MISSION WORKBOOK • CEFR A2–B1 • AGES 7–14

Wu Zetian: The Dragon Empress Who Defied an Empire

The Only Female Emperor & The Wordless Stele | 唯一的女皇帝：武則天與無字碑

SCAN TO PLAY AUDIO
curioquestkids.com

EXPEDITION MAP — Where Are We Landing? 古代中國時空座標

Tang Dynasty (690–705 AD) | **690 AD • 34°N, 112°E**

📍 **Luoyang Divine Capital & Qianling Mausoleum** (唐代神都洛陽與乾陵無字碑)

[Lin]: "Step into Tang Dynasty Luoyang, where one woman defied 2,000 years of tradition to become the only female Emperor of China!"

[Leo]: "She invented her own Chinese character 'Zhao' (sun and moon in the sky), and left a giant blank stone monument! Why no words?"

WARM-UP — Before You Warp: Predict True or False! 聽前真假預測

Guess the answers before listening to today's episode! (聽故事前先猜猜看！)

1. Wu Zetian ruled China as an official female 'Huangdi' (Emperor), not merely an empress consort.
TRUEFALSE

2. Only noble-born men from aristocratic families were allowed to pass her imperial exams.
TRUEFALSE

3. Her famous tomb stele at Qianling was carved with over 10,000 praise poems.
TRUEFALSE

READING PASSAGE The Rise of China's Sole Dragon Empress 日月當空：一代女皇武則天傳奇

A ~230-word standalone story covering core historical facts and all 12 vocabulary words. Works with or without audio! **（約 230 詞獨立精讀短文，底線標記全部 12 個核心單字，無音響設備亦可獨立教學）。**

In the golden age of the Tang Dynasty, imperial power was strictly reserved for male heirs. Yet one extraordinarily brilliant leader shattered every barrier: Wu Zetian, the only woman to rule China as an official Emperor (Huangdi). Entering the palace as a low-ranking teenage consort, she rose through sheer intellect, political courage, and razor-sharp strategy. In 690 AD, she proclaimed the Second Zhou **dynasty**, inaugurating a remarkable fifteen-year **reign** that transformed imperial governance. To dismantle corrupt aristocratic families, Empress Wu revolutionized the imperial civil service exams. She opened leadership positions to gifted **scholar** candidates regardless of family wealth, creating a true **merit** system. Peasants enjoyed lower taxes, agricultural production soared, and international trade along the Silk Road flourished under her imperial **decree**. Driven by bold **ambition**, she even invented unique written characters, most famously 'Zhao' (曌)—combining the sun and moon shining over the sky to symbolize her radiant wisdom. When she died at age 81, she chose to be buried beside her husband at Qianling. In front of her tomb stood a colossal, 8-meter limestone **stele**. Yet unlike every other imperial **memorial**, her stone remained completely blank. By leaving a **wordless** monument, this fearless ruler left her profound **legacy** entirely for future generations to judge.

SCIENCE FACT The Character '曌' & Imperial Meritocracy 自創「曌」字與科舉拔擢寒門

Wu Zetian invented 18 brand-new Chinese characters! The most famous is '曌' (Zhào): combining '日' (sun) and '月' (moon) over '空' (sky), declaring her light covered heaven and earth. Simultaneously, her anonymized test-grading prevented cheating in civil service exams.

READ & SPOT Quick Story Check 閱讀關鍵線索任務

- Spot the title Wu Zetian claimed in 690 AD: Emperor (Huangdi) of the Zhou Dynasty.
- Find how she helped ordinary citizens: Lowered farm taxes and promoted talented commoners.
- Locate what stands before her tomb: An 8-meter Wordless Stele (無字碑).

LISTENING LOG 5-Act Time-Travel Mission Notes 五幕式聽力探險筆記

Listen to EP03 (use **0.8x speed** on curioquestkids.com if you want extra thinking time!) and record key details. **(邊聽播客邊記錄每一幕關鍵線索，官網播放器支援 0.8x 慢速跟聽)。**

Act 1 • A Female Emperor? 歷史上唯一的女皇帝 00:00
How did Wu Zetian challenge 2,000 years of male-only imperial tradition?

Act 2 • Tang Portal to Luoyang 穿越繁華大唐洛陽 02:14
What sensory details made 7th-century Luoyang the glittering capital of the world?

Act 3 • Rise of the Dragon Empress 從才人到登基稱帝 05:14
What key reforms did Wu Zetian implement to promote talented commoners over rich nobles?

