

 The

Silk Road

by James Washington



HOUGHTON MIFFLIN



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You're riding a mule in the desert. It's hot and dry, and sand blows in your face. You have miles to go before stopping. Bandits could rob you at any time!



That's what it was like being a trader on the Silk Road. The Silk Road was the major trade route between China and countries to the west. The route covered over 5,000 miles and linked Asia and Europe. It was named for silk, which came from China.




Silk was one of the first items brought from China to Western countries. Cloth made from silk is very soft. Silk was also rare and valuable in Europe. People would trade an ounce of gold for an ounce of silk!



Camels can go a week or more without water.






 The Silk Road was an important trade route.

Chapter 1

Trading Goods and Spreading Ideas

The Silk Road **preceded** the Internet by hundreds of years. Yet, in some ways it was like the Internet. The Silk Road helped goods and ideas move around the world — just like the Internet.

 Traders moved across deserts and through narrow mountain passes along the Silk Road. Some carried silk. Some packed gold. Traders also carried perfume, grapes, **lustrous** gems, and other valuable items. Ideas traveled, too. For example, a new religion came to China from India on the Silk Road. This new religion was Buddhism.



Chapter 2

Early Travels from Ancient China

No one is sure how the Silk Road began. During the Qin (chin) dynasty (221 – 206 B.C.E.), Emperor Qin Shihuang (shir hwong) didn't allow trade outside of China. Yet, scientists think some trade took place. They found evidence that the ancient Chinese people likely traded with other people. This trade may have started the Silk Road.




During the Han dynasty (202 B.C.E. – 220 C.E.), a new emperor heard about a strong country to the west of China. This country is what we know as India today. He wanted to know more about India and the world outside China. He sent a group to visit this country. After 12 years, the group finally returned to China. The leader of the group suggested that China trade goods with India.




The emperor liked the idea. Ten years later, he sent another group to India with goods. Their journey was a success. They returned to China with many unusual items. More and more people wanted to trade on this route. The Silk Road was now expanding.


The Emperor Wants Horses

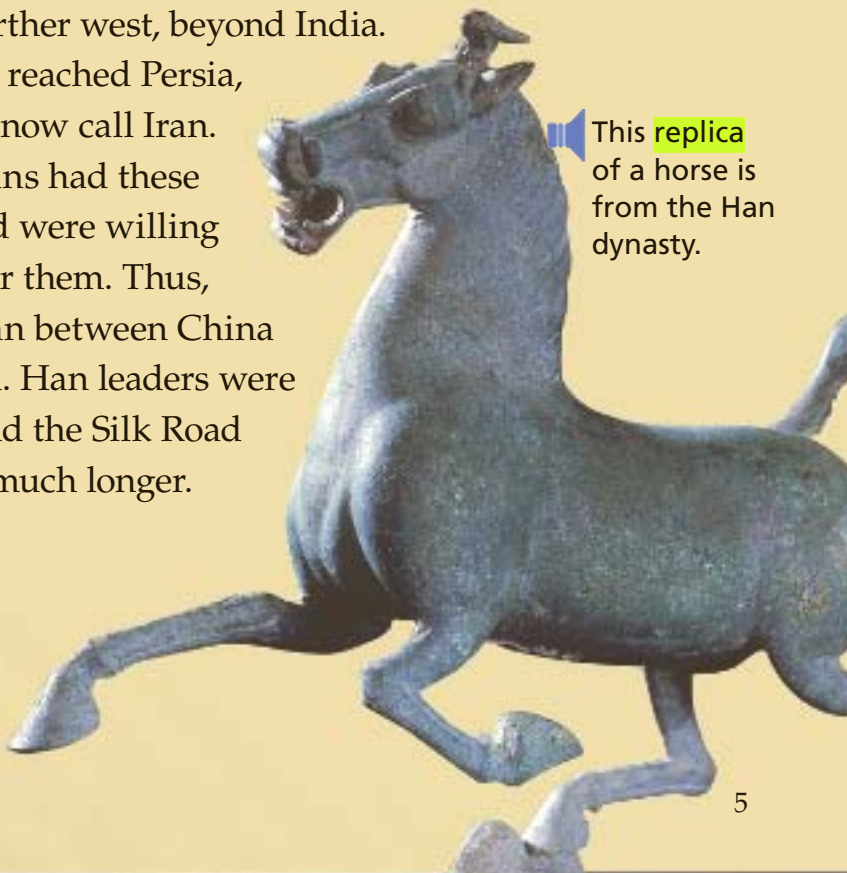
One of the most unusual things brought back to China were horses. Horses lived in China, but these horses from the West were very different.

