

# Episode 2 Lesson Plan: Steel—the Great Conqueror

This lesson is designed for students studying world history, geography, and economics in grades 6-12.

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## **Lesson Objectives:**

Students will be able to:

1. Brainstorm their prior knowledge and ideas about the role of guns and steel in historic conquests.
2. Participate in class discussion using their own opinions supported by facts, examples, and reasons.
3. Use listening and note taking skills to view the film segment and complete the accompanying viewing guide accurately.
4. Utilize a number of primary sources to conduct research about weapons from a specific time period.
5. Work in pairs/small groups to complete a project and presentation illustrating significant weaponry from their assigned time period
6. Make a group presentation to teach classmates about what they learned about the weaponry and impact of the weapons researched for their assigned time period.
7. Write a written response to Jared Diamond's theories about the significance of guns and steel, including stating personal opinions supported by what was learned from research and other classroom activities.

## **Relevant National Standards:**

### **World History**

Standard 27: Understands how European society experienced political, economic, and cultural transformation in the age of global intercommunication between 1450 and 1750.

Standard 29: Understands the economic, political, and cultural interrelations among peoples of Africa, Europe, and the Americas between 1500 and 1750.

### **Historical Understanding**

Standard 1: Understands and knows how to analyze chronological relationships and patterns

Standard 2: Understands the historical perspective

### **Geography**

#### **The World in Spatial Terms**

Standard 3: Understands the characteristics and uses of spatial organization of Earth's surface

## **Human Systems**

Standard 9: Understands the nature, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth's surface

Standard 12: Understands the patterns of human settlement and their causes

## **Uses of Geography**

Standard 17: Understands how geography is used to interpret the past

## **Language Arts**

### **Writing:**

Standard 4: Gathers and uses information for research purposes

### **Reading:**

Standard 7: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand a variety of information texts.

### **Listening and Speaking:**

Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

### **Viewing:**

Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

### **Thinking and Reasoning:**

Standard 1: Understands and applies the basic principles of presenting an argument

### **Working With Others**

Standard 1: Contributes to the overall effort of the group

Standard 4: Displays effective interpersonal communication skills

### **Estimated Time:**

Approximately 2 to 3 90-minute or 4 to 5 45-minute class periods

### **Materials Needed:**

- Internet access to allow for viewing of companion website's "The Story of..." steel and writing features and conducting research
- Television/vcr for viewing "Guns, Germs, and Steel: Episode 2" content
- Viewing Guide handout for each student (printable copy provided with lesson plan)
- Library/primary resources for conducting research
- Timeline Project Guidelines for each student (printable copy provided with lesson plan)
- Assorted art supplies including poster board, construction paper, markers, glue, colored pencils, and stencils for construction of various timeline posters.

### **Backgrounder for Teachers:**

This episode explores, in more depth, the idea that geographic luck enabled some cultures to become more agricultural, thus allowing them to establish larger settlements with people specializing in many aspects of technological development. One of these was the development of steel for use in weaponry. Diamond chronicles the success of the Spanish Conquistadors and how the use of written language gave them an advantage over the Incas, along with their advanced weapons including guns and state of the art steel swords. These two things combined

allowed the Spanish to overthrow a much larger Inca army, thus taking control of their empire and its riches.

### **Assumed Student Prior Knowledge**

Students will need a basic understanding of Jared Diamond's theory that certain civilizations gained great power and wealth and were able to conquer much of the world because of simple, geographic luck. They had access to the best resources because of where they lived. In addition, students should have some understanding of who the Spanish Conquistadors were and where and when the Inca Empire was in power.

### **Teaching Strategy:**

#### **Part 1: Steel—The Great Conqueror**

1. Using an overhead projector, chart paper, or a blackboard, record each of the following questions before class begins so they can be used as part of a group brainstorming session.
  - How did the development of steel help civilizations gain power?
  - What were the common weapons of war 500 years ago? 300 years ago? 100 years ago? 50 years ago?
  - What weapons do you think have had the most impact on warfare throughout history?
2. To assess students' prior knowledge and get them focused on the topics that will be presented in "Guns, Germs, and Steel Episode 2", take approximately 15 minutes to brainstorm the answers to each of the questions above as a group. Record all student ideas and responses and keep these in case students want to refer back to them later.
3. Once brainstorming is completed, ask students the following question. Have students share their answers in a short class discussion based on this question.
  - Why were the Europeans the people who were able to conquer so many of the world's great civilizations and control so much of the world?To assist with this discussion, refer to the "Guns, Germs, and Steel" website's interactive map entitled "The World" at <http://www.liontv.co.uk/ggs/world/index.html> to introduce or review Jared Diamond's theory that the reason the Europeans were able to conquer the majority of the world was because they had a geographic advantage. Explain that Diamond's theory suggests that the Europeans were able to grow the most nutritious crops and raise the most domesticated animals. This, in turn, allowed them to prosper and create societies where people could specialize in a given area, thus producing technological advances that allowed them to conquer other civilizations.
4. One of the most important technological advances, according to Diamond, was steel. Another was writing. Using the "Guns, Germs, and Steel" website content entitled "The Story of Writing" available at <http://www.liontv.co.uk/ggs/variables/writing.html>, review the role writing had in the Spanish conquest over the Inca Empire. Pay special attention to how the battle tactics of Hernan Cortes were passed on in writing and used in the conquering on the Incas.
5. Next, explain to students that they will be viewing "Guns, Germs, and Steel: Episode 2" to learn more about how the Europeans managed to take control of the vast Inca Empire and overthrow the native South Americans with virtually no loss of European lives. View Episode 2 and have students complete the **Viewing Guide** as they are watching. Stop the film periodically to discuss points as necessary throughout the film. If limited viewing time is available, watch the segments outlined below.
  - Beginning to 2:00 (previews the conflict between Incas and Spanish conquistadors and

