Tengri – the Sky God Without a Temple

Subjects: English · Religious Studies · History · Geography | recommended from age 12 (B1) | Video: 8:28 min



Watch the video
youtu.be/83_FSJmUoZ8

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

A · Before watching

1. Where do people pray to their god or gods? Name at least two places – and think: does a god need a building?

B · While watching

1. What does the word 'Tengri' mean, and which peoples worshipped him? Where does the name still live on today?

2. In the creation myth from the Altai, how is the land created? What does the first human secretly do, and what does he become?

3. How do the 8th-century Turkic stone inscriptions begin, and what right does the sky give the ruler?

4. What did Temüjin do after hiding on the mountain Burkhan Khaldun? Name at least three actions.

5. Who was Kököchü, why did he become dangerous for the khan, and what was the message of his death?

Useful words

steppe	Steppe	offering	Opfergabe
nomad	Nomade, Nomadin	to proclaim	ausrufen, verkünden
inscription	Inschrift	seal	Siegel
to kneel	knien	cairn	Steinhügel

C · Put the story in order

Number the events from 1 to 8 in the order they happen in the video.

	Temüjin kneels nine times on Burkhan Khaldun.
	John of Plano Carpini travels to the Mongols on behalf of the pope.
	Kaira Khan and the first human glide above the endless water.
	The shaman Kököchü is killed during a wrestling match.
	The human hides earth in his mouth and has to spit it out.
	The Great Khan Güyük seals a letter to the pope.
	Turkic rulers have inscriptions carved in stone.
	The tribes proclaim Temüjin Genghis Khan.

D · Think and discuss

1. “A god who lives in that sky doesn't need a temple. His church is the open land itself.” Explain why the sky was so important for life on the steppe.

2. “Power is only ever on loan.” Explain this idea with two examples from the video.

E · Sky, earth, underworld

For each level of the world, say who or what rules there and what this level brings to people.

	Who or what rules there?	What does it bring to people?
Above: the sky		
Middle: the earth		
Below: the underworld		

F · Get creative

1. You are travelling with a Mongolian family and stop at an ovoo on a mountain pass. In your exercise book, write a short travel diary entry: What does the ovoo look like, what do people do there, and what does it have to do with Tengri? (8–10 sentences)