 The emperor especially liked these horses. He called them “heavenly horses.” They were strong and fast. The emperor wanted more for his army. He offered gold and silver in trade, but his offer was turned down.

 The emperor sent out another group. Its mission was to trade for these heavenly horses. The traders headed farther west, beyond India.

Then they reached Persia, which we now call Iran. The Persians had these horses and were willing to trade for them. Thus, trade began between China and Persia. Han leaders were happy. And the Silk Road was now much longer.

 This replica of a horse is from the Han dynasty.





Camels can survive in temperatures as high as 120° Fahrenheit.



Chapter 3

Trading Places

However, a longer Silk Road created problems. Bandits kept robbing traders. The emperor ordered walls and forts built to protect them. Some of the **elaborate** walls later became part of the Great Wall.



These walls and forts, however, only protected some sections of the Silk Road. China's leaders realized they couldn't control the entire route themselves. They needed to set up local villages. They hoped these towns would be safe places to stop and rest. As these villages were set up, trade grew. Many villages became bigger towns. Others grew into cities.



Trade with the Ancient Romans

By 200 B.C.E., trade also began with the Romans. Rome and China are 5,000 miles apart. Chinese silk passed from one group of traders to another until it finally arrived in Rome. It took two years to complete the journey. One person, it was thought, could not make such a long trip.

Rome and China were so far apart that neither group knew much about the other. The Romans called the ancient Chinese the “silk people.” They were sure that silk grew on trees!

Silk is made from the cocoon of the silkworm.



Around 100 C.E., the Chinese tried to send a messenger to Rome. The messenger got tired and gave up. A Roman messenger didn't reach China until 166 C.E.



Rome is a long distance from China.



Chapter 4

Long and Winding Roads

The Silk Road had many **distinct** branches. The roads went different ways to avoid the hardest parts of the desert and mountains. Some routes were more dangerous, but shorter. Other routes had better places to stop. An oasis was a stopping place where a trader might rest and get water.

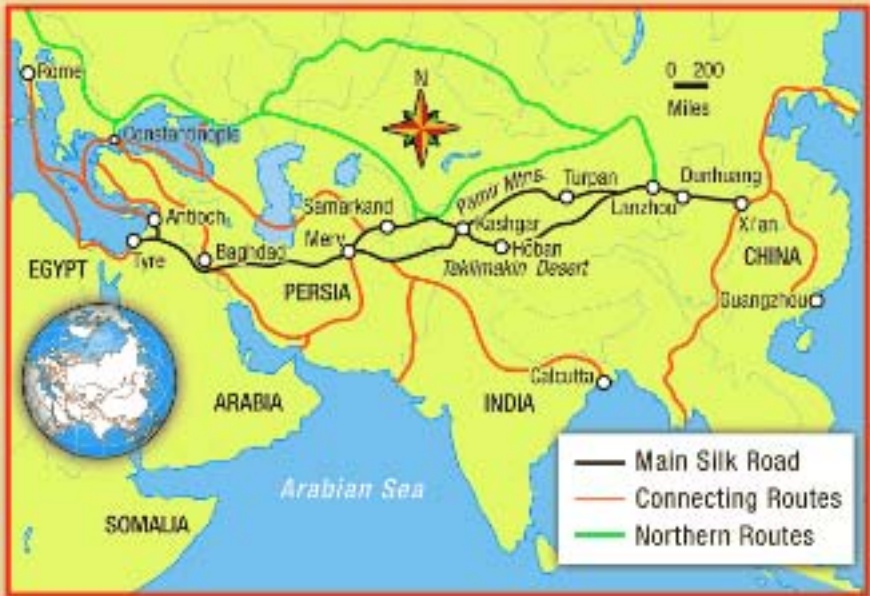


Most traders traveled in groups called caravans. Caravans used camels to move their goods. Each caravan had between 100 and 1,000 camels. Each camel could carry about 500 pounds of goods! Gold, jewels, and silk were some of the items they carried. Bandits often robbed caravans when they stopped at night.



