



1. In about 1787, Nandi a Langeni girl gave birth to an illegitimate child by Senzangakona, the Zulu chief. The union was regularized when Nandi was taken in by Senzangakhona as a junior wife with her baby Shaka. However mother and child were soon expelled by the chief and Shaka's childhood was spent among the Langeni (Nandi's father's people) and the Qwabe (her mother's people).
2. When Shaka was about 16 Nandi took him to Mthethwa relatives, where he worked as a herdboyc until at about the age of 22 he was conscripted into Dingiswayo's growing army. There he acquired a reputation as a brave warrior and a man of original military ideas and he rose to the command of his regiment.
3. When Shaka's father Senzangakona died in about 1816, he was succeeded by Sigujana his son. A plot was hatched at Dingiswayo's place to kill him. Ngwadi, a son of Nandi by a later marriage killed Sigujana and Shaka then went to the Zulu with an escort provided by Dingiswayo and took over the Zulu chieftanship without opposition.
4. Shaka applied the Mthethwa military system of age regiments to the Zulu with further innovations of his own.
 - He conscripted men under 40 years into 3 age regiments each with a distinctive headdress. Each regiment stayed in regimental barracks in a regimental village under the control of its officers and one of Shaka's aged female relatives.
 - Instead of assagais for hurling at the enemy from a distance, he armed each Zulu warrior with a short stabbing spear which was very effective.
 - Shaka forbade his warriors to marry except for the regiment of older men which formed a reserve. He subjected them to rigorous training and an iron discipline.
 - He aimed at destroying absolutely the capacity of an enemy to resist by eliminating the ruling family and even by massacring the women and children as well as the men.
5. So long as Dingiswayo survived Shaka professed to be his loyal subordinate but when he was killed by the Ndwandwe, Shaka killed Dingiswayo's heir and became the strongest ruler north of the Tugela. He expanded his Kingdom rapidly absorbing the Mthethwa confederacy and defeating the Ndwandwe amongst others. Ultimately Shaka was able to bring an army of perhaps 40,000 men into the field
6. Shaka had a small group of councillors who he consulted freely but he made every important decision. He was the senior executive the ultimate court of appeal. The traditions of the Zulu royal lineage became the traditions of the nation and the Zulu dialect became the language of the nation and every inhabitant whatever his origins became a Zulu owing allegiance to Shaka. Thus an area previously occupied by many autonomous chiefdoms became transformed into a single kingdom under Shaka.
7. Fear too was an important nation building factor, Executioners were always at hand to kill people Shaka suspected of disloyalty or cowardice.
8. The rise of the Zulu kingdom had repercussions from the Cape Colonial frontier to Lake Tanganyika. Every community throughout approximately a fifth of the African continent was profoundly affected and many were utterly disrupted. Refugees came pouring south from Shaka's country disrupting the communities they came in contact with. By 1824 most of the country between the Tugela and the Mzimkulu, the Drakensberg and the sea was devastated.

9. Shaka treated the white traders in Natal with friendly curiosity but he made it known that they were his white people and he made them help him in some of his campaigns. (1826 campaigns against the Ndwandwe and the Kumalo) The white traders included Henry Francis Fynn, Francis Farewell, James King and Nathaniel Isaacs. Shaka never ceased to be interested in talking with them. He valued their medical skills and was fascinated by their muskets. _____
10. From the beginning of his reign Shaka was a capricious ruler whose whims were tolerated because of the strength and loyalty of the army and the sheer success of his military adventures but success went to his head and by 1824 he was killing his subjects on the flimsiest pretexts. His decline in popularity reached its final phase after the death of his mother Nandi in 1827 when thousands were butchered for not showing sufficient grief.
11. In 1828 a plot was hatched by members of his own family. Mkabayi, his aunt seems to have been at the centre of the conspiracy. She had long been alienated from Shaka and she believed that he had killed Nandi. She enlisted the co-operation of Shaka's half-brothers, Dingane and Mhlangana, and his principal servant Mbopha. Whilst the army was away on the Shoshangane expedition, Dingane and Mhlangana slipped away from the army and returned home, and they with Mbopha slew Shaka outside his cattle kraal in broad daylight on 24 September 1828. By a ruse Dingane had Mhlangana killed and he took control of the kingdom. _____

Reference Oxford History of South Africa - Volume I pages 342-350
Edited by Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson.