

SOCIAL STUDIES · GRADES 3–4

The Great Wall of China

The longest wall ever built

Quick facts

Length	About 21,000 km (13,000 miles) — longer than from London to Sydney.
When built	Started around 220 BCE under Emperor Qin Shi Huang. Most of what we see today was built under the Ming dynasty (1368–1644).
Purpose	To keep out invaders from the north — especially Mongol horsemen.
Materials	Earth, wood, stone, brick — depending on the region.
Workers	Hundreds of thousands of soldiers, farmers, and prisoners. Many died building it.
Watchtowers	Around 25,000 — used to send smoke signals if an attack came.
Did it work?	Sometimes. The Mongols still managed to invade in 1211–1271, taking over China entirely.
Visible from space?	MYTH. It's long but very narrow. Astronauts say you cannot see it from low Earth orbit.

