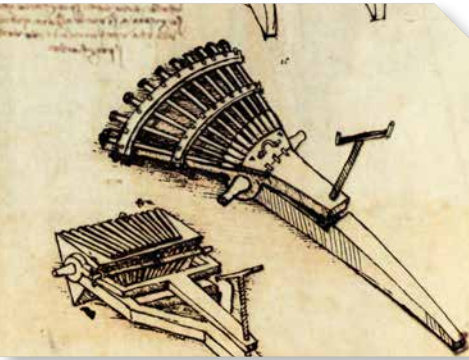


World of WEAPONS



Of all of the earth's mammals, only humans use weapons to kill at a distance – and this development never could have happened without a unique wrist that allows us to throw accurately. But throwing was just the beginning of the big history of weapons. From the invention of the long bow to a Chinese alchemist's accidental discovery of gunpowder, to Leonardo da Vinci's design for a machine gun, history has been shaped by an ever-evolving quest for power over others. This episode looks at the ways humans have built and refined weapons, and how they have transformed human cultures over time.

Curriculum Links

H2's *Big History* series is a great fit with a range of courses and units on history, science and technology, social studies and global studies. It is most appropriate for high school students but is suitable for middle school students as well. The series can be used as a companion to the Big History Project online course and curriculum. (Visit www.bighistoryproject.com to learn more.)

Identification Terms

The terms below are used in this episode; defining them will help students understand some of the concepts explored in this series. Using a dictionary or another resource, students can find definitions for these terms before or after watching the episode. As they are watching, students can also keep a list of terms from each episode in the *Big History* series to define.

alchemist

geology

mother lode

projectile

compression

longbow

primate

saltpeter

Discussion Questions

1. When did humans first use projectile weapons? Why was the use of projectiles such an important development for humankind?
2. How does our use of weapons make humans distinct?
3. What is saltpeter and why has it played an important role in the history of weapons?
4. Why do you think gunpowder was invented in China? What conditions and resources made it possible to create gunpowder?
5. When did massive armies first form? What are some of the ways official militaries have shaped world history?



Activities

- 1. When and Where.** Gunpowder was first created in China. This episode discusses how and why the conditions were just right for humans to create this potent substance. Describe in a short essay the context in which gunpowder was created and the process used to develop it in ancient China.
- 2. The Big History of Saltpeter.** This episode explores saltpeter. Create a visual presentation describing the makeup of saltpeter and its uses over time.
- 3. The Short History of the Longbow.** We learn in this episode about the importance of the longbow. How were longbows made, and what were some of their vulnerabilities? Write an essay or create a presentation about the longbow answering these questions.



Reflections After Watching

What were the three most interesting things you learned from watching this episode of *Big History*?

Web Links

Short video about the creation of gunpowder:

www.history.com/shows/mankind-the-story-of-all-of-us/videos/mankind-the-story-of-all-of-us-gunpowder-to-guns

Background information about the Black Death/Plague:

www.history.com/topics/black-death

Big History Project:

www.bighistoryproject.com

