The Wind That Saved Japan

In the late 1200s, Kublai Khan ruled the mighty Mongol Empire, which stretched from the Black Sea to the South China Sea. He had completed the Mongol conquest of China and extended Mongol rule to Korea. Next he tried to conquer Japan.

In 1274 Kublai Khan sailed for Japan from Korea with a force of 900 ships and 40,000 men. In November the force sailed into Hakata Bay on the island of Kyushu. After a day's fighting, the Mongols returned to their ships, intent on renewing the attack the following day. That night, however, a fierce storm drove the Mongol force out to sea. There mighty winds sank 200 ships with the loss of 13,500 lives. The severely weakened Mongol force returned to the Asian mainland.

The great khan was disappointed, but he was not discouraged. Once again he began to assemble an attack force. In his eagerness to control Japan, however, Kublai Khan had failed to learn an important lesson from the disaster in 1274. The storm that fateful night had not been an unusual event. From July through November, such storms are not uncommon in the western Pacific Ocean. At that time of year, devastating storms called typhoons form over water in the trade winds latitudes—between 0° and 30° north and south of the equator.

A typhoon consists of winds reaching 100 to 150 miles an hour that swirl around a storm center. Within this “eye” of the storm, all is clear and calm. But the raging winds around the “eye” send out a destructive force ranging from 50 to over 200 miles. While in the trade
winds latitudes, a typhoon travels in a northwesterly direction. Then it turns and travels in a northeasterly direction.

It was during the typhoon season of 1281 that Kublai Khan's forces attacked Japan again. One force of 900 ships and 42,000 men left from Korea; 3,500 ships and 100,000 men sailed from China. The two forces met at Takashima in July, ready to attack Kyushu.

Once again nature proved to be a powerful enemy of the Mongols. In August a typhoon turned toward Kyushu. There it passed through the invasion force, creating a great destruction. The Mongols lost an estimated 4,000 ships and 10,000 men. To the Mongols, the typhoon was a death blow to their hopes of conquering Japan. To the Japanese, the typhoon was a heaven-sent "divine wind," or kamikaze, saving them from Mongol domination.

1. On the map, draw the probable paths followed by the two invasion forces in 1281.
2. Draw the probable path of the typhoon passing over Japan.
3. How did the Japanese explain the great storms that destroyed both Mongol forces?

**Critical Thinking: Movement**

Discuss how advance knowledge of the typhoons might have influenced Kublai Khan's plans to invade Japan.
New Empires in Asia and Africa

Natural Resources and State-Building

Mineral resources—gold and salt—served as the basis of trade that built the wealth and power of the West African kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay. The locations of these kingdoms gave them access to generous supplies of both these valuable resources.

The earliest of these West African kingdoms was Ghana. It was located just north of the gold mines in the African rain forest and just south of the salt mines in the Sahara. Muslim Arabs living near the North African coast wanted the gold available in the south, and the people of the south needed salt. As a result, a lively trade developed.

The trade route crossed the Sahara, which had to be navigated, almost like a sea. Traveling in groups was necessary as protection against robbery. Some caravans included as many as 12,000 camels. Using the stars or familiar rocks, pilots would guide the caravans along routes that took them to oases, where they could replenish their water supplies.

Later, Mali grew even stronger and richer than Ghana. It too amazed and impressed the Muslim Arabs. When making a pilgrimage from Timbuktu to Mecca, Mali's king, Mansa Musa, was accompanied by 60,000 people, including 500 slaves. Each slave carried a 4-pound bar of gold, which Mansa Musa spent freely along his route. According to tradition, Mansa Musa's lavish spending depressed the value of gold in Egypt and Arabia for at least 12 years.

Songhay carried on the trading tradition of Ghana and Mali. In the end, however, salt and gold helped bring down the kingdom of Songhay. Relations between Songhay and Morocco to the north became strained. In the late 1500s Morocco attacked and destroyed Songhay.
Chapter 13, Geography Activity, continued

1. On what river were Timbuktu and Gao located?

2. How do you think the locations of these cities encouraged their development as trading centers?

3. Why would Morocco need to conquer Songhay to gain control of access to gold?

4. How did geography influence the development of trade in Ghana, Mali, and Songhay?

Critical Thinking: Human-Environment Interaction

How did mineral resources contribute to the growth of the kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay?