“Don’t be fooled by the heroic image. Behind the boyish good looks, Alexander is basically Saddam Hussein. One minute he’s your best [friend], the next minute he’s cutting your head off. So when the city of Thebes rebels, he doesn’t just punish it, he destroys it. He’s basically saying to all the other Greek cities out there, “Cross me at your peril (doom)!” And you know what? It works.”

Source: Mike Ibeji, PhD, Military Historian

“Alexander continues to believe he’s special. Whenever anybody resists him, he takes it as a personal affront (insult). He not only defeats them, he massacres them. This… serves as an example to the rest of the world.”

Source: David Mallot MD, Analytical Psycholoist, University of Maryland

1. “Fear was one of Alexander’s greatest weapons.” How do the above documents support this view?

“His Macedonian infantry is armed with the sarissa, a razor-sharp spear 18 feet long. His men face the enemy using a phalanx formation… In such a grouping, the long spears carried by every man, even the guys four rows back, become effective weapons. This has a distinct advantage over the style of leaving the fighting to the men in the front rank, one row at a time.

Source: Ancients Behaving Badly: Alexander the Great, The History Channel

2. How did the development of the sarissa make the Macedonian phalanx more effective in battle?
3. Why do Plutarch’s and Wiraz’s views of Alexander’s Persian conquests differ so greatly?

4. According to Plutarch, what influence did Alexander have on the Eastern peoples he conquered?

5. What evidence is there to suggest that Plutarch is biased in his account?

“But if you examine the results of Alexander’s instruction, you will see that he educated… the Indians to worship Greek gods, and the Scythians to bury their dead, not to devour them!… [W]hen Alexander was civilizing Asia, Homer was commonly read, and the children of the Persians, of the Susianians, and of the Gedrosians learned to chant the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides… through Alexander, Bactria (modern day Afghanistan) and the Caucasus (East of the Black Sea) learned to revere the gods of the Greeks… Alexander established more than seventy cities among savage tribes, and sowed all Asia with Greek magistracies (governorships), and thus overcame its uncivilized and brutish manner of living… Those who were vanquished (defeated) by Alexander are happier than those who escaped his hand…”

Source: On the Fortune of Alexander, Plutarch (Roman Historian), c. 100 CE
“Alexander’s empire was definitely visually impressive, but it wasn’t actually much of an empire. Like, Alexander specialized in the tearing down of things, but he wasn’t so great at the building up of institutions to replace the things he’d torn down. And that’s why, pretty soon after his death, his Empire broke into multiple successor states called the Hellenistic Kingdoms. Each was ruled by one of Alexander’s generals, and they became important dynasties. The Antigones in Greece and Macedonia, the Ptolemies in Egypt, the Selucids in Persia, all of which lasted longer than Alexander’s empire. But the dead Alexander had a huge impact on culture. He gave the region its common language, Greek, which facilitated conversations and commerce. Greek was so widespread that archaeologists have found coins in what is now Afghanistan from the Greco-Bactrian Kingdom with pictures of their kings and the word “king” written beneath the pictures — in Greek. This is also why, incidentally, the New Testament of the Bible was eventually written in Greek. Although Alexander was mostly just conquering territory for the glory and heroism and greatness of it all, in his wake emerged a more closely connected world that could trade and communicate with more people more efficiently than ever before. Alexander didn’t make those things happen, but they probably wouldn’t have happened without him.”

Source: “Alexander the Great,” John Green, Crash Course World History (adapted)

6. Who took over the lands of the Empire after Alexander’s death?

7. What lasting impact did “dead Alexander” have on the lands he conquered?
Pythagorean Theorem

Geometry students remember Pythagoras for his theorem on the triangle, but its principles were known earlier. This formula states that the square of a right triangle’s hypotenuse equals the sum of the squared lengths of the two remaining sides. Chinese mathematicians knew this theory perhaps as early as 1100 B.C. Egyptian surveyors put it to practical use even earlier.

However, the work of the school that Pythagoras founded caught the interest of later mathematicians. Shown are Euclid’s proof in Greek along with a Chinese and an Arabic translation. The Arabs who conquered much of Alexander’s empire spread Greek mathematical learning to the West. The formula became known as the Pythagorean theorem throughout the world.

8. Does Alexander the Great deserve credit for the development and spread of the Pythagorean Theorem?

Summary: Does Alexander deserve to be called Great?