

Is Mao Zedong a Hero or a Villain?

HANDOUT

General Directions: read the passages that follow and then answer the questions below.

Mao is the “sun in the sky.” He is considered the greatest leader in Chinese history. Mao freed China from its backwardness and transformed it into a modern nation. Under Mao’s leadership, China was transformed. What had taken centuries in the West, took only decades in China. China made the leap from a weak-power to a Great Power.

(1) Why is Mao considered the “sun in the sky” in Chinese history?

Mao liberated the Chinese people from economic exploitation by European Powers and social oppression. He gave women equal status in Chinese society, opened China to the west and expanded China’s economy. China’s economy grew at an average annual rate of 11% to 15% per year, thereby creating the industrial infrastructure that laid the basis for the economic transformation that took place during the rule of Deng Xiaoping.

(2) How did Chinese life improve under Mao?

According to Lee Feigon, author of *Mao – A Reinterpretation*, the Cultural Revolution transformed China for the better. During the Cultural Revolution, Mao battled corruption, made government better, strengthened the economy, promoted artistic and educational reform, and worked towards justice for all (including women).

(3) How did the Cultural Revolution change China?

“Although urban schools closed for a time, Mao improved education. He shifted resources to rural education, in the process radically expanding China’s educational system.”

- Dongping Han, “Impact of the Cultural Revolution on Rural Education and Development”

(4) How did China’s educational system improved as a result of the Cultural Revolution?

The Great Leap Forward was a failure. Rather than a leap forward, it became a lurch sideways. By 1961, China was on the brink of economic ruin and internal collapse. As a result of the loss of fertile farmland and poor management the harvest declined. The result was widespread famine. Factory production also fell. Even Mao himself was forced to admit that his idea was a disaster. He was forced to step down from his position as the political leader of the Communist Party in China

(5) Why was Mao forced to step down from his post as chairman of the Chinese Communist Party?

Mao launched a rebellion called the Cultural Revolution that encouraged destruction of basic human rights, democracy, the rule of law. During the decade that followed, literally millions of people were killed or jailed. China collapsed into a state of near anarchy. Schools shut down, offices closed, transportation was disrupted – it was so bad that even today, the full history is still far from known. While the Cultural Revolution 'officially' ended in 1969, and the worst abuses stopped then, the politically charged atmosphere was maintained until Mao's death in 1976.

(6) How did the Cultural Revolution affect China?

The Cultural Revolution had a disastrous effect on the educational system and the scientific community within China; an effect that was felt well into the late 80's. Those people in China who were between the ages of 15 to 25 during the period of the revolution are now referred to as the “lost generation.” This is because they are the ones who lost out: losing the chance for an education, losing the chance for a normal youth.

(7) Who were the “lost generation?”

Mao's rule brought about more deaths of his own people than any other leader in history. The total death toll is only exceeded by all the dead people of World War II. Some 12 to 15 million deaths can be attributed to Stalin. The systematic elimination of the Jews under Hitler was approximately 6 million. Under Mao, over 40 million people lost their lives.

(8) Was Mao's rule more brutal than that of Stalin or Hitler?

9. Complete the chart on Mao Zedung and answer the question

Positives of Mao's Rule	Negatives of Mao's Rule
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

10. In your opinion is Mao a Hero or a Villain?