Great Projects

The Great Wall was begun by the first emperor of the Qin Dynasty around 214 B.C. Emperor Shi Huangdi built the Great Wall by connecting new walls with older ones. Hundreds of thousands of workers were conscripted to work on the wall. The Chinese constructed the wall on the tops of hills and mountains to make it even more difficult to overcome.

Along the Great Wall, huts and platforms provided shelter for guards, storage room for weapons, and strategic places from which to shoot. The watchtowers or signal towers had platforms at the top where beacon fires could be lit. Below, there were rooms for the guards and for storage and pens or stables for sheep and horses. Large fortifications were built at strategic points along the wall.

1. Why was the wall built on tops of hills and mountains?

2. Identify the purpose of the huts and platforms along the Great Wall?

3. How were the watchtowers designed?

The Grand Canal was originally built to ship grain from the Chang Jiang valley to the imperial capitals and to the garrisons that guarded northern China. The Grand Canal was built by the Sui (Sway) emperor Yang Di. It ran from Hanzhou near the Yangzi River, to Beijing in the North, covering a distance of 1,500 miles. The canal was used extensively by the Tang and Song dynasties. The Mongols and Ming added new sections. Over the years, the canal has been dredged, improved, and extended numerous times.

4. What was the original purpose of the Grand Canal?

Many cities in southern China were built on network of urban waterways. These busy urban waterways were crowded with junks and sampans. The most common craft on China’s waterways were simple boats called sampans, which means "three planks." Although there were many different types of sampan, the basic, flat-bottomed design remained the same centuries. Some families made their homes on boats, rafts, or barges and spent their lives afloat. Water taxis ferried passengers from one part of the city to another, while wealthy people often traveled along city canals in their own splendidly decorated boats.

5. What was the most common craft on the waterways? Explain its design.

6. Contrast the difference between the way the common people and wealthy traveled the waterways.