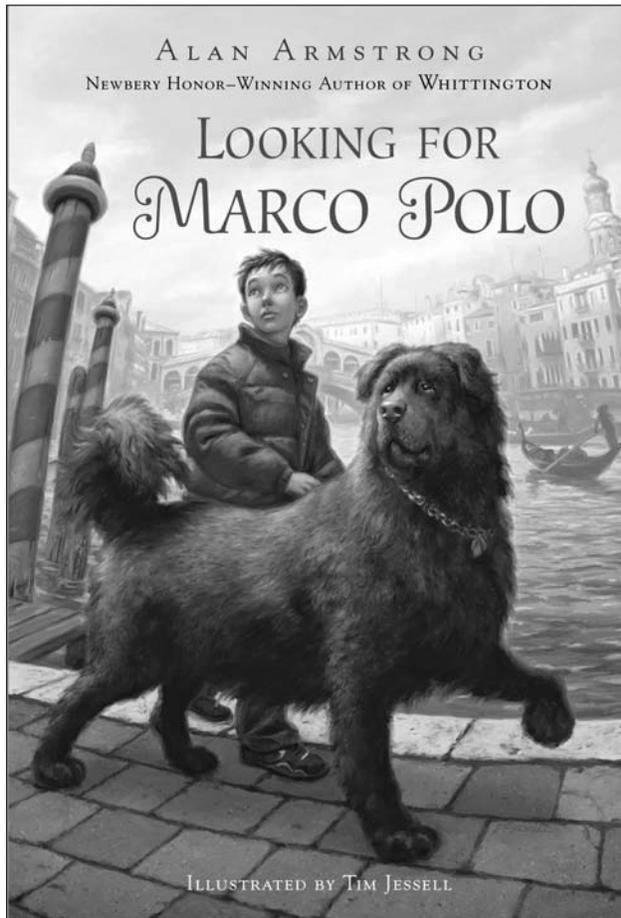


# BOOKNOTES

educators guide



Random House HC: 978-0-375-83321-2  
GLB: 978-0-375-93321-9

## THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

Courage • Family • Fear  
Truth/Trust • Values in Conflict  
Perspective

GRADES 3-7

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Mark is only eleven years old when he looks for Marco Polo in the streets of Venice, and along the way gains a thirst for adventure—something that he has never shared with his anthropologist father.

Mark's father is an anthropologist who is traveling Marco Polo's ancient route from Venice to China. Mark isn't too interested in his father's adventure, and refuses to read *The Travels of Marco Polo* that his father gives him. When it appears that Mark's father is lost in the Gobi Desert, Mark and his mother go to Venice to get the Italian agency that planned the trip to send out a search party. In the meantime, Mark has a bad asthma attack, prompting his mother to get help from Dr. Hornaday, a physician in Venice who fought in the Gulf War with Mark's dad. Dr. Hornaday has a gift for storytelling, and he tells Mark spellbinding tales about Marco Polo and his travels. Mark is mesmerized, wants to know more, and spends the remainder of his stay in Venice looking for Marco Polo. His days turn into adventures, but what he really finds is the courage to take personal risks much like his father.

New from  
Newbery Honor-Winning  
author Alan Armstrong

Visit Teachers @ Random at [www.randomhouse.com/teachers](http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers)



## PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Have students trace Marco Polo's Silk Road Travels on the following map: [www.artsmia.org/art-of-asia/history/silk-road-map.cfm](http://www.artsmia.org/art-of-asia/history/silk-road-map.cfm). Then have them take a modern map and plan an alternative route for adventure travelers today who wish to make a similar trip. What type of gear should they take on their travels? What might they expect to see?

## THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

---

#### COURAGE

Dr. Hornaday and Mark's dad were in the Gulf War together. The doctor tells Mark that his father was always a brave man. Discuss how it takes bravery and courage for Mark's dad to attempt to trace the travels of Marco Polo. Debate whether Dr. Hornaday realizes that Mark lacks courage. How does Mark become more courageous as he roams Venice with Dr. Hornaday and Boss?

#### FAMILY

Ask students to describe Mark's relationship with his father. Draw a comparison between their relationship to that of Marco Polo and his father. Mark is an only child. Explain how this affects his views regarding himself and his family. Discuss why Mark isn't interested in reading the book about Marco Polo that his dad gave him. What is significant about Mark's question: "Did Marco miss his father?" (p. 53)

#### FEAR

Ask students to discuss how the old Arab helps Marco Polo know how to conduct himself when he meets Kublai Khan. How does this advice help Marco Polo deal with any fears he has regarding his initial contact with the emperor? Boss tells Mark, "It's only when people get older that they learn to fear." (p. 89) Ask students to discuss how some people, especially adults, fear the unknown. Why are the people of Venice so fearful of Marco Polo when he returns from China? Discuss how the fear of the unknown causes Mark's mother to take them to Venice during the holiday. Debate whether Mark is afraid for his father, or afraid for himself.

