



Day 6 Age of Exploration Unit
49-79 Minutes

Marco Polo and the Silk Road

(Adaptable for Grades 3–9)

TITLE:

Marco Polo and the Silk Road: Exploration, Trade, and Cultural Exchange

OBJECTIVE:

Students will learn about Marco Polo's journey from Venice to China, understand the importance of the Silk Road, examine cultural exchange between Europe and Asia, and evaluate Marco Polo's writings through interactive activities and maps.

GRADE LEVEL:

Adaptable for Grades 3–9
(Differentiation embedded throughout)

MATERIALS: (All From learnaboutamerica.com)

- Marco Polo text
- Interactive Silk Road map
- Silk Road Scavenger Hunt activity
- Articles on *Il Milione* (The Travels of Marco Polo)
- Optional Marco Polo presentation

- Printable or digital comprehension activities (Lexile 800 & 1000)

1. INTRODUCTION (5 minutes)

Teacher Says:

“Today we’re learning about Marco Polo, a merchant from Venice whose journey across Asia changed the way Europeans saw the world.”

Define briefly:

- Silk Road
- Merchant
- Kublai Khan
- Caravan
- *Il Milione* (Marco’s written account)

Ask:

“What challenges do you think travelers faced when crossing thousands of miles of land and sea in the 1200s?”

2. ARTICLE READING (10 minutes) or PRESENTATION (20 minutes)

Article -

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/battles/marco-polo>

Presentation -

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/explorers/plans/polo.pptx>

Note -

Older students can also read the differentiated articles below:

The Travels of Marco Polo: Accurate or Embellished?

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/battles/the-travels-of-marco-polo>

The History of the Silk Road

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/legends-myths-and-dictions/the-history-of-the-silk-road>

Quick Check:

"Why did Marco Polo's stories impress Europeans when he returned home?"

Expected answers:

- Described paper money, porcelain, riches
- China's large cities and inventions were new to Europeans
- Inspired future explorers like Columbus

3. INTERACTIVE SILK ROAD MAP + SCAVENGER HUNT (20 minutes)

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/battles/marco-polo>

Scroll down to access the map. Have students complete the scavenger hunt on the map. This involves them clicking on and reading about the various points along the map. This map helps to pair history with geography.

Follow up by asking students about some of the countries along the Silk Road.

Grades 3–5:

- Locate major cities and basic path
- Identify deserts and mountains with help
- Answer simple scavenger questions

Grades 6–9:

- Analyze trade patterns
- Explain why certain routes were dangerous
- Evaluate why the Silk Road helped spread ideas, goods, and diseases

Discussion:

"How did geography shape Marco Polo's route?"

"What dangers might caravans have faced crossing deserts and mountains?"

5. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (5-10 minutes)

(Use whole class or break into pairs)

1. Why was Marco Polo's journey important for Europe?
2. What made his stories about Asia so interesting to people in Europe?
3. How do you think Marco Polo felt traveling so far from home at such a young age?
4. What would *you* want to ask Marco Polo if you could meet him?
5. Why did his stories inspire future explorers?

LITERACY ACTIVITIES (20 - 30 min.)

LearnAboutAmerica provides a variety of different literacy activities related to Marco Polo and the Age of Exploration. Use your discretion to choose the most appropriate option for your students.

Marco Polo and the Silk Road Reading Comprehension - Lexile 800 (Printable) (Passage & 8 MC Questions)
<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/explorer-activities/marco-polo-and-the-silk-road-printable-reading-comprehension>

Marco Polo and the Silk Road Reading Comprehension - Lexile 800 (Online) (Passage & 8 MC Questions)
<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/explorer-activities/marco-polo-online-reading-comprehension>

Marco Polo Fact or Fiction - Lexile 1000 (Printable) (507 Words) Determine if each statement is fact or fiction.
<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/explorer-activities/marco-polo-and-the-silk-road-printable-fact-or-fiction>

Marco Polo Fact or Fiction - Lexile 1000 (Online) (507 Words) Determine if each statement is fact or fiction.
<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/explorer-activities/marco-polo-and-the-silk-road-online-fact-or-fiction>

Marco Polo - Virtual History Teacher - This fun activity requires students to role play as a history teacher grading a student's history test that reflects a poor effort. "Teachers" must grade the test and then elaborate on student answers to make them complete answers.
<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/explorers-writing-activities/marco-polo-virtual-history-teacher>

Marco Polo Topic Sentence and Supporting Details Exercise
<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/explorer-activities/marco-polo-topic-sentences-and-supporting-details>

Marco Polo the Pool Game (LOL) Online or Printable Reading Comprehension Lexile 800 or 1050

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/explorer-activities/marco-polo-the-pool-game-online-or-printable-reading-comprehension>

Marco Polo Correct-me Passage - This fun activity requires students to identify and correct the factual errors in a short paragraph about Marco Polo. Click the factual error and then select the correct fact. The program gives immediate feedback.

<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/explorers-and-the-age-of-exploration/explorers-games-and-fun-stuff/marco-polo-correct-me-passage>

CLOSING (2 minutes)

Teacher reviews:

- Marco Polo's journey connected Europe and Asia
- The Silk Road was a network of trade, cultures, and ideas
- Marco's writings inspired explorers and changed European understanding of the world
- Students learned geography, culture, trade, and exploration through interactive mapping and primary-source-style analysis