

- Have students develop a geographic travel line of the Polo family adventure from their home in Venice to the court of the Khan in China. Ask students to include illustrations of key places visited by the Polos during their journey.
- Have students research the history of the Mongol rulers and their vast empire. Compare Kublai with other Mongol Khans, such as Genghis or Ogadai. Were the Mongols all like Kublai Khan in how he ruled over China? Encourage students to create a Venn diagram comparing Kublai and another Khan from Mongol history.
- Develop a class chart or poster that highlights some of the critical Chinese contributions to European society that came as a result of renewed trade and commerce with the Chinese during the time of Marco Polo and beyond.
- Hold a mock trial in your classroom in order to debate the issue of the accuracy of Marco Polo's claims. Divide your students into groups; half of the class should generate a defense for Polo, and the other is responsible for his prosecution. Representatives for each group can then debate the issue.
- Marco Polo reported about many strange and wonderful discoveries that he made on his travels, including silkworms, gunpowder and porcelain. Encourage students to write a journal entry, imagining that they are Europeans experiencing one of these novelties for the first time.
- Share Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "Kublai Khan" with your students. (See rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poem/524.html for a copy.) Ask students to compare the representation of the Khan in the poem with that in the program. How are these representations similar and different?

Suggested Internet Resources

Periodically, Internet Resources are updated on our web site at www.LibraryVideo.com

- www.silk-road.com/artl/marcopolo.shtml

This Web site features information about Marco Polo, including excerpts from *The Travels*, details about Polo's expeditions and his service to the Khan.

- afe.easia.columbia.edu/mongols/index.html

"The Mongols in World History" is a site that contains information about Kublai Khan and the influence of the Mongols in China, in addition to details about Marco Polo and his exploration of the East.

- www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/polo-kinsay.html

This site provides an excerpt from *The Travels of Marco Polo*, in which Polo describes a city that he encountered while exploring China for Kublai Khan.

Suggested Print Resources

- Gilchrist, Cherry. *Stories from the Silk Road*. Barefoot Books, Cambridge, MA; 2005. This collection gathers folktales from the cultures along the Silk Road, which is a merchants' trade route that Marco Polo actually traveled on his journey to China.
- Polo, Marco, Rule, Henry and Cordier, Henri (translators). *The Travels of Marco Polo: The Complete Yule-Cordier Edition*. Dover Publications, New York, NY; 1993.
- Worth, Richard. *Great Empire of China and Marco Polo in World History*. Enslow Publishers, Berkeley Heights, NJ; 2003.

TEACHER'S GUIDE CONSULTANT

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MARCO POLO

Grades 5–8

This guide is a supplement designed for teachers to use when presenting programs in the video series *Explorers of the World*.

Before Viewing: Give students an introduction to the program by relaying aspects of the historical overview to them. Select pre-viewing discussion questions and vocabulary to provide a focus for students when they view the program.

After Viewing: Review the program and vocabulary, and use the follow-up questions and activities to inspire continued discussion. Encourage students to research the topic further with the Internet and print resources provided.



Historical Overview

During the 13th century, Europe began to awaken from a long period of relative cultural isolation. Prompted by renewed military, commercial and cultural ties with the people of the Middle East, North Africa and Asia, many Europeans traveled over much of the known world in search of wonders. One individual who survived the often perilous and always exciting adventures associated with travel to far away places in search of new ideas, wealth and trade was an Italian by the name of Marco Polo.

Marco Polo was exposed to the adventures of traveling by his father and uncle, who were merchants who journeyed extensively and developed a relationship with Kublai Khan, the ruler of China. Polo's relationship with the Khan enabled him to travel widely in China, collecting information about the land and the people of this empire.

Marco Polo was not the only European visiting Asia, India and the Middle East during this time, but he was the one who developed a fascinating tale of his time away from Europe that became a widely read and highly influential document. His book fired the imaginations of countless other Europeans, including Christopher Columbus and Vasco da Gama, who sought to explore such fabulous places for themselves.

Time Line

1211-1215 — The Mongols conquer China.

c.1254 — Marco Polo is born in Venice.

1260 — Kublai becomes the Khan of China.

1260-1269 — Marco Polo's father, Niccolò, and his uncle, Maffeo, make their first trip to China. This initial trip establishes the foundation for Marco Polo's later trip.

1271 — Marco Polo sets out for China with his father and uncle.

c.1274 — The Polo family arrives in China.

1294 — Kublai Khan dies in China.

1295 — Marco Polo returns to Europe.

1298 — While in prison, Polo dictates his memoirs to fellow prisoner Rustichello. These writings become the famous book that makes Marco Polo a significant influence on future exploration.