#### PERSPECTIVE

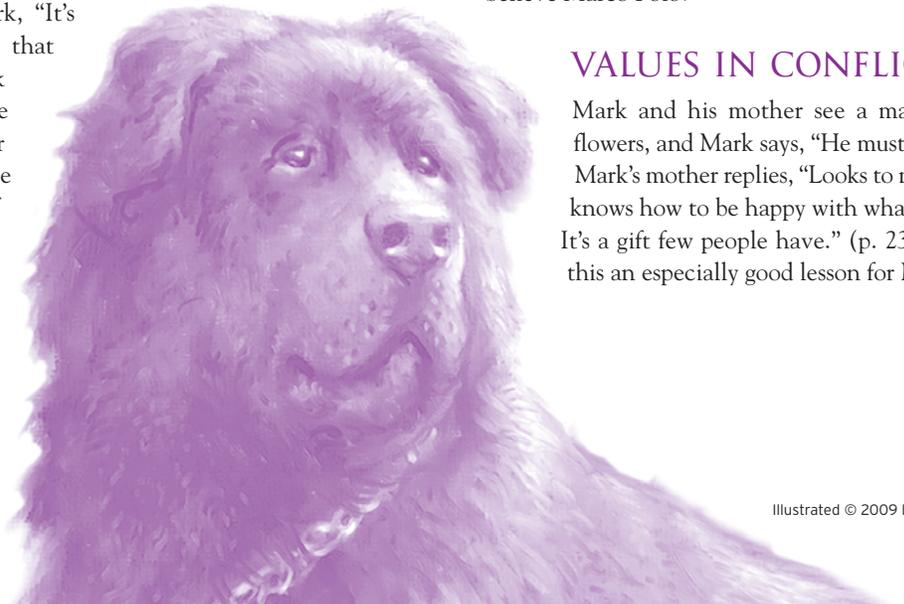
Dr. Hornaday tells Mark that many missionaries and merchants had traveled to China, but they were like blind men. They saw "tiny parts, totally ignorant of the whole." (p. 54) Ask students to discuss how Marco Polo had eyes for the "whole." Explain what Dr. Hornaday means when he says, "Marco Polo studied in the school of the street." (p. 55) What does Mark learn in the streets of Venice? How do Marco Polo's streets give Mark a vision he didn't possess before coming to Venice? Dr. Hornaday also tells Mark that Marco Polo had the "mind of a merchant, not a missionary." (p. 102) Discuss the difference.

#### TRUTH/TRUST

Discuss the relationship between truth and trust. Why didn't the people of Venice trust that Marco Polo was telling the truth about the things he saw in China? Explain the parts of Marco's behavior upon his homecoming that made even his friends mistrust his stories. A priest told Marco on his deathbed, "Clear your conscience, Marco. Confess that you have lied." (p. 94) A priest could have had great influence over the predominately Catholic population of Venice. Debate whether the priest allowed himself to be influenced by the people. At what point did the Venetians finally begin to appreciate and believe Marco Polo?

#### VALUES IN CONFLICT

Mark and his mother see a man selling flowers, and Mark says, "He must be poor." Mark's mother replies, "Looks to me like he knows how to be happy with what he's got. It's a gift few people have." (p. 23) Why is this an especially good lesson for Mark?



# CONNECTING TO THE CURRICULUM

---

## LANGUAGE ARTS

Helen and Bill Thayer were the first woman and man to successfully make the 1,600-mile trek across the Mongolian Gobi Desert on foot. Ask students to read their journal and view their photographs on the following Web site: [www.oneearthadventures.com/gobi/](http://www.oneearthadventures.com/gobi/). Instruct students to write a feature story for an adventure magazine that compares the Thayers' journey to Marco Polo's travels.

Dr. Hornaday tells Mark, "History is a series of stories. It comes from what the historian imagines. He soaks up everything he can and then imagines what happened." (p. 51) Ask students to use both facts and imagination to create a comic book story about Marco Polo that Mark might present to his school library upon his return.

## SOCIAL STUDIES

There is a Madonna on the wall of Mark's hotel room in Venice. His mother explains that it is an Italian custom to display religious ornaments for a blessing. Have students record other things that Mark learns about modern and ancient Italian customs while in Venice. Then have them prepare an oral presentation called "How I Discovered Italy in the Streets of Venice" that Mark might deliver to his social studies class upon his return.

Have students reread the first paragraph on page 208. Then form a class debate team that argues the philosophy expressed in this paragraph in the context of the way the United States deals with diplomacy and war today.

## SCIENCE

A Bactrian, a two-humped camel, was the animal that Marco Polo used on the Silk Road. Ask students to research other animals that are common to the Gobi Desert and make an illustrated two-page spread for an animal atlas of this area.

