

## American History Lesson 2

*Read the story of Marco Polo. Answer the lesson 2 questions. Discuss them with your teacher/class.*

Imagine living in Venice, Italy, about 800 years ago. People back then had some pretty wild ideas:

- They thought the Sun moved around the Earth (spoiler: it doesn't!)
- They thought the Earth was small and mostly land (nope, mostly water!)



Now, enter Marco Polo. He was born in 1254, probably in Venice. Venice was like the cool kid of cities back then because:

- It was a major trading hub
- Ships from all over came to its port
- Traders would leave Venice to get stuff from faraway places like Russia and China

Here's where it gets interesting. When Marco was born, his dad Niccolo and two uncles were on this epic trading journey. They weren't just hanging out nearby - these guys went all the way to China! They even met the super powerful ruler Kublai Khan.

Now, imagine this: Marco's dad and uncles come back after being gone for 16 whole years. Marco's dad finds out his wife died, and - surprise! - he has a 15-year-old son he never knew about. Talk about family drama!

This is just the beginning of Marco's wild adventures. Want to know what happened next?

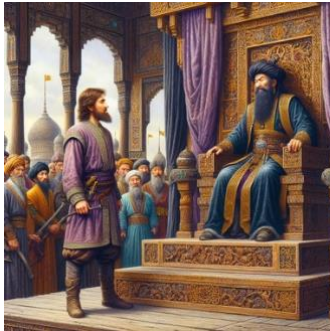
Two years after Marco's dad came back, something super exciting happened. In 1271, when Marco was 17, his dad Niccolo and uncle Maffeo decided to go on another big trip. But this time, they took Marco with them!

Their mission? To go straight to Kublai Khan's place in China. They had some important stuff to deliver:

## American History Lesson 2

- Some documents from the pope (the big boss of the Catholic Church)
- Holy oil from Jerusalem (which was super special back then)

Now, get this - Kublai Khan gave them a gold passport. It was like a super VIP pass that let them use special places to stay and ride horses along the way. Pretty cool, right? But even with this awesome passport, the trip was no joke. It took them three and a half years to get there! Can you imagine being on a trip for that long?



Finally, in 1275, they made it to Kublai Khan's summer palace. And here's the wild part - Marco's dad basically said to the emperor, "Hey, here's my son. Can he work for you?" Talk about a unique job interview!

What do you think happened next? Did Kublai Khan give Marco a job? And what kind of job do you think it might have been?

Okay, let's dive into what happened after Marco met Kublai Khan!  
So, Marco turned out to be a pretty awesome dude. Check this out:

- He learned a bunch of languages on his trip, including Mongolian (but not Chinese, which is kinda funny)
- He could write in four different alphabets. That's like being able to write in English, Russian, Arabic, and Japanese all at once!

Now, Kublai Khan had just finished taking over all of China. But here's the thing - some parts of China weren't too happy about having Mongol bosses. So, Kublai Khan needed some non-Mongol people to help run things.

This is where Marco came in handy. He got all sorts of cool jobs:

- He was like a diplomat (talking to important people)
- He helped run things in different areas

Marco worked from a place called Dadu, which Kublai Khan built right next to his capital, Khanbaliq. Both these places are now part of Beijing, the capital of China today!

## American History Lesson 2

Here's the crazy part - Marco and his family stayed in China for over 16 years! That may be longer than you've been alive! When they finally wanted to go home to Venice, Kublai Khan didn't want to let them leave. They were just too useful! But eventually, he agreed on one condition:

- The Polos had to take a Mongolian princess named Cogatin to Persia (which is now Iran) to marry another khan.

So, that's how Marco and his family finally started their journey back home. Can you imagine being away from home for that long? What do you think Venice looked like when they got back?

So Let's quickly break down Marco Polo's amazing journey back home and what happened after:  
The Trip Home:

- This time, they sailed in Chinese ships
- They had some tough times but got the princess to her new home
- But then, Kublai Khan died in 1294
- This meant local rulers started demanding money from traders again
- The Polos had to give away 4,000 coins - that's a lot of cash!

Back in Venice:

- They finally got home in 1295 after being gone for 24 years!
- People thought they were dead!
- They showed up wearing Mongolian clothes and could barely speak Italian
- But they had a secret - gems hidden in their clothes! (Talk about a cool hiding spot!)

Marco's Next Adventure:

- Venice went to war with Genoa (another Italian city)
- Marco bought his own war ship (because that's what rich guys did back then)
- But he got caught and ended up in prison in Genoa

## American History Lesson 2



### The Book:

- In prison, Marco met a guy named Rusticello who knew how to write stories
- Marco told his wild tales, and Rusticello wrote them down
- This became the book that taught Europeans about China for hundreds of years!

### After Prison:

- Marco got out of jail in 1299 and went back to Venice
- He got married to Donata Badoer and had three daughters
- He became a businessman and worked from home (kinda like some people do today!)
- He died in 1324 when he was almost 70 years old

Can you imagine living such an exciting life? What part of Marco's story do you think is the coolest? You know, it's pretty wild when you think about it. Marco Polo might've just been another forgotten traveler if it wasn't for his book, "The Travels of Marco Polo." This thing took off like wildfire!

But here's the kicker - they didn't have printing presses back then. Can you imagine? Each copy had to be handwritten. Talk about a slow process! We're talking about 200 years before printing hit Europe. Crazy, right?

At first, it was just the smart crowd reading it - you know, scholars, monks, the fancy nobles. But then it started getting translated into all these languages - Venetian, German, English, you name it. It took over a century for the average Joe in Europe to even hear about it.

Now, this book? It stirred up more drama than the Kardashians. People couldn't decide if Marco wrote it or if it was this guy Rusticello he met in prison. Sometimes it's "I did this," other times it's "He did that." Talk about an identity crisis!

## American History Lesson 2

And the stuff in the book? To Europeans who'd never left their hometown, it sounded like pure fantasy. They were like, "Yeah, right, Marco. Pull the other one!" But here's the thing - historians have checked it out, and a lot of what he said about the Mongol empire? Spot on!

Marco turned out to be quite the storyteller. He was all excited about Mongolian customs, going on about paper money and using coal for heat. To him, this was mind-blowing stuff. Little did he know, the Chinese had been doing this for ages! But even Marco missed a few things. Like, he totally overlooked the printed books in Hangzhou. They were using movable type there, while Europe was still centuries away from that tech. Gutenberg didn't come along with his printing press until the 1400s!

Oh, and get this - when Columbus set sail in 1492, trying to find a route to China, guess what he packed? A copy of Marco's book, all marked up with notes. He thought it'd be his guidebook to the East. Talk about influential! Isn't it fascinating how one book can have such a huge impact? It really makes you wonder what other amazing stories might be out there, just waiting to be discovered.

### *Answer the Questions*

1. Two books shaped the modern western world, The Travels of Marco Polo and the Bible. Can you think of any things or events that determined the direction history took?
2. Why didn't America develop into a nation with a Viking culture?
3. What are the dangers of applying your own interpretation to historical events?
4. What prompted the family of Viking, Leif Erikson to leave their homeland?
5. What was the first event that stirred the Europeans' appetite for Asian goods?