Lesson Plan:

How Shall We Rule China?
Role Play

Description
This role-playing activity focuses on a powerful time in history: when the Mongol armies conquered China. Students consider important questions about government and society from a number of perspectives.

Objectives/Skills
Students will:
- understand the attitudes Mongols had about the Chinese and how the Chinese viewed these nomadic invaders.
- analyze the options the Mongols had as they established their rule over the Chinese people.
- analyze what relationship the Mongols established with the Chinese, how the Mongols governed, from what political center and what their policies were toward land use in China.
- analyze the ways in which nomadic invaders changed after they settled down and began to rule urbanized and agricultural peoples.

Assessment
Teachers may assess the quality of discourse and debate to determine whether students thought critically about history and governance.

Questions
What options did Kublai Khan and the Mongols face as they established the Yuan Dynasty in China? And how should they rule the great kingdom?

Procedure

1. Explain to the students that they are going to pretend that they are back in China around the year 1270. They are participating in a high-level conference the Mongols are holding in which they are trying to decide what advice to give Kublai Khan about how he should rule China. Most of them are to play the part of an invading Mongol, but one or two of them will be Chinese advisors whom the Mongols have allowed to participate in the conference. In the role play, they are to figure out how to rule China.
2. Assign each student a role and give them their role description (see below). They may want to choose their own names.
3. Have all the students with the same role meet together and discuss who they are and what they believe. Have them consider the various issues (see below) and what advice they would offer on those issues. Ask them to figure out which answers they care strongly about and on which issues
they might be willing to compromise.

4. Divide the students into groups with different roles. There should be groups of up to nine students each, with each student in the group playing a different role. Ask these groups to discuss the various issues. They must decide as a group what they would advise Kublai Khan to do.

5. Bring the class together and have a spokesperson from each group report on the group's decisions. Discuss as a class what strategies they feel are best for the Chinese and the Mongols and what they actually think happened.

6. Have students compare what they decided with what Kublai Khan actually did and what happened to the Yuan dynasty. They may use their textbooks to find out what happened. They may use the information provided in this lesson. They may do individual research on the various issues they have discussed.

7. Have the class discuss what actually happened and why. If the actual events were different from what they had advised, have them discuss why they think the Mongols followed the policies they did.

The issues to be discussed are: **What shall be our relationship with the Chinese?**

- Should we stay away from them?
- Should we socialize with them?
- Inter-marry?
- Learn Chinese?
- Should we make them work for us?
- Leave them be?
- Shall we have a census to determine who is in the empire and who can pay taxes?
- Should we use them in government posts?
- If so, in what jobs?
- In lower positions only?
- Should we use them only as advisors?
- Can we really ever trust them?
- What if they do not want to help us rule, how shall we get them into the government?

**How shall we govern?**

- Do we want to appear to be just like the Chinese?
- What kind of bureaucracy shall we create?
- Should our military leaders govern certain areas?
- Should we keep the Chinese bureaucracy in place?
- If so, do we use the Chinese bureaucrats?
- Can we trust them?
- Should we use our own people?
- Are they literate enough?
- Would it be better to use Mongol warriors or Muslim traders?
- How shall we select the bureaucrats?
- Should we use some form of an exam system like the Chinese have?
What should we do about the land?
- Should we give it to our own tribal warriors in reward for their loyalty and courage?
- Should we allow the Chinese farmers to stay on the land and farm it?
- Should we turn the land into grazing and hunting areas?
- Should we set a standard tax rate and keep an eye on the people who are collecting taxes or should we leave them alone and let them squeeze as much out of the peasants as they can?
- Should we support trade and make it easier for merchants by improving communication or creating money?

Where shall we have our political center?
- Should we keep our nomadic way of life and have the capital wherever the leader is, under his text?
- Should we build a permanent capital in the steppe land so that we can maintain our nomadic lifestyle and keep good contact with other Mongol groups?
- Should we build a permanent capital in the agricultural area so we can control the Chinese people more effectively?
- Should we have two capitals, one outside the wall and one inside the wall?