1324 — Marco Polo dies.

Vocabulary

Zanzibar — Island off the coast of East Africa.

griffin — A mythical bird with the front of an eagle and the rear of a lion.

exploration — The process of investigating in search of a goal, such as wealth, information or colonization.

merchant — A person who buys, sells or trades goods for profit. Marco Polo, his father and uncle were merchants.

Cathay — The name by which the northern part of China was known in Europe during Columbus' time. *(Continued)*

Khan — The Mongol title for supreme ruler.

Mongols — A group of people from Central Asia who conquered China and created a vast empire by the 13th century.

Chengdu — The Mongol capital city of China that was the site of the court and the summer palace for the Khan.

dynasty — A succession of rulers from the same family or group.

ambassador — An official representative.

Rustichello — The prisoner befriended by Marco Polo in prison after Polo was captured in the war between Genoa and Venice. Marco Polo told his tales to this man, who recorded the story, added a bit of his own fantasy and published *The Travels of Marco Polo*.

Chinese character writing — Chinese do not generally use symbols (characters) that stand for sounds (letters) in writing. Instead they use pictographs or characters that represent whole ideas.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Explore a map of Europe and Asia with your students. Identify the starting and ending points of Marco Polo's journey to China. Encourage students to plot the route they would choose if they were embarking on this adventurous trip. Help students to recognize the pros and cons of each of their chosen routes. After viewing the show, revisit students' travel plans and compare them with Polo's actual route.
- Marco Polo was successful in his travels and his work for the Khan in China. In part, this success was due to his ability to learn and speak foreign languages. Discuss with students why learning foreign languages was important in Marco Polo's time and why it is even more so today.
- During the 12th and 13th centuries, Europe began to experience increased contact with diverse lands and people through military and trading activities. Prior to this time, Europe had experienced a long period of cultural isolation. Discuss this concept with students. What are the benefits and drawbacks of being culturally isolated from other societies? Brainstorm with students how Marco Polo's adventures and the written account of his experiences might have helped to bring Europe back into the mainstream of cultural interactions.

Focus Questions

1. Why did Marco Polo's father and uncle return to Italy before once again departing for Kublai Khan's court?
2. With whom did Marco Polo travel to China? Describe some of the key events that took place during his trip from Italy to China.
3. Who were the Mongols and how did they come to rule over China?
4. Why did the Khan welcome so many foreigners to his court in China?
5. How did Marco Polo serve the Khan while in China? Why did the Khan use Marco Polo in this service and not a person from China?

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6. Who were some of the other explorers of Marco Polo's time?
7. Why did Marco Polo decide to leave China when he did? What was the specific event that permitted Polo to take his leave of the great Khan?
8. On the return trip from China to Europe, what happened to the Polo family?
9. Why was Marco Polo imprisoned?
10. How did Europeans learn of Marco Polo's adventures?
11. What specific inventions and novelties did Marco Polo note while he was in China that made such an impression on Europeans?
12. What effect did Marco Polo have on the history of Europe?

Follow-up Discussion

- Discuss the reign of the Great Khan with your students. What made his reign "great"? Speculate about which groups believed the Khan was a great ruler. Did the Chinese? The Mongols? The Europeans? Encourage your students to support their speculations with evidence from the program.
- Brainstorm with your class how a foreigner like Marco Polo would be treated if he came to the United States today. Would the President greet him in the White House? Would he become an ambassador for the United States? How would he view the many technical and cultural advances that the United States and Western society presently enjoys? Would the description of such inventions and items sound fanciful back in the visitor's home country, much as Marco Polo's claims were seen in Europe during the 13th century?
- The Khan, a ruler who was tolerant of many religions, requested that the Pope send 100 wise men to China to teach about Christianity. Discuss with the class how the future might have been different had these priests and scholars actually come to China. Is it possible that China might have converted to Christianity in the 13th century? Help your students speculate what effects that event might have had on the development of the world to the modern era.
- Some historians charge that Marco Polo did not actually visit China, and that he only reached the eastern edge of the Black Sea. These historians believe that Polo told exaggerated fantasies based upon some unreliable tales he heard from people who had actually traveled to China. Discuss with your students the likelihood that Polo's claims were fabricated. What might Polo have gained or lost by embellishing his tales?

Follow-up Activities

- Share excerpts from *The Travels of Marco Polo* with your students. In groups, have students develop two lists based upon the claims of Marco Polo presented in his book. The first list should contain what the students believe are truthful claims that Polo made and the second list can contain those claims the students believe are fanciful. Have spokespersons for each group explain their lists and compare these lists across the class as a whole. *(Continued)*