

Countries Around the World™

Mongolia

Program Summary

Meet Baljinyam. He and his family live in Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia. Join Baljinyam as he practices playing a traditional instrument, made from the horn of a yak, at the National School of Music. Then, Baljinyam returns home where his mother serves him a tea used to combat the freezing temperatures that Mongolians endure. Students will learn about the wildlife of Mongolia when Baljinyam and his class visit the Natural History Museum. Next, Baljinyam and his family visit the Buddhist Gandan Temple to reveal some of the religious traditions and customs in Mongolia. Travel with Baljinyam across the steppe when he goes to visit his grandparents. Once there, students will experience what life is like in the steppe, including living in a yurt, a circular tent traditionally used by Mongolian nomads. Finally, Baljinyam returns to Ulaanbaatar and heads out to a restaurant with his family to listen to *kboomii* — a type of music where the singers can sing more than one note at the same time!

Country Information

- **location:** Northern Asia; bordered by Russia and China
- **capital:** Ulaanbaatar
- **official language:** Mongolian
- **type of government:** mixed parliamentary/presidential
- **total area:** approximately 1,564,116 sq km
- **climate:** desert in the South; large daily and seasonal temperature ranges in the rest of the country
- **terrain:** vast semi-desert and desert plains, grassy steppe, mountains in the West and Southwest; Gobi Desert in the south-central region
- **natural resources:** includes oil, coal, copper, molybdenum, tungsten, phosphates, tin, nickel, zinc, fluorspar, gold, silver and iron
- **industries:** includes construction and construction materials, mining, oil, food and beverages, processing of animal products, cashmere and natural fiber manufacturing
- **agricultural products:** includes wheat, barley, vegetables, forage crops, sheep, goats, cattle, camels and horses

Vocabulary

Sühbaatar — A town in northern Mongolia named after the Mongolian revolutionary leader Damdiny Sühbaatar.

Genghis Khan — A nomad who unified the Mongolian tribes and established an empire by conquering a large part of Asia. He lived from 1162-1227.

Cyrillic — An alphabet used for certain Slavic languages. Cyrillic was introduced in Mongolia in the 1930s and is still used as a companion alphabet to the traditional Mongolian script.

kiang — A large, wild donkey of the mountains of Asia.

yurt — Also “ger.” A circular, domed, portable tent used by nomadic peoples of central Asia.

steppe — Temperate, flat grasslands found in Europe and Asia.

togrog — The currency of Mongolia.

buuz — A traditional Mongolian dish made with minced meat and pastry.

Naadam — A major Mongolian festival featuring archery, wrestling and horse riding competitions in addition to different foods and costumes.

Gandan Temple — A major Buddhist temple located in Ulaanbaatar.

prayer wheel — A mechanical device featuring a scroll with an inscribed prayer wrapped around a wheel and mounted on a stick. The wheel is spun by hand while the prayer is recited.

oboo — A pile of stones dedicated to the practice of ancestor worship. The *oboo* plays a role in several Mongolian shamanistic rituals.

del — A traditional Mongolian tunic.

kboomii — A form of polyphonic singing where the singers are able to vibrate their vocal cords in a way to produce two pitches at the same time.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Ask students what they would do and show if they were going to give a tour of their community to a child from another country. In small groups, have students brainstorm a list of things they think would be important to show their visitor. Engage the students with questions, such as: Why are these things important to you? How are they representative of where you live? Do you think your visitor would fully understand your community if he or she experienced all these things? Why or why not?
- Lead a discussion about how climate affects where and how people live. Begin by having students talk about how the weather in their area affects their lives. Expand the conversation with questions like: How would you have to adapt your lifestyle if you lived in a place that was really hot? What about a place that was really cold? How do people who live in such extreme conditions adapt to the climate? Would you like to live in a place like that? As they prepare to watch the program, instruct students to watch for references to how climate affects people living in Mongolia.
- Distribute outline maps of Mongolia to the students. Have them find and label the capital, other major cities and bodies of water. Questions to ask include: Which countries border Mongolia? Where are the cities located? Based on its location, what do you think the climate is like? How might the climate affect where and how the people live?