- summarizes Diamond's theories related to geography)
  - 13:57 to 21:42 (explains the role and history of the development of steel weapons by the Europeans and the benefits this technology gave them)
  - 37:15 to 42:32 (tells the story of the confrontation between Spanish conquistadors and the Incas and explains how steel gave the Europeans an easy victory)
  - 52:40-53:19 (summary of how Diamond's theories about geography explain Spain's easy victory over the Inca Empire)
6. After viewing is complete, take time to discuss the answers to the **Viewing Guide**. In addition, using "The Story of Steel" available at <http://www.pbs.org/gunsgermsteel/variables/steel.html>, have students learn more about the impact of steel in advancing civilizations around the world. Re-address the first brainstorming question: **How did the development of steel help civilizations gain power?** and have students use what they learned to answer this in more detail in group discussion.

## **Part 2: How Steel Changed the Way We Fight**

1. Since the Spanish conquistadors arrived in Peru in 1532, warfare has changed dramatically, but two variables remain the same:
  - steel is still significantly important in modern warfare
  - countries with the most technological advances still hold most of the world's power
2. One of the brainstorming questions from Part 1 asked students to discuss which weapons they felt had the most impact on warfare throughout history. This activity will examine this question again and will also present the class with the opportunity to learn about the types of weapons that have been provided significant advances over time.
3. Explain to the class that they will be working in pairs to create a portion of a weaponry timeline. Each group will be assigned to learn about weapons from a specific time period. They will then create a piece of the timeline to be shared with the class and posted in chronological order around the classroom. Distribute the **Timeline Project Guidelines** and review them with students.
4. Provide pairs with time to conduct research and prepare their piece of the timeline according to the specified guidelines. Students will also need to prepare a 1-2 minute presentation explaining their portion of the timeline.
5. Once all pairs have completed their timeline sections, have each group present it's findings in chronological order. Provide 3-5 minutes for each group's presentation to allow for questions and answers. Post each piece of the timeline after it is presented to the class.
6. Once all timeline sections have been presented and students have had an opportunity to learn about the technological advances in weaponry, assign the following written response to summarize the lesson. Students should write 1-2 paragraphs to address each of the questions below:
  - In your opinion, which weapon has had the most impact on warfare historically? Why?
  - Do the findings presented in the timeline activity support Jared Diamond's theory that historically, the most successful conquerors experienced success because of the geographic advantages they had over other countries? Why or why not?
  - In your opinion, how has the spread of guns and steel changed the balance of world power over the past 100 years now that most countries have access to them?
  - Do you think that Jared Diamond's theories will hold true for future generations? Why or

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For more GUNS, GERMS, AND STEEL lesson plans...go to: [www.pbs.org/gunsgermsteel/](http://www.pbs.org/gunsgermsteel/)

why not?

### **Assessment Suggestions:**

1. Students could receive participation scores/grades for involvement in group brainstorming and class discussion and research work in pairs.
2. Students could receive completion or accuracy grades for their work on the Viewing Guides.
3. Students could complete peer evaluations and self evaluation or be graded using a scoring guide for completion of the timeline project and the accompanying presentation.
4. Students should receive individual grades on the follow-up written response asking them to discuss weaponry and Jared Diamond's theories related to Guns, Germs, and Steel.

### **Extension Ideas:**

1. Have students research and learn about other great conquests where one army or civilization was overthrown by a much smaller force simply because of the technology they possessed. Retell this story by creating dioramas or multi-media presentations that re-enact the events and showcase the weaponry/technology that provided the great advantage.
2. Have students debate the pros and cons of the invention of firearms. Using what they have learned from their research along with their personal opinions, have students decide if the world would be better off if guns had never been invented.

### **Related Resources:**

"Guns, Germs, and Steel" website sections entitled:

The World (interactive map activity) <http://www.pbs.org/gunsgermsteel/world/index.html>

Variables ("The story of..." features content about the significance of writing and steel) <http://www.pbs.org/gunsgermsteel/variables/index.html>

### **Guns, Firearms, and Ammunition History**

<http://inventors.about.com/library/inventors/blgun.htm?iam=ask&terms=firearms+history>

provides a short history of the development of various firearms and ammunition

### **Military History Resources**

<http://www.cc.gatech.edu/fac/Thomas.Pilsch/history.html>

provides a detailed collection of information related to most major conflicts/military campaigns throughout history

### **About the Author**

Lisa Prososki is an independent educational consultant who taught middle school and high school social studies, English, reading, and technology courses for twelve years. Prososki has worked with PBS TeacherSource and has authored many lesson plans for various PBS programs over the past five years. In addition to conducting workshops for teachers at various state and national conventions, Prososki has also worked as an editor and authored one book.