

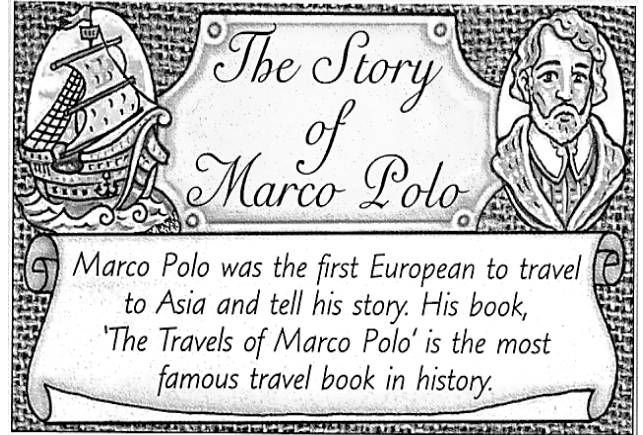
Name: _____

Marco Polo

Marco Polo and the Silk Road

Marco Polo was the first European to travel all the way to Asia and tell his story. His book "The Travels of Marco Polo" is the most famous travel book in history.

Marco Polo was born in 1254 in Venice, Italy. Venice was a wealthy trading city and Marco's father was a merchant.



When he was 17, Marco traveled with his father and uncle to China—a journey of 6000 miles along the Silk Road.

Not many people traveled the entire route. Trading was mostly between cities or small sections of the route and products would slowly make their way from one end to the other, changing hands several times along the way.

Marco's father and uncle wanted to try something different. They wanted to travel all the way to China themselves and bring the goods directly back to Venice. They thought they could make their fortune this way.

The trip to China took 3 years. The Emperor Kublai Khan was surprised to hear that there were European traders in China. He invited them to his palace and he gave Marco a job.



Marco worked for the Emperor for many years. He traveled all over China and he made many amazing discoveries. In Europe people didn't have many of the wonderful things that he saw.

In Europe, the money was gold and silver coins. In China, people used paper money. It was much easier to use. The Chinese also burned black stones, not wood, for their fires. These black stones—or coal—came from under the ground.

Marco also saw people with small glass circles in front of their eyes. These 'glasses' helped people to see better. What a good idea!



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Marco Polo



And Chinese food was also different from Italian food. Some of it was very strange, but Marco Polo especially loved two foods. One was ice cream and the other was spaghetti.



In 1292, the Polos decided to go back to Italy. Marco took with him many of his Chinese discoveries.

The Polos arrived back in Venice in 1295. Marco was 41 and his father and uncle were old men. Their friends didn't recognize them. They had been away for 24 years.

Marco told fantastic stories about China and his discoveries. No one believed him. They called him 'the man of a million lies.'

So, Marco invited everyone to a big dinner party. At the party, the Polos wore their old traveling clothes, and the guests feasted on Chinese spaghetti and ice cream.

After dinner, Marco took a knife and cut open his clothes. Gold and jewels from China fell onto the floor. After this, the people of Venice believed Marco's stories.



A few years after Marco returned home, Venice fought a war with the city of Genoa. Marco was captured and sent to prison. In prison he told stories of his journey and his discoveries to a friend. The friend wrote them all down in the book called *The Travels of Marco Polo*.

Two hundred years later, a man called Christopher Columbus read Marco Polo's book. He decided to sail west across the ocean in hopes of reaching China. He thought that his would be quicker and easier way to reach China than traveling along the Silk Road. Columbus never did find China ... but that's another story for another day!