Chapter summary

*Chapter 1 (The most famous traveller of all)* explains that Marco Polo was the most important traveller of his time. He came from a family of rich merchants in Venice and he journeyed to China on the Silk Road with his father and uncle. He lived in China for many years but finally returned to his home city. He later wrote a book called The Description of the World which introduced Europeans to new things such as gunpowder and paper money, and gave a wonderful picture of the great Mongol ruler Kublai Khan.

*Chapter 2 (Early years in Venice)* looks at Marco's childhood. He was born in the busy merchant city of Venice around 1254. But at this time his father, Niccolo, and his uncle, Maffeo, were away on a long trade trip. People believe that Marco's mother died when he was a baby and that he was brought up by other family members.

*Chapter 3 (Niccolo and Maffeo Polo)* describes how Niccolo and Maffeo Polo went on a long journey, leaving Venice in 1253 and returning in 1269 when Marco was about sixteen. At first, they traded in Constantinople for six years, but then travelled east on the Silk Road. They eventually journeyed to China and met the great Kublai Khan in Khanbaliq (Beijing). He was very interested to learn more about religious life in Europe and asked them to return with a hundred Christian priests and holy oil from Jerusalem.

*Chapter 4 (The Mongol Empire)* explains that the Polos were some of the first Europeans to meet the great Mongol rulers of the age. At this time, the Mongol empire was at its height and the Mongols ruled more than 100 million people.

*Chapter 5 (The Silk Road)* examines the long trade route between China and Europe which first began in the second century BC. The Silk Road was a series of roads with places to stay along the route – these were called caravanserais.

*Chapter 6 (Marco leaves Venice)* looks at how Marco left Venice in 1271 to go to China with his father and uncle. At first, they went to the city of Acre to meet Theobaldo of Piacenza who later became Pope Gregory X. He helped them to get holy oil from Jerusalem, but there were problems getting the Christian priests. In the end, the Polos went on their journey without priests for the Khan. The Polos travelled through countries now known as Turkey, Armenia, Georgia, Iraq and Iran. They arrived in Hormuz ready to sail to China but they were unhappy about the boats there. So they turned back and did the second part of their journey on foot.

*Chapter 7 (From Hormuz to Khanbaliq)* relates the second part of the Polos journey to China. They travelled through countries now known as Iran, Afghanistan and Chinese Turkestan. They faced great dangers on their journey, but arrived safely in the Chinese city of Shangdu in 1275, four years after leaving Venice.

*Chapter 8 (At the court of the Khan)* describes Kublai Khan's splendid court in the summer palace at Shangdu and the winter palace at Khanbaliq. Marco was soon a favourite at court and became the Khan's ambassador. He travelled to different parts of the huge empire.

*Chapter 9 (Working for the Khan)* explains how Marco worked for Kublai Khan for seventeen years. He travelled widely in the empire and wrote descriptions of countries now known as Myanmar, Vietnam, Sri Lanka and India. He heard stories about Japan but didn't go there.

*Chapter 10 (Going home)* relates how the Polos decided to go home after many years in China. At first, the Khan didn't want the men to leave. However, in the end he agreed they could accompany a Mongol princess called Kokachin to Persia. After a dangerous sea voyage to Hormuz and further travel, the Polos arrived in Venice in 1295, twenty-four years after their departure.
Chapter 11 (The travellers return) describes how the Polos returned to Venice looking like poor travellers. At first, their families didn't seem to believe that they really were Marco, Niccolo and Maffeo. But at a family meal, the men cut open their jackets and a lot of jewels fell out. The family soon understood that these men really were the rich and successful Polos.

In 1298, Marco fought for the city of Venice against Genoa, but was captured and put in prison along with a writer called Rustichello. Marco told Rustichello all about his journeys and Rustichello wrote everything down in a book which later became known as The Description of the World. Marco Polo died in 1324, aged seventy.

Chapter 12 (After Marco Polo) examines the legacy of Marco Polo and how The Description of the World was translated into different languages. For hundreds of years his book gave Europeans the best information about life in the East. The famous explorer Christopher Columbus read Marco's stories about Japan with great interest, because he wished to open a trade route there.

Background
There is no single authoritative version of Marco Polo's book The Description of the World. There are around 150 variants of the work which still exist in museums and libraries today. Without the availability of a printing press, many errors were made during copying and translation into different languages, which resulted in many discrepancies between the books.
Marco Polo and the Silk Road

Pre-reading activity

Crossword

Words across:
2 to buy and sell goods
4 a large place with trees and gardens where people can go to walk, play games, etc.
6 a person who buys and sells goods
8 a man or woman who works in another person’s house and who does the cleaning, cooking, etc.
9 a part of a plant that you put in food to make it taste good; for example pepper or ginger
11 beautiful stones that are very valuable; for example, diamonds or rubies
14 material that you use for making clothes and other things
15 to go back to a place

Words down:
1 an important person who represents their country in another country
3 to control a country and its people; a king, queen or a president does this
4 a girl or young woman in a royal family; she is the daughter of a king or queen
5 a very large and beautiful house where a ruler lives
7 to take control of a country by force
10 a large, dry area of land with very few plants; for example the Sahara or the Gobi
12 fine soft cloth made from the threads that an insect makes; people produce expensive clothes from this
13 a big and important town; for example, London, Tokyo or New York

Put the words from the crossword into the columns below. There are four words in each column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People</th>
<th>Places</th>
<th>Things</th>
<th>Verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

To the teacher

Aim: To introduce key vocabulary and encourage students to predict information.
Time: 40–45 minutes
Organization: Give one copy of the worksheet to each group of students. Tell students they are going to do a crossword to focus on key words that appear in the book. Before students begin the crosswords, go carefully through the definitions as a class. Then in pairs, students fill in the crosswords, they can begin with the easier words: across 4 – park, across 15 – return, down 5 – palace, down 13 – city. Students can then use bilingual dictionaries to help them with the other clues. They could also find the words in the glossary at the back of the book. Conduct feedback as a class. Then ask the students to put the words into the correct columns in the grid at the bottom of the page. Use the words in the grid to make predictions about Marco Polo and life on the Silk Road.