## CAREER EXPLORATION

Mark's father is an anthropologist. Ask students to visit the official Web site of the American Anthropological Association ([www.aaanet.org/profdev/careers/](http://www.aaanet.org/profdev/careers/)) and find out the various career paths for those interested in the field. Then have them investigate colleges and universities that offer a major in Anthropology.

## CREATIVE DRAMA

Marco was a "teller, not a writer." Ask students to consider the qualities of good storytelling. Then have them jot down everything they learn about Marco Polo's travels from reading about Mark's adventures in Venice. Have them prepare an oral story about Marco Polo's travels that Mark might share with elementary-age students upon his return home.

## ART

People wear masks at carnival time in Venice. Pick one of the following characters and make an appropriate mask for that person to wear during carnival: Marco Polo, Marco Polo's father, Mark, Dr. Hornaday, Mark's mother, or Mark's father.

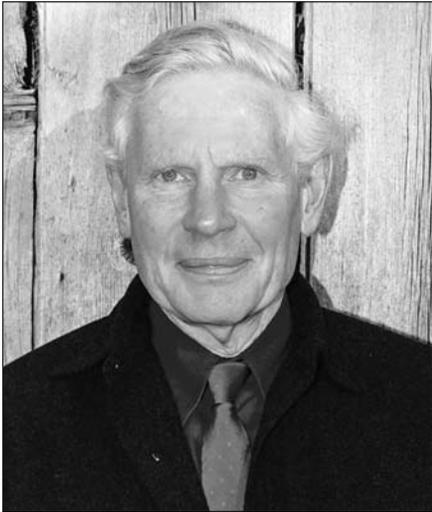
## VOCABULARY | USE OF LANGUAGE

Have students make an illustrated Italian-English language book of common words and phrases that Mark and his mother might use while they are in Venice.

Encourage students to jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them using clues from the context.

Such words may include:

p. 29	<i>cistern</i>	p. 81	<i>campo</i>	p. 110	<i>sultan</i>	p. 162	<i>impertinence</i>
p. 52	<i>horde</i>	p. 85	<i>gambit</i>	p. 128	<i>emissaries</i>	p. 166	<i>ominous</i>
p. 54	<i>immensity</i>	p. 103	<i>vaporetto</i>	p. 129	<i>pranzo</i>	p. 186	<i>cairns</i>
p. 60	<i>oasis</i>	p. 109	<i>harborage</i>	p. 133	<i>scimitar</i>	p. 237	<i>cortege</i>
p. 74	<i>palazzo</i>	p. 109	<i>sarcophagus</i>	p. 147	<i>sutras</i>	p. 240	<i>retinue</i>



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Alan Armstrong** started volunteering in a friend's bookshop when he was eight. At fourteen, he was selling books at Brentano's. As an adult, every so often, he takes to the road in a VW bus named Zora to peddle used books. He is the editor of *Forget Not Me & My Garden*, a collection of the letters of Peter Collinson, the eighteenth-century mercer and amateur botanist. His previous books for children include *Whittington*, which won a Newbery Honor, and *Raleigh's Page*. He lives with his wife, Martha, a painter, in Massachusetts.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

### Marco Polo and His Silk Road Travels

[www.silk-road.com/artl/marcopolo.shtml](http://www.silk-road.com/artl/marcopolo.shtml)

### Kublai Khan Rules China

[www.thenagain.info/WebChron/china/KublaiKhan.html](http://www.thenagain.info/WebChron/china/KublaiKhan.html)

### Guide to Venice

[www.italyguides.it/us/venice\\_italy/venice\\_travel.htm](http://www.italyguides.it/us/venice_italy/venice_travel.htm)

## ON THE WEB

For bios, teachers guides, and more, visit our FREE online site:



Be sure to sign up for our online newsletter  
[www.randomhouse.com/teachers](http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers)

**Teachers @RANDOM** Search over 100 themes and holidays  
**Search by THEME!** for books for your classroom!

## RELATED TITLES BY THEME



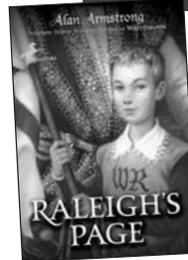
### The Buccaneers

Iain Lawrence  
 Courage • Trust • Fear • Adventure  
 Grades 5-9  
 Yearling PB: 978-0-440-41671-5



### Daughter of Venice

Donna Jo Napoli  
 Courage • Trust • Fear  
 Grades 7 up  
 Laurel-Leaf PB: 978-0-440-22928-5



### Raleigh's Page

Alan Armstrong  
 Illustrated by Tim Jessell  
 Courage • Trust • Fear • Adventure  
 Grades 5-7  
 Random House HC: 978-0-375-83319-9  
 Yearling PB: 978-0-375-83320-5