The Persian Empire

The heart of the Persian Empire, also called the Achaemenid Empire, was located in the modern country of Iran. Modern Iran and the Persian Empire are located on the east side of the Persian Gulf, part of the Indian Ocean. In fact, Persia was the official name of modern Iran until 1935. The Persian Empire lasted from 550 BCE until 330 BCE and it was the largest empire in the world in terms of physical size up until that time. It stretched across portions of western Asia, northern Africa and included parts of Ancient Greece.

To the west, the Persian Empire included the areas of Mesopotamia once occupied by the Sumerians and Babylonians. The empire extended further west to the Mediterranean Sea and beyond to the eastern edge of the Greek peninsula. Persian lands included the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea and the lands of Syria as well as the all lands south of the Mediterranean, including Ancient Egypt. Expansion of the empire to the north was stopped by the Black Sea, the Caucasus Mountains, the Caspian Sea and the Scythian Mountains. To the east the empire extended almost to the Indus River.

This huge land mass was unified under the Persian ruler Cyrus the Great. The empire was ruled from the city of
Pasargadae built by Cyrus the Great. Conquered lands were allowed to keep most of their local customs and religions. Cyrus the Great died in battle in 530 BCE.

Darius the Great was the third king of the Persian Empire. Darius built his royal palace at the new city of Persepolis. Darius the Great was responsible for organizing the empire into provinces that were each ruled by a satrap (governor). The empire was an administrative unit that allowed trade to flourish under a uniform language, money and government without any small local wars.

Darius the Great is also a major figure in the history of Ancient Greece, conquering the city-states of Thrace and Macedonia. Darius next attempted to conquer all of Greece but failed. Darius’ son Xerxes invaded Greece and the famous Battle of Thermopylae occurred. The Persian Empire ended in 330 BCE after being defeated by the Greek ruler Alexander the Great.
Multiple Choice Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. Persia used to be the name of the modern country of
   a. Egypt
   b. Iraq
   c. Iran
   d. Syria

2. The Persian Empire included lands that were once home to other ancient civilizations including the
   a. Babylonians
   b. Sumerians
   c. Egyptians
   d. All of the above

3. The Persian ruler who first established the Persian Empire was
   a. Cyrus the Great
   b. Darius the Great
   c. Xerxes
   d. Alexander the Great

4. The Persian Empire included lands on the continents of Asia and
   a. Africa
   b. Australia
   c. North America
   d. South America

5. The Persian Empire bordered on many bodies of water including the
   a. Mediterranean Sea
   b. Persian Gulf
   c. Black Sea
   d. All of the above

6. The Persian Empire ended when it was conquered by the
   a. Egyptians
   b. Greeks
   c. Romans
   d. None of the above
Short Answer Questions

1. Do some research and list the modern countries that occupy the land of the Ancient Persian Empire.

2. Locate the Black Sea, the Caucasus Mountains, the Caspian Sea and the Scythian Mountains on a map of the world.

3. Do some research and write a short biography of Cyrus the Great.

4. Do some research on the Internet and locate pictures of Ancient Persian artifacts. Create a poster or collage of these pictures. Be sure to label each one.

5. Pasargadae is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Do some research and write a short report about the ruins that remain from this ancient city.

6. Persepolis is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Do some research and write a short report about the ruins that remain from this ancient city.

7. Do some research about the Battle of Thermopylae. Write a short report about what happened there.
Answer Key

Multiple Choice

1. c.
2. d.
3. a.
4. a.
5. d.
6. b.

Short Answer

1. Individual response
2. Individual response
3. Individual response
4. Individual response
5. Individual response
6. Individual response
7. Individual response