A camel caravan makes its way across the Silk Road.






The Silk Road was made up of several routes.

The Silk Road had a main route. It began in China's capital city at the time, Changan. When this main route reached the edge of the Taklimakan Desert, it split. Some caravans went north into the snowy Pamir Mountains. Others curved south around the edges of the desert. These routes would split again before meeting up with the main route.

Trips were long and hard. Sandstorms and strong winds were common. In the summer, it might get up to 120° F. In the winter, the temperature might drop below zero. Traders had to worry about the weather, supplies, and of course, the bandits.

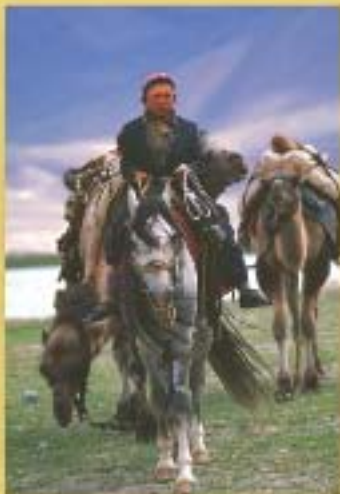
Putting Camels to Bed


Few traders traveled the entire Silk Road. Most went part of the way, made a trade, and then went home. As trade grew, more oasis towns appeared. These rest stops offered traders and camels a chance to take a break. Traders could not risk having their camels get sick!

 Caravans moved slowly. The camels were well-suited to desert travel, but they did not move fast. A typical caravan went no more than three miles an hour. The trip was so hard, they usually only went 30 miles a day. No wonder trips took so long!


Animals on the Silk Road

While camels carried goods, traders often rode horses, mules, or donkeys. Horses sometimes pulled carts with traders' belongings. Donkeys and mules often carried packs similar to backpacks.



 This trader rides a horse.




 This oasis town is in the mountains.

Chapter 5


Life at a Silk Road Rest Stop

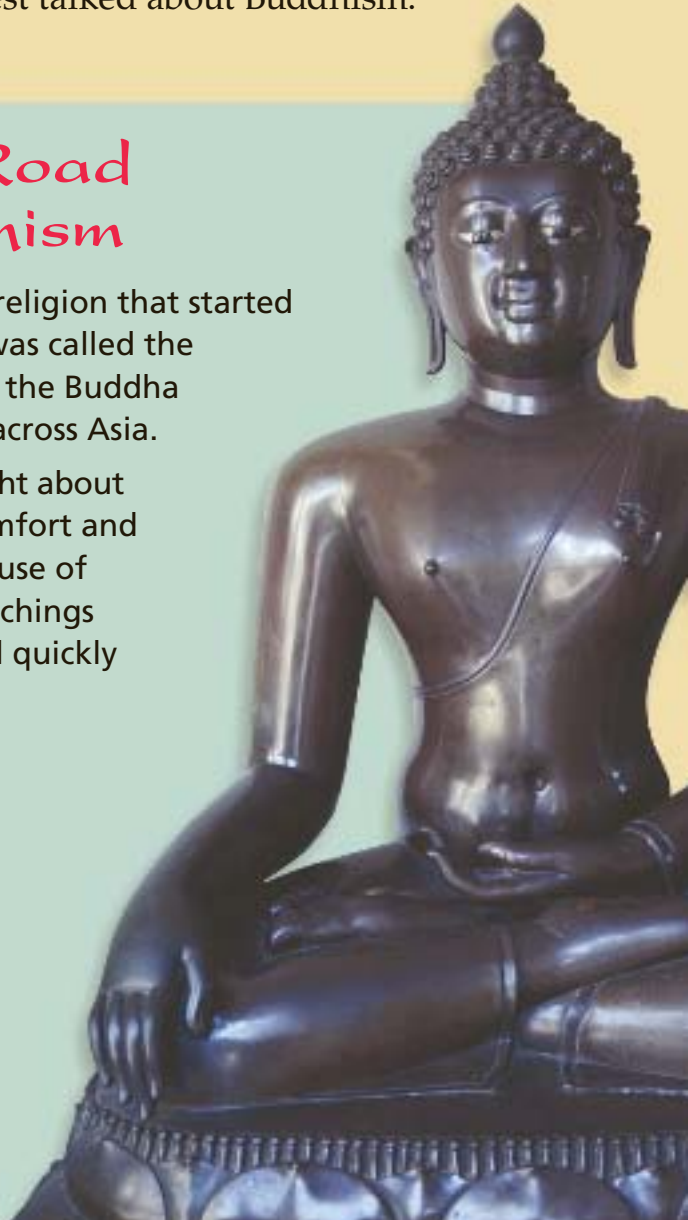
Different routes of the Silk Road often met up at the oasis towns. Traders could stop to rest or to buy or trade more supplies. They could also stop to escape bandits. Oasis towns became busy trade centers. Traders made so much money that many thought the long trips were worth the risks.

