

Name _____



Marco Polo

By Sharon Fabian

Marco Polo grew up in the Middle Ages in Venice. At the time, most people in Europe didn't know much about the rest of the world. Travel was much slower than it is today, and very few people traveled to other continents. The printing press had not yet been invented, so there were not many books available to read about far away places. However, Marco Polo grew up knowing more about other parts of the world than most young men. Venice was a large trading center on the Mediterranean, and his family was in the business of trading with other countries. Both his father and his uncle were merchants who had traveled far.



Marco's father and his uncle had already traveled far into the continent of Asia, and they had gotten to know the great Asian leader of the time, Kublai Khan. He was the emperor of the Mongol Empire, which included what is now China. When Kublai Khan invited them back to continue their trading business, Marco Polo was allowed to go along. He was 17 years old at the time. The Polo's traveled from Europe through Asia to China along the Silk Road. This was the road that merchants had been using for some time to trade with the Far East. They called it the Silk Road, because silk was one of the favorite products to buy while in China. So Marco was not setting out to discover a new land, but he was taking a trip that only a few people of his time ever had the chance to take. Marco Polo, his father, and his uncle continued on their journey until they had traveled farther into China than any of the other merchants.

Why did Marco Polo become famous, and not the other merchants who had traveled before him? Marco Polo became famous because he did something that almost every middle schooler does today. He wrote in a journal.

Marco Polo kept a journal about all of the interesting things he saw and heard in China. He wrote about things that people in Europe had never heard of before, including paper money and coal. He wrote

about China's communication system, which used foot runners and horseback riders to deliver messages quickly. He wrote that they even had a type of Special Delivery in which a fresh horse would be waiting at each stop along the way. He also wrote down stories that people had told him, including one about a huge bird that could carry elephants while it flew. A few of these stories turned out to be just fiction, but most of what he wrote was later found to be true.

Marco Polo had some help writing his book in a strange place -- jail. After he returned from China, he became a soldier and fought for his home city-state of Venice against a neighboring city-state, Genoa. He was captured and put in jail. In jail, he met the writer Rustichello. Marco Polo dictated stories from his journal, and Rustichello turned them into a book. In English the book is called *The Travels of Marco Polo*. His book became a big hit. People all over Europe wanted to hear what he had to say about the far away lands of China. Here is a little of what he wrote.

He described Kublai Khan's palace. He said that its walls were covered with gold and silver, and pictures of dragons, birds, and horsemen. He described the dining hall of the palace as being so big that 6,000 people could sit down to dinner at the same time.

He described the city of Kinsai, which meant "City of Heaven" as the "finest and most splendid city in the world." He reported that this city had shops offering every type of practical craft, and selling every kind of luxury. Some of the luxuries he listed were gems, pearls, and spices.

He described the desert as so big that it would take a year to travel from one end to the other.

Someone once asked Marco Polo if his stories were really true, or if they were exaggerated. Marco Polo is supposed to have replied that he hadn't told even half of what he had seen.

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Questions

- _____ 1. Marco Polo traveled to China with _____.
- A. Kublai Khan
 - B. his father and his uncle
 - C. the Army of Venice
 - D. his two uncles
- _____ 2. Marco Polo traveled to China by way of the _____.
- A. Red Sea
 - B. Great Wall
 - C. Atlantic Ocean
 - D. Silk Road
- _____ 3. Marco Polo grew up in a city know for _____.
- A. warfare
 - B. factories
 - C. trading
 - D. farming
- _____ 4. Marco Polo became famous because he _____ and _____.
- A. wrote, sang
 - B. traveled, wrote
 - C. fought, won
 - D. traveled, fought
- _____ 5. Kublai Khan was _____.
- A. the leader of the Mongol Empire
 - B. Marco Polo's uncle
 - C. the mayor of Venice
 - D. the leader of Marco Polo's expedition
- _____ 6. According to Marco Polo, the desert that he saw was very _____.
- A. hot
 - B. dry
 - C. sandy
 - D. large
- _____ 7. Marco Polo was the first European to discover China.
- A. true
 - B. false
- _____ 8. The Travels of Marco Polo is the Italian name of Marco Polo's book.
- A. false
 - B. true