Act 4 • Mystery of the Wordless Stele 無字碑的千年之謎 08:58
Why did she choose to leave her 8-meter tombstone completely blank without an epitaph?

Act 5 • Time Machine Quiz Challenge 時光機問答挑戰 10:57
What does Wu Zetian's life teach us about courage and defying expectations?

PART A Complete the Field Report (Cloze) 關鍵詞聽讀填空

Choose words from the word bank to complete Leo's mission debrief. **(從單字庫中選出正確單字填入空格)**

reign scholar merit decree stele legacy

During her 15-year (1) _____ as Emperor, Wu Zetian broke noble privilege by creating a (2) _____ system based on skill. Any hardworking (3) _____ could take the imperial exams. She lowered farm taxes by imperial (4) _____. Before her tomb stands an 8-meter blank stone (5) _____, leaving her historic (6) _____ for history to judge.

PART B Timeline Detective (Order 1–4) 歷史事件先後排序

Number the chronological events from 1 (earliest) to 4 (latest). **(依歷史發生順序填入數字 1 到 4)**

[ ]
Wu Zetian enters Emperor Taizong's imperial court as a 14-year-old consort.

[ ]
She rises to become Empress Consort and begins co-managing imperial state affairs.

[ ]
She officially proclaims the Zhou Dynasty and ascends the throne as Emperor (Huangdi).

[ ]
Her tomb is sealed at Qianling beside the famous 8-meter Wordless Stele.

WORD BANK 12 Core Mission Words 12 個核心歷史英語詞彙

Master these 12 power words to boost your historical reading, listening, and debate writing! **(掌握這 12 個核心詞彙，全面提升聽說讀寫實力)**

empress n. · /ˈem.prəs/
A female monarch who rules an empire in her own right, or an emperor's wife.
"Wu Zetian ruled as an Empress with absolute sovereign authority."
✦ 中文釋義：女皇・皇后

defy v. · /dɪˈfaɪ/
To challenge, resist, or openly refuse to obey traditional social limits.
"She dared to defy traditions that said women could never be emperors."
✦ 中文釋義：違抗・反抗・打破常規

stele n. · /ˈstiɤ.li/
An upright stone slab or pillar bearing inscriptions or commemorative carvings.
"The 8-meter Qianling stele has eight carved dragons at the top but zero words."
✦ 中文釋義：石碑・巨型碑刻

legacy n. · /ˈleg.ə.si/
Something memorable and impactful handed down from an ancestor or historic figure.
"Wu Zetian's legacy proved that leadership depends on intellect, not gender."
✦ 中文釋義：歷史遺產・身後名聲

decree n. · /dɪˈkriː/
An official imperial order issued by a monarch having the force of law.
"The imperial decree lowered taxes on farmers and protected grain harvests."
✦ 中文釋義：聖旨・官方政令

memorial n. · /məˈmɔː.ri.əl/
A monument, plaque, or structure built to commemorate a person or event.
"Visitors still travel to Shaanxi to inspect her famous imperial memorial."
✦ 中文釋義：紀念碑・紀念物

reign n./v. · /reɪn/
The period of time during which a sovereign monarch rules a country.
"During her peaceful reign, the Silk Road flourished with merchant caravans."
✦ 中文釋義：執政期・統治

scholar n. · /ˈskɒl.ər/
A highly learned person who has studied subjects in great depth.
"Bright young scholars from poor villages passed the imperial civil exams."
✦ 中文釋義：學者・讀書人

merit n. · /ˈmer.ɪt/
The quality of being good and worthy, based on real ability rather than wealth.
"Her government hired officials on merit rather than who their parents were."
✦ 中文釋義：才能・功績・才德

ambition n. · /æmˈbɪʃ.ən/
A strong determination and desire to achieve great success or high rank.
"Her fierce ambition drove her from a low palace rank to the dragon throne."
✦ 中文釋義：抱負・野心・大志

dynasty n. · /ˈdɪn.ə.sti/
A line of hereditary rulers from the same family ruling a nation across eras.
"She interrupted the Tang Dynasty to establish her own Zhou Dynasty in 690 AD."
✦ 中文釋義：朝代・皇朝

wordless adj. · /ˈwɜːd.ləs/
Completely silent or having no written words, text, or letters.
"Her wordless monument invited the world to write its own verdict on her life."
✦ 中文釋義：無字的・無言的

PRACTICE 1 Match the Word to Its Clue 單字線索配對

1. Defy	A. Quality of being chosen for real talent rather than family wealth
2. Stele	B. An official royal order having the force of law
3. Merit	C. To bravely challenge or resist ancient unfair rules
4. Decree	D. An upright carved stone monolith honoring someone
5. Legacy	E. The lasting impact and reputation someone leaves for history

PRACTICE 2 Upgrade Leo's Field Journal 語境進階詞替換

Replace the bracketed everyday words with power words from Page 05.