Roles
- You are a Mongol warrior who wants to maintain the nomadic way of life no matter what. You feel the Mongols should take farm land from the Chinese for your herds to graze and turn other farm land into hunting areas. You do not want to have contact with the Chinese, and you think it is a bad idea to build a capital or do anything that might make the Mongols want to be like the Chinese. You do not trust the Chinese and wonder if it is ever possible for a Chinese scholar to be loyal to the Mongols. Most of all, you don't want to get used to luxuries as you fear they would make the Mongols weak and more vulnerable. You want to keep your fighting skills and you want Kublai Khan to follow a policy of expansion and attack neighboring areas such as Korea and Japan.
- You are a Chinese bureaucrat and the Mongols who know you have learned to respect you. You want to appear to be on the Mongol's side, but your long-range objective is to weaken Mongol rule and to finally see them leave. You suggest that they advise Kublai Khan to act more Chinese because that would make the Chinese obey him more readily, making it easier to govern. You appeal to Mongol vanity by suggesting that acting more Chinese will make the Mongols appear cultured in the eyes of the rest of the world. You believe secretly that the more the Mongols act like the Chinese, the weaker and less militaristic they will become and the less other Mongol groups will respect them or come to their aid. You are smart enough to try and convince the Mongols that becoming like the Chinese (Sinicizing) is the best policy for themselves, while you really believe it is the best policy for the Chinese.
- You are a Mongol leader who feels the Mongols should integrate with the Chinese in some aspects of life. You suggest that they ask Kublai Khan to act more Chinese so that the Chinese will respect him and obey him. You feel everyone should learn Chinese and speak it and you want the Mongols to use Chinese bureaucrats in some of the lower posts in the government. You favor a permanent capital inside the agricultural lands. You want the Mongols to be tolerant of Chinese ways and allow Buddhism and Taoism to be practiced. You feel if the Mongols accommodate the Chinese way of life, they will never be expelled from the country as "outsiders."
You are Kublai Khan’s mother, Sorghaghtani Beki. You are concerned for the Chinese, especially the farmers. You want the Mongols to protect the farmlands and not to allow their horses and herds to graze on the farmland and destroy the crops. You want to promote the culture and then tax it. You think allowing the animals to destroy the agriculture is a bad policy. You want to collect surplus grain and distribute it to people whose land was hurt in the wars and to save surplus grain to distribute in case of famine. You also want projects to insure flood control and that the irrigation works are in good order. You want the government to stock rivers with fish and generally work to improve agriculture. This will ensure a large tax base for the Mongol government, whereas being harsh to the farmers may drive them off the land and leave no one to pay the taxes.

You are for tax reform. You feel it is dangerous to allow merchants, especially Muslims, to collect taxes as they please. Harsh tax collection policies will drive farmers off the land (thus destroying the tax base) or tempt them to revolt and try and drive the Mongols out. You want a systematic tax schedule and tax collectors who are watched by the government to be sure they do not exploit the peasants. You are not opposed to using Chinese in the bureaucracy. You favor learning Chinese so the Mongols can communicate better with the Chinese.

You are a Mongol leader who favors public works, building a grand capital and extending the canal in order to bring goods, especially food, to the capital. You think the Chinese should pay taxes and provide unpaid labor for public works projects. You think a large, permanent capital would add prestige to the Mongol ruler. You also want the government to take a census of all the people, placing them in categories so the Mongols know who their friends are. You suggest the categories might be 1) Mongols; 2) outsiders like Muslim merchants; 3) Northerners who have been under outsider rule for several centuries and are less resentful of the Mongols; 4) the Chinese, particularly those from the Southern Sung, who cannot be trusted.

You are a Mongol noble who opposes a permanent capital. You feel one inside the agricultural area will result eventually in the Mongols becoming too Chinese and one on the steppe land would require too much effort. You want the Mongols to maintain their own nomadic way of life and nomadic values. You oppose intermarriage, learning Chinese or other forms of accommodation to the Chinese way of life. You do not think Chinese people can be trusted because Confucianism is anti-foreign. If the Mongols stay strong, they cannot be thrown out.

You are a Mongol warrior who knows the importance of information. Although you do not trust merchants and feel as a group they are cheaters and untrustworthy, you favor encouraging trade, especially because of the information the merchants can provide about the outside world. Merchants who have traveled across the Silk route can be valuable “eyes” for the government, either knowingly or unknowingly. They can report on what and who they passed on their journeys. You suggest the creation of paper money and good communication. You favor the postal system, through which merchants can “post” their messages or goods via horseback riders.

You want to keep the Mongol customs and way of life. You oppose learning Chinese and Chinese customs. You do not like foot binding and think no Mongol woman should ever have her feet bound. You like the Mongol festivals and feasts and do not want to see your people celebrate Chinese ones. You
You want to keep your customs and the hunt and fear a capital city, especially one inside the agricultural territories. You do not trust the Chinese and wonder if it is ever possible for a Chinese scholar to be loyal to the Mongols. You want the government to make two sets of laws, one for the Chinese and one for the Mongols. If the Mongols stay strong, they cannot be thrown out.

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SUBJECTS
History and social studies,

TIME REQUIRED
1 - 3 hours

MATERIALS REQUIRED
Cut and paste each "Roles" description below onto student handouts.

RELATED BACKGROUND ESSAYS
The Mongol Dynasty

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