Key: Words across: 2 trade, 4 park, 6 merchant, 8 servant, 9 spice, 11 jewels, 14 cloth, 15 return.
Words down: 1 ambassador, 3 rule, 4 princess, 5 palace, 7 conquer, 10 desert, 12 silk, 13 city.
People: ambassador, merchant, servant, princess.
Marco Polo and the Silk Road

While reading activity

What will happen next?

Which of these things do you think will happen in Chapter 8?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>WILL HAPPEN</th>
<th>MAY HAPPEN</th>
<th>WON’T HAPPEN</th>
<th>YOUR OWN COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kublai Khan is very happy to see the Polos and he welcomes them to his court.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kublai Khan is very angry about the priests and at first he puts the Polos in prison.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Niccolo becomes ill and he suddenly dies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maffeo and Niccolo stay in the city of Khanbaliq and trade.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marco is the Khan’s favourite at court and he becomes an ambassador.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marco becomes a famous soldier and he fights the Khan’s enemies.</td>
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Which of these things do you think will happen in Chapter 11?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>WILL HAPPEN</th>
<th>MAY HAPPEN</th>
<th>WON’T HAPPEN</th>
<th>YOUR OWN COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When the Polos return, everybody in their family is happy and excited.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When the Polos return, nobody in their family looks pleased or interested.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marco fights for Venice against the city of Genoa. But enemy soldiers put him in prison.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marco fights for Venice against the city of Genoa. But enemy soldiers cut off his arm.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kokachin comes to Venice and she marries Marco.</td>
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<td>Marco marries the daughter of a rich merchant.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Just before Marco dies, he says that his stories are not true.</td>
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To the teacher

Where: At the end of Chapter 7; at the end of Chapter 10.

Aim: To encourage students to predict the development of events.

Time: 20 minutes (10 minutes for each chapter)

Organization: Stop the students reading at the points indicated above. Give one copy of the worksheet to each student or each group of students. Ask them to discuss and decide what will happen in the next chapter. Ask them to fill in the table with their predictions. They can also add their own ideas. Conduct feedback on their ideas as a class and encourage them to justify their opinions. It is not important whether their predictions are correct or not. It may be interesting for students to keep their worksheets and see whether or not their predictions were right.
Read this summary of the book. Find twelve more mistakes and write in the correct words. The first one has been done for you. The dates are all correct.

Marco Polo was born in the city of Venice. He came from an important family of sailors. In 1253, his father, Niccolo, and his brother, Maffeo, left Venice and went to Cairo to trade. While they were away, Marco was born, but later his mother died.

After six years, Niccolo and Maffeo began to journey east on the famous Gold Road. In the city of Bukhara, they met Kublai Khan’s ambassador. The ambassador invited them to China and in 1264, the men arrived at the Khan’s winter palace in Khanbaliq.

Kublai Khan was very interested in life in Europe and he asked the Polos to come back to China with a thousand Christian priests and special oil from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

In 1269, the men arrived back in Venice and Marco met his father for the second time. After three years, Niccolo and Maffeo left Venice to return to China and this time they took Marco with them.

At first, they needed to find the special oil in Jerusalem and also the priests. They got the oil, but they could only take five priests with them – and these men soon turned back because they were frightened.

In 1275, four years after they had left Venice, the Polos arrived in Shangdu and met Kublai Khan. Marco was soon a favourite with the Khan. He became the Khan’s servant and travelled to different places in the huge empire.

But after seventeen years the Polos began to think of going home. In the end, they sailed from Zaiton and took a beautiful Mongol princess, called Theobaldo, to Persia.

In 1295, the Polos arrived in Venice in their new Mongol clothes and at first their family didn’t look excited to see them. But at a special meal they cut open their coats and money fell to the floor. Everybody then understood that they really were Niccolo, Maffeo and Marco.

In later years, Marco fought for Venice against the city of Rome, but some soldiers put him in prison. Here, he told his stories to a man called Rustichello. He put them into a book and this became The Description of the World.

Marco died in 1324. People translated The Description of the World into different languages and the famous explorer Ferdinand Magellan read it to find information about Japan.

To the teacher

Aim: To revise key information from the book.

Time: 40–50 minutes

Organization: Put the students into pairs and give out a copy of the worksheet to each pair. Explain that they need to find twelve more mistakes in the summary and remind them that the dates in the text are all correct. One mistake has already been corrected. Ask the students to look for twelve more mistakes and to write in the correct words. Ask them to try doing it without looking back at the book at first. Then towards the end of the activity they could check the answers they are unsure about. Conduct feedback as a class.

Key: brother: uncle, Cairo: Constantinople, Gold Road: Silk Road, thousand: hundred, second: first, five: two, servant: ambassador, Theobaldo: Kokachin, new: old, money: jewels, Rome: Genoa, Ferdinand Magellan: Christopher Columbus