- Wu Zetian managed to [break the rules] and become ruler. → **Upgrade:** _____
- She promoted people based on their [real skills and brains]. → **Upgrade:** _____
- The emperor issued an [official imperial law] to lower taxes. → **Upgrade:** _____
- Her famous tomb [stone pillar] has no words carved on it. → **Upgrade:** _____

PRACTICE 3 Leo's Code Scramble & Power Sentence 解碼與造句

A female imperial ruler (E E M P R S S) → _____

A highly educated exam taker (A C H L O R S) → _____

The special character meaning sun/moon in sky (A H O Z) → _____

The lasting reputation left behind (A C E G L Y) → _____

Write your own power sentence using at least one new mission word:

PART A History Detective Quiz 深度理解選擇題

1. What was unique about Wu Zetian's position compared to all other Chinese empresses?

A. She ruled as an Emperor (Huangdi) in her own right　　B. She was the youngest ruler in Tang history

C. She refused to live in the palace　　D. She banned all military training

2. How did Wu Zetian reform the imperial examination system?

A. She only allowed her family to pass　　B. She tested applicants anonymously to promote talented commoners on merit

C. She abolished all written tests　　D. She replaced tests with archery contests only

3. What does her invented character '曌' (Zhao) mean?

A. A river flowing through mountains　　B. The sun and moon shining over the sky

C. A dragon sleeping beneath the earth　　D. An army marching into battle

4. Why is her tomb monument called the 'Wordless Stele'?

A. Bandits erased all the text with acid　　B. She deliberately left its 8-meter surface blank for posterity to judge her

C. Tang sculptors ran out of carving tools　　D. An earthquake broke off the inscription

PART B Explain in Your Own Words 開放式簡答思考題

✦ **How did Wu Zetian's merit-based exam system change the lives of ordinary Tang citizens?**

✦ **If you had to design a personal monument today, what symbols would you choose instead of words?**

CRITICAL THINKING & OPINION WRITING • CCSS W.4.1 / CEFR B1

Why Did Wu Zetian Leave Her Qianling Tomb Stele Completely Wordless?

For over 1,300 years, historians have debated why the boldest ruler in Chinese history left no words on her tomb. Did she feel her achievements transcended words, or did she trust future generations to judge her fairly? **武則天為何立下無字巨碑？自信功高無法言表 vs 任由歷史評說?**

STEP 1 Weigh Both Sides (Evidence T-Chart) 正反證據分析

THEORY A — Words Could Not Contain Her Deeds (功績蓋世無須言)

- As China's sole female Emperor who defeated all rivals and stabilized the empire, no standard official praise text could capture her unprecedented stature.
- Surrounding rulers always exaggerated their virtues; silence was the ultimate statement of supreme imperial confidence and authority.

THEORY B — History Alone Must Be the Judge (是非功過留待後人)

- She knew court historians and Confucian critics would argue over her ruthless methods and dynasty break, so she refused to write biased self-praise.
- By leaving a blank canvas, she invited centuries of open historical debate, ensuring her name would remain unforgettable forever.

STEP 2 Write Your Historian's Verdict 撰寫歷史觀點短文

Lin's Opinion Starters: *"In my opinion, ... because ..."* · *"Evidence shows that ..."* · *"While some argue ..., I believe ..."*

