

1: Introduction to the 'Age of Discovery'

Today's world is a very **small place**, and we know a lot about it and it's people. However, this was not always the case. There was a time in history, when we only knew of the **European continent** and very little beyond that.

This **lack of knowledge** was to change with the **Age of Discovery**. This **Age of Discovery** began in **1400**, and it was to take us around the world, discovering new and exciting places.

Back in **1400**, travel was very **difficult** and **dangerous**. Most people could not read or write. There were **few maps** available to travellers and **technology** was not very advanced. All these factors added to the difficulty of travelling, and as a result people really only had knowledge of their **own immediate area**.

However, some people did still manage to explore despite these obstacles!

The **Vikings** went out to **America** and briefly lived there, and some **merchants** from **Venice** had managed to travel to **China** prior to 1400.

Marco Polo, was a famous merchant and explorer from **Venice**. In **1271**, he set out exploring the **Chinese Empire** with his father and uncle. The Polos discovered many wonderful things on their travels.

Whilst in **Beijing**, Marco Polo noticed many things he had never seen before. For example the Chinese used **printed paper notes** as money. Marco Polo had always used coins before this. Marco Polo was also in **Beijing**, Marco Polo noticed many things he had never seen before. For example the Chinese used **printed paper notes** as money. Marco Polo had always used coins before this. Marco Polo was also impressed with the speed of the



Chinese postal service. It was run in a way he had not seen in Europe.

Whilst on their way back home, the Polos followed an ancient trading route where rich **jewels, spices and silks** could be found.

In **1298**, whilst a prisoner of war in Genoa, Marco Polo recited his tales to a fellow prisoner called **Rusticello**. Rusticello was a **writer**, and turned Polo's stories into a book called **The Travels of Marco Polo**. This book described **travel, trade, people and places** in the **east** during the middle ages. It was something of a **best seller**. People who read it learnt a great deal about land in the east.

Marco Polo's book was to catch the imagination of many other travellers and explorers. **Christopher Columbus** was one such explorer who read the book and took careful notes on it. He dreamt of the day he might find his way to the east.

Task 1:

1. Copy the title '**The World as Known to Europe in 1400**'
2. Collect a map from your teacher.
3. Stick this map into your jotter and shade in the area known to Europe by 1400.

Task 2: Answer the following questions in full sentences.

1. What is the name we give to the period in history when much exploration was taking place?
2. Give three reasons why few people travelled or explored before 1400.
3. In what way did Marco Polo have a positive effect on exploration?