Follow-up Activities

- A yurt, also known as a ger, is a traditional Mongolian home. These circular dwellings fit the lifestyle of the nomadic people of Mongolia perfectly because they are portable and can be moved from one grazing place to the next. In fact, some Mongolians continue to live in yurts today! Visit www.laohats.com/Mongolian%20Ger.htm to learn more about these mobile homes and the way in which they are traditionally organized. Have students compare and contrast these dwellings with their homes. As a culmination, students can sketch a floor plan or build a model of a yurt.
- Practiced in parts of Asia, *kboomii* singing, also known as “overtone singing” or “throat singing,” is a style of music in which singers are able to sing more than one note at the same time! Visit www.ubu.com/ethno/soundings/tuva.html to listen to samples of *kboomii* songs. Afterwards, ask students to respond to the songs by asking questions like: Did the songs sound like you thought they would? Which one was your favorite? How do you think the singers are able to make those sounds? If they're feeling adventurous, encourage students to imitate the *kboomii* singers!
- Genghis Khan unified the various nomadic tribes of Mongolia and extended his empire across Asia to the Adriatic Sea. Students can investigate the life of Genghis Khan by visiting afe.easia.columbia.edu/mongols/figures/figures.htm. Invite students to create time lines about Genghis Khan and draw maps showing the expansion of Khan's empire, using different colors and symbols to represent the conquered territories.

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- Naadam is a major festival in Mongolia and features competitions in the traditional sports of archery, wrestling and horse racing. Find information on Naadam by visiting www.csen.org/Mongol.Nadaam/Mongol.text.html. Using a graphic organizer, compare Naadam with major festivals and holidays in the United States. As an extension, invite students to create their own festival modeled after Naadam that features different events, foods and costumes.
- Use clay, salt dough or another medium to create a raised relief map of Mongolia. Advise students to sketch the country on a sturdy piece of cardboard first. When molding the clay, be sure to clearly depict the different landforms of Mongolia, like the mountains, steppe and Gobi Desert. When the model dries, use paint or other craft materials to provide a greater level of detail for the map. For added authenticity, include models of man-made structures, like cities, yurts and railways. As an extension, create a compass rose and determine the scale of the model.
- In Mongolian, “tiim” (pronounced “tēēm”) means “yes,” and “ugui” (pronounced “ōō-gw-ēē”) means “no.” Poll the class with a series of questions where the students answer either “tiim” or “ugui.” Have you ever been camping? Have you ever flown in an airplane? Have you ever eaten sushi? Compile the number of yes and no answers for each question and have students convert the numbers into fractions and decimals. Students can then make percentages from the numbers and create a chart for the class that shows the results of the poll.
- Students can pretend that they have taken a vacation in Mongolia by making a travelogue photo album. For photographs of Mongolia, visit www.discovermongolia.mn/gallery.php. Choose a minimum of five photographs and draw pictures of them. For each picture, write a caption that provides information about the picture and also builds a narrative about visiting Mongolia (e.g., “Here I am in the steppe, visiting a yurt, a traditional nomadic dwelling.”). Arrange the pictures in a photo album and share with the class. For a classroom with the technological means, have the students present their “travel photos” as an interactive slide show.
- Mongolia is a hotbed for dinosaur fossils, drawing paleontologists from all over the world to places like the Gobi Desert in hopes of making the next big discovery. Students can experience the thrill of unearthing a new species of dinosaur by making their own fossils! Invite students to imprint things like chicken bones, shells and pipe-cleaner footprints in clay and let them harden overnight. Then, bury or hide the students’ fossils and have students dig them up. Students can then design their own dinosaurs, based on their fossils, by drawing pictures and ascribing attributes to them (carnivore, quadruped, winged, etc.). Students can even give their new dinosaurs Mongolia-themed names like “Ulaanbaatarosaurus Rex,” “Yurtodon” or “Khoomiidactyl.” As an extension, have students mark their “dig sites” on an outline map of Mongolia.

Suggested Internet Resources

- www.mongolianembassy.us/default.php
Learn more about Mongolia’s culture, history, politics and economy from this site presented by the Embassy of Mongolia in Washington, D.C.
- www.culture.mn/index.php
This web site presents comprehensive information about Mongolian culture and traditions.
- www.katw.org/pages/sitepage.cfm?id=31&pname=Home&purl=index.cfm
This site introduces students to the lives, customs, and cultures of children in Mongolia. Includes lesson plans.
- www.cia.gov
The CIA World Factbook web site presents detailed and up-to-date information on Mongolia and many other countries. Topics include geography, people, government, economy, transportation and communication. On the main page of the CIA site, click on the “World Factbook” link.

Suggested Print Resources

- Cheng, Pang Guek. *Mongolia*. Marshall Cavendish, Tarrytown, NY; 1999.
- Lassieur, Allison. *Mongolia*. Children’s Press, Danbury, CT; 2007.
- Taylor, Robert. *Life in Genghis Khan’s Mongolia*. Lucent Books, Farmington Hills, MI; 2000.

Teacher’s Guide written by Brian Wales, Curriculum Specialist, Schlessinger Media

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