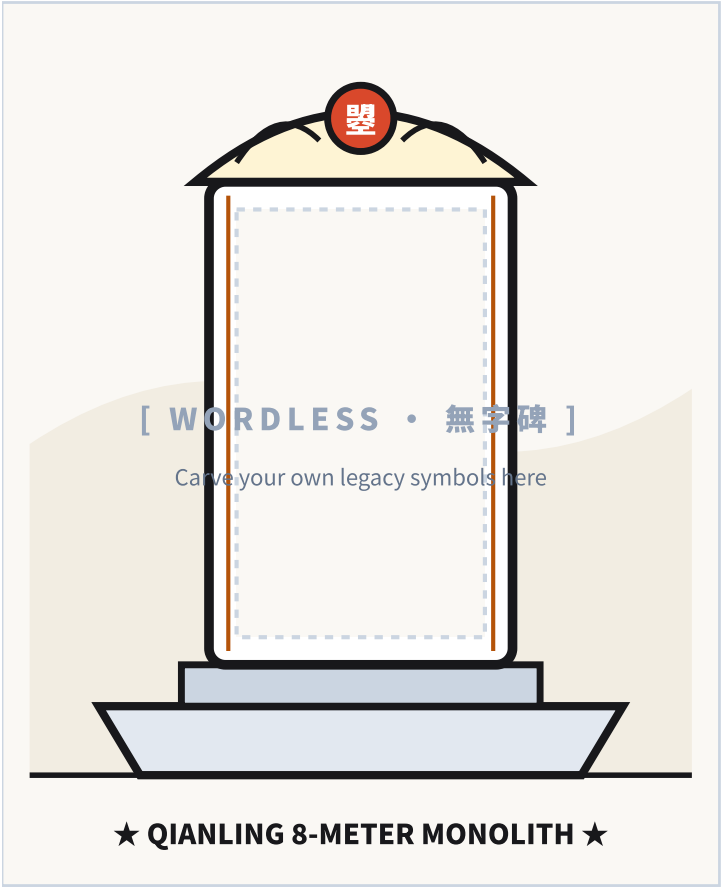
Writing Checklist: [ ] Clear opinion stated [ ] 2 historical reasons with "because" [ ] Concluding statement [ ] Capital letters & periods

MUSEUM LAB

Carve the 8-Meter Wordless Stele & Dragon Crest!

雕刻乾陵 8 米無字巨碑與八龍盤頂!

Draw the 8 entwined imperial dragons at the crown, design your own secret glyph in the center, and sketch the Tang Luoyang skyline!



Historical Design Specs

1. **Color Palette:** Mineral pigment highlights.
2. **Special Feature:** Add tools, sails, or banners.
3. **Mission Symbol:** Hidden dynastic crest.

Explorer Tip

Use fine-tip markers or colored pencils to bring your ancient artifact to life!

TANG DYNASTY • 690 AD

★

EP03 • DRAGON EMPRESS 'ZHAO' SEAL

✂ CUTOUT EXPLORER PASSPORT SEAL • 探險護照專屬實體印章

Congratulations, Time-Traveler! Cut along the dashed border and glue this official seal into your CurioQuest Passport. **（恭喜完成任務！沿虛線剪下這枚官方印章並貼入你的探險護照）。**

Explorer Signature: _____

ADULT COACHING GUIDE • ZERO PREP

Standards, Complete Answer Key & Writing Models

CEFR A2–B1 CCSS Aligned

教學對標、完整解答與分級範文指南

Standards Alignment:

• **CEFR A2–B1:** Narrative comprehension & reasoned opinion writing.
• **CCSS:** SL.4.2 (Listening), RI.4.1 (Evidence), L.4.6 (Vocab), W.4.1 (Opinion).

3-Day Pacing Suggestion:

• **Day 1:** P1 Warm-up → Listen/P2 Reading → P3 Notes.
• **Day 2:** P4 Cloze/Timeline → P5–P6 Vocab → P7 Quiz.
• **Day 3:** P8 Debate Essay → P9 Museum Lab & Seal!

COMPLETE ANSWER KEY

P1 Warm-Up: 1-T, 2-F, 3-F.
P4 Cloze: (1) reign, (2) scholar, (3) merit, (4) decree, (5) stele, (6) legacy.
P4 Timeline: A=1, B=2, C=3, D=4.
P6 Match: 1-C, 2-D, 3-B, 4-A, 5-E.
P6 Upgrade: 1. defy, 2. merit, 3. decree, 4. stele.
P7 MCQ: 1-A, 2-B, 3-B, 4-B.

DIFFERENTIATED WRITING MODELS (P8):

Level 1 (CEFR A2 / Grades 3–5): "In my opinion, Wu Zetian left the stele blank because she wanted history to judge her. She changed many rules and helped poor scholars pass tests. Many critics did not like a woman ruling, but she was not afraid. The blank stone shows she had courage and believed in her truth."

Level 2 (CEFR B1 / Grades 6–8): "Historians recognize Wu Zetian's Wordless Stele as a masterclass in political psychology. In ancient China, imperial monuments were universally filled with boastful, formulaic propaganda. By intentionally omitting text, Wu Zetian subverted imperial tradition one final time. She recognized that any eulogy written by her court would be discarded by subsequent dynasties; therefore, leaving a blank stone paradoxically ensured that her extraordinary achievements—from breaking hereditary nobility to fostering the Tang golden age—would spark eternal contemplation."

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