

WORLD TRAVELERS

Purpose

Marco Polo was a famous fourteenth-century explorer. Use your critical-thinking skills to figure out what he was describing in each passage from *The Travels of Marco Polo*.

Process

1. Read each primary source passage and answer the questions in the tables that follow each passage.

Passage 1: “It is a fact that all over the country of Cathay there is a kind of black stone existing in beds in the mountains, which they dig out and burn like firewood. If you supply the fire with them at night, and see that they are well kindled, you will find them still alight in the morning; and they make such capital fuel that no other is used throughout the country. It is true that they have plenty of wood also, but they do not burn it, because those stones burn better and cost less.”

Question	Response	What clues or evidence from the text informed your decision?
What are the “stones” Polo is describing?		

Passage 2: “When these sheets have been prepared they are cut up into pieces of different sizes All these pieces of paper are issued with as much ... authority as if they were of pure gold or silver; and on every piece a variety of officials, whose duty it is, have to write their names, and to put their seals. ... And nobody, however important he may think himself, dares to refuse them on pain of death. And indeed everybody takes them readily, for

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wheresoever a person may go throughout the Great Khan's dominions he shall find these pieces of paper current, and shall be able to transact all sales and purchases of goods by means of them ..."

Question	Response	What clues or evidence from the text informed your decision?
What are the "sheets" Polo is describing?		

Passage 3: "Now you must know that from this city of Cambaluc proceed many roads and highways [and] every twenty-five miles of the journey [there is] a station which they call Yamb, or, as we should say, the 'Horse-Post-House.' And at each of those stations, there is a large ... building ... in which they find all the rooms furnished with fine beds At some of these stations ... there shall be posted some four hundred horses standing ready Even [if] a roadless tract where neither house nor hostel exists, still there the station-houses have been established just the same They are provided with horses and all other necessities just like those we have described, so that the Emperor's messengers, come they from what region they may, find everything ready for them And in this way the Emperor, who has an immense number of these runners, receives dispatches with new from places ten days' journey off in one day and night"

Question	Response	What clues or evidence from the text informed your decision?
What kind of system is Polo describing?		

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Passage 4: “There are wild elephants in the country, and numerous unicorns, which are very nearly as big. They have hair like that of a buffalo, feet like those of an elephant, and a horn in the middle of the forehead, which is black and very thick. They do no mischief, however, with the horn, but with the tongue alone; for this is covered all over with long and strong prickles and when savage with anyone they crush him under their knees and then rasp him with their tongue. The head resembles that of a wild boar, and they carry it ever bent towards the ground. They delight much to abide in mire and mud.”

Question	Response	What clues or evidence from the text informed your decision?
What animals are the “unicorns” that Polo is describing?		

2. After completing the tables, answer these questions.

- How do you think Marco Polo perceived the Chinese during his travels?

- How do you think the publication of *The Travels of Marco Polo* aided trade between Europe and China?