities that meant he walked with a limp and couldn't lift his right arm, Tamerlane was fearless. Tamerlane's enemies used his disabilities as an excuse to laugh at him, but this didn't help them to beat him in battle. Tamerlane was an intelligent ruler, brave in battle, but ruthless with his enemies, massacring whole populations and burning cities to the ground. He inspired loyalty in his soldiers, and even his critics praised him. The 15th-century Syrian historian, Ibn Arabshah, called him 'mighty in strength and courage' and a 'spirited and brave' leader.

Did you know ...?

- ★ The name 'Tamerlane' comes from the Persian 'Timur-i-lang' (Timur the lame).
- ★ His armies killed an estimated 17 million people, about 5% of the global population at the time.
- ★ He built towers using the skulls of the people he had massacred as a grim warning to others.
- ★ The excavation of his tomb revealed he was tall for the time (1.73 m) and broad-chested with high cheekbones.
- ★ People say that on his tomb were the words 'When I rise from the dead, the world shall tremble'.