 An oasis town was also a place where traders could talk and share ideas. Along the Silk Road, people would exchange ideas, not just trade goods. Traders from China talked about making paper. Traders from the West talked about Buddhism.

The Silk Road and Buddhism

Buddhism was a religion that started in India. Its founder was called the Buddha. Followers of the Buddha spread his teachings across Asia.

 The Buddha taught about peace. He offered comfort and hope to people. Because of the Silk Road, the teachings of the Buddha spread quickly throughout China.






Chapter 6

The Decline of the Silk Road


As time went on, the Chinese Empire weakened. Traders could no longer be protected on the Silk Road. For hundreds of years, few traders used it. Then in the 1200s, China grew strong again. Trade on the Silk Road grew once more. Stories of China's wealth once again reached Europe. An Italian named Marco Polo wrote about his adventures on the Silk Road. His stories also helped increase trade on the Silk Road.

 Still, the journey on the Silk Road remained long and hard. By the 1400s, a quicker and cheaper route was discovered. This route used the sea. This sea route also connected Asia and Europe. Traders now found that it was much easier to move silk and other goods by ship. Many of the oasis towns on the Silk Road collapsed. The Silk Road once again declined.


Chapter 7

Looking Down the 'Road'

Now that you've read about the Silk Road, think about what life must have been like for the traders who used it. What would life have been like if you had been a trader on the Silk Road? How would you have felt during a hot summer day? What would you have thought about as you fell asleep on a cold winter night?

 Our trips today are much more comfortable. We can use trains, buses, and cars instead of camels or mules. We have heaters and air conditioners. We can sleep in hotels. Yet, people today — like people of yesterday — still enjoy going on adventures!

What do you think will become the next Silk Road?

 Today, sea routes have replaced the Silk Road as a way to move goods.



Responding



TARGET SKILL Fact and Opinion

Which statements in *The Silk Road* are facts? Which are opinions? Copy and complete the chart below.

Fact	Opinion
Trade began between China and Persia.	Han leaders were happy.
?	?



Write About It

Text to Self Write a paragraph that explains the information on page 13 about the decline of the Silk Road. Be sure to include the main ideas.



TARGET VOCABULARY

archaeologists

dignified

distinct

elaborate

excavate

lustrous

mythical

precede

replicas

temperaments



TARGET SKILL

Fact and Opinion Decide whether an idea can be proved or is a feeling or belief.



TARGET STRATEGY

Question Ask questions about a selection before you read, as you read, and after you read.



GENRE Informational Text gives facts and examples about a topic.

Level: V

DRA: 50

Genre:

Informational Text

Strategy:

Question

Skill:

Fact and Opinion

Word Count: 1,594

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