From 1966 to 1976, the communist country of China embarked on the Cultural Revolution led by Mao Zedong, which followed the failure of the Great Leap Forward (1958 to 1961). The Great Leap Forward was an experiment by Mao to increase China’s economic production. In this attempt to boost China’s economic position, China actually fell deeper into economic distress even resulting in widespread famine among the country. In the end this movement failed leaving the Chinese government with an economic and humanitarian disaster. Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping and Chen Yun, all leaders in the Chinese government, tried to help China recover after the disaster. At this time Mao withdrew from active decision making for the country and instead focused on intellectual thought.

Question 1: What was the Great Leap Forward?

Question 2: Following the Great Leap Forward Mao withdrew from active decision making, what modern day country has a leader that is withdraw from active decision making, but still acts as the leader of the country?

From 1959 to 1964, withdrawn from decision making, Mao saw China changing. He felt that revisionist (new) thought was destroying the communist party he had help build. Other theories conclude that during this time Mao concocted a plan on how to seek revenge against those who had said he had failed. Nevertheless, Mao saw his hard work and hopes fading away. For his plan he needed people who had not become corrupt with revisionist thought, so he looked to children to help rebuild his dream.

Question 3: Who did Mao look to in order to rebuild China?

The Cultural Revolution in China affected children of various ages and on different levels. Mao Zedong used children during the Cultural Revolution to meet his objectives for ongoing revolution. Children’s lives were impacted by this movement through the absence of schooling, partaking in violence, manual labor, dreadful living conditions and poor healthcare. The Cultural Revolution would be a period in the children of China’s lives which would inflict a lifetime of haunting memories, but despite these impacts, many would only recall pleasant memories of their leader Mao. Mao referred to the children of China as “the morning sunlight,” possibly because he felt that they were the ones who could help him bring about a new day in China. When the
Communist Party gained control in China, Mao weaved his intellectual thought into schools in order to produce communist comrades. By the time these children had reached adolescence, they were dedicated to protecting their leader. According to Jiang Ji Li in her primary school classroom there was a picture of Mao with his slogan for the children: “Study Hard and Advance Everyday.” It was mottos such as this that enlightened children and made them have favorable views of their leader, because he believed in them.

**Question 4: How did Mao influence the mindset of children?**

According to Li Cunxin in his primary school, all students had to have a copy of *Quotations from Chairman Mao* and they recited phrases such as “Long, long live Chairman Mao,” and “I love Chairman Mao,” daily. This affected children because through these exercises students were being trained to be loyal to their leader.

**Question 5: In America are there recited phrases that children perform in order to show pride to their country/leader?**

Sadly, by the end of 1966, all schools in China were forced to close. Mao insisted that the reason for the closure was that the schools were teaching revisionist (new) thought. It was in the schools that children had learned since 1949 to be loyal to communism and their leader Mao. With the closure of the schools this allowed the spread of communist revolution. Children were no longer expected to attend school, instead they were encouraged to focus on activities relating to revolution. Following the closure of the schools students were asked to attack their teachers through *dazibao*, which were big posters which criticized certain people. Liang Heng and his friends made posters criticizing their teachers. One teacher of Liang’s was accused of using capitalist teaching methods in the stories that she told before class. For this poster Liang drew, “…the math teacher with a bottle of perfume held to her armpit and a swarm of flies buzzing around her head. The caption read: “Why does it stink? It is the stink of Capitalism!”

Obviously, these students were not aware of the significance of their actions. Mostly the source of such criticism resulted from discipline the teachers had inflicted on the students for inappropriate behaviors. Liang Heng and his friends were given the chance to get revenge on their teachers, for the discipline the educators had given them. With the closure of the schools, the *dazibao* was the beginning of a child’s involvement in the Cultural Revolution.

**Question 6: What was a *dazibao*? Was the information in a *dazibao* legit?**

The children of China had been led to believe that it was their duty to protect Mao and soon would develop a group called the Red Guards, groups of boys and girls ages twelve to eighteen. Mao planned to use the Red Guards to, “topple the existing authority and to bring up a new leadership… Mao could not rely on the workers and peasants to be the mainstay of his latest revolution, but had to fall back on youngsters and teenagers.” The reason Mao could not rely on the workers and peasants was because he wanted to eliminate people from many different ranks of life. The Red Guards were to follow the map of the Cultural Revolution called Mao’s Sixteen Points.
The Red Guards duty was to destroy the four olds which included old thought, old customs, old culture and old habits. In Liang Fang’s work as a Red Guard she conducted search raids. In these raids Red Guards would invade people’s homes looking for anti-communist material such as western suits and books. Also they would look for anything related to the four olds. In other work she helped destroy old monuments. “We had to use knives and axes to dig out the inscriptions.” In this testament it is apparent that the Red Guards took their jobs seriously. The motivation for the Red Guards was not only for Mao, but also for themselves. “…in 1966, the tensions…anger…and bottled-up frustrations of the preceding years exploded into violence.” In the minds of the Red Guards, their duties were to defend Mao’s revolution while expressing frustrations of their own, in ways that upheld the revolution. The Red Guards had never known China to be anything but communist and by destroying traditional temples and monuments from China’s past was upholding revolution. They had never lived in China before 1949, so they were destroying a time which they had never experienced and did not understand.

Not only did the Red Guards destroy the four olds in China, but they also denounced people in public. People who were accused of anti-communist thought were taken to public meetings, spit upon, hit and even made to wear dunce hats.

Another interesting note is that the Red Guards were supplied with weapons; grenades, bayonets, machine guns, cannons and tanks.

**Question 7: What was the Red Guards job?**

When Mao called for unity in China in 1968, the Red Guards were disbanded. This resulted in a large number of children with no direction or purpose. As a result former Red Guards were sent to the countryside to live and work in communes. One reason Mao decided to send certain groups down to the countryside was because he felt that the Red Guards had gone too far. The Red Guards had terrorized China and eventually turned on each other. The Red Guards were known as the educated youth and it was their duty to go work in the countryside among the peasants to get an understanding of where communism came from and to also spread Maoist thought. Over a twelve year span, 17 million educated youth from the cities were sent to the countryside and forced to do manual labor. Many were sent to the countryside for a total of ten years. Their stays consisted of 12 hours of manual labor, seven days a week. It was in the countryside were many children experience a different realm of life.

The Cultural Revolution led by Mao Zedong came to an end with his death in 1976. The Cultural Revolution, which had started ten years earlier, occurred possibly because Mao saw China changing right before his eyes and he needed to rebuild the communist party or because Mao was seeking revenge against those who said he failed during the Great Leap Forward. The reason for the occurrence of the Cultural Revolution is still not entirely know, but nevertheless Mao saw his hard work and hopes fading away in China. In order to rebuild China, Mao looked to people who had not become corrupt with revisionist thought, so he looked to children to help rebuild his dream.