Cultural Blending: Case Study: The Safavid Empire

**Key Terms and People**

Safavid  member of a Shi’a Muslim group that built an empire in Persia
Isma’il  Safavid warrior who seized most of what is now Iran
shah  Persian title meaning “king”
Shah Abbas  leader during the Safavid golden age
Esfahan  capital city of the Safavid Empire

**Before You Read**

In the last lesson, you read about the Ottomans.

In this lesson, you will learn about the development of another empire, the Safavid.

**As You Read**

Use a diagram to identify examples of cultural blending in the Safavid Empire.

**PATTERNS OF CULTURAL BLENDING**

*What is cultural blending?*

Throughout history, different peoples have lived together. Their cultures have influenced one another. Often these people have blended one culture with another. This can happen because of migration, trade, conquest, or religious freedom or conversion.

Cultural blending results in changes in society. Some results of cultural blending are changes in language, religion, styles of government, or arts and architecture.

Societies that are able to benefit from cultural blending are open to new ways. They are willing to adapt and change.

1. What are the four causes of cultural blending?

**THE SAFAVIDS BUILD AN EMPIRE**

*How did the Safavids rise to power?*

Cultural blending took place in the Safavid Empire of Persia. The Safavids were members of the Shi’a, a branch of Islam. The major group of Muslims, the Sunnis, persecuted the Shi’a for their views. The Safavids feared the Sunni Muslims. They decided to build a strong army to protect themselves.
In 1499, a 12-year-old leader named Isma'il led this army to conquer Iran. He took the traditional Persian title of shah, or king, and made Shi’a the religion of the new empire. He destroyed Baghdad’s Sunni population. Ottoman Turk rulers—who were Sunni Muslims—in turn killed all the Shi’a that they met. This conflict between the two groups of Muslims continues today. The border between the Ottoman Empire and the Persian Empire remains—it is the border between Iran and Iraq.

The Safavids reached their height in the late 1500s under Shah Abbas. He created two armies that were loyal to him and him alone. He also gave new weapons to the army to make them better fighters. He got rid of corrupt officials in the government.

He also brought gifted artists to his empire. He decorated Esfahan, the capital city, with art made by artisans from around the world. Many Chinese artists worked in Esfahan, bringing to the city a handful of art styles including calligraphy, glasswork, and pottery. The city was said to be the most beautiful in the world.

Under Shah Abbas, the Safavids enjoyed good relations with nations of Europe. The demand for Persian rugs increased greatly in Europe. In this period, rug making, which had been a local craft in Persia, became a major industry for the country. Shah Abbas also sent artists to Europe to study with Raphael. The cultural blending also produced rugs with European designs.

2. What made Esfahan special?

____________________________________________________________________

THE DYNASTY DECLINES QUICKLY

Why did the Safavids lose power?

Like the Ottoman Empire, the Safavid Empire began to decline soon after it had reached its greatest height. Shah Abbas killed or injured his most talented sons—just as Suleyman had done. Shah Abbas feared that his sons would seize power from him. As a result, a weak and ineffective grandson became shah after him.

3. Why did Shah Abbas hurt his sons?

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Lesson 5, continued

As you read this case study, take notes to answer the questions about patterns of cultural blending.

Interaction among peoples can create a blending of cultures.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. What activities cause cultural blending to occur?</th>
<th>2. What should cultures do to benefit from cultural blending?</th>
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The Safavids built a Shi’a empire.

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<tr>
<th>3. How did Isma’il help the Safavids rise to power?</th>
<th>4. How did Isma’il’s rule affect the Islam religion?</th>
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Shah Abbas helped create a Safavid culture.

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<th>5. How did Shah Abbas promote cultural blending in his empire?</th>
<th>6. What was probably the most important result of Western influence on the Safavid Empire?</th>
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