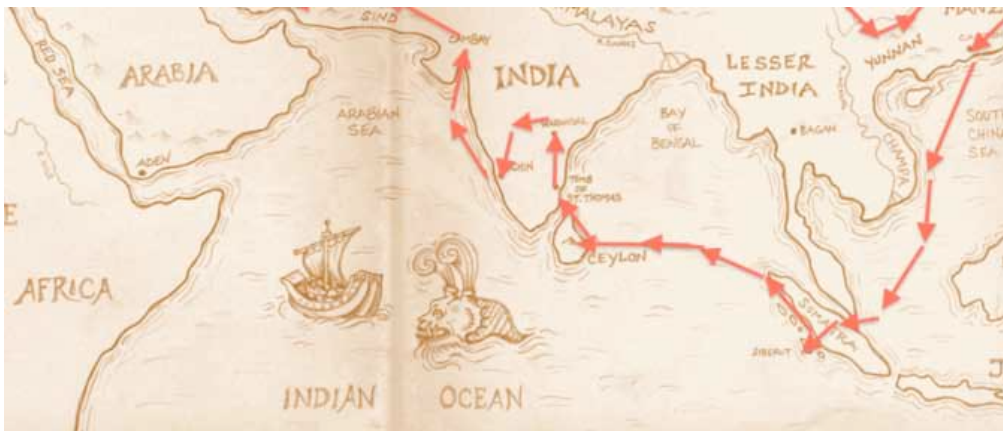


PROJECTS: DESIGN AND BUILD



- Students build scale models of a nomadic Mongol Ger or Yurt tent. Still used today on the steppes of Central Asia, the Ger is a tangible link to the historic past. Students who have studied the nomadic life of Native Americans find the comparisons with those of Mongolia stimulating and for good reason; A discussion on the Bering Land Bridge and how the Americas were populated by East Asians.
- Marco Polo was given a golden *paiza* or “passport” entitling him to shelter, food, fresh horses and guides wherever he traveled in the Mongol Empire. Students make their own *paiza* using gold polymer clay that when baked becomes hard and metallic. Discussions will include diplomacy, the significance of passports and other official documents and how one such hand written, ‘golden tablet’ saved Denis’ life on numerous occasions.
- Students build a working model of a medieval trebuchet or catapult described by Marco Polo, ranging in size and strength - anywhere from a tiny model made out of Popsicle sticks to desktop sizes that can fire tennis balls and even larger versions, which can hurl pumpkins!

CARTOGRAPHY - *The Silk Road*



Maps from Marco Polo's time were hand drawn and elaborately illustrated. Students make their own ancient Silk Road versions to scale, on vellum or paper. Legends and keys can explore the movement of goods and ideas as well as population and religious makeup along the famed trade route, offering a look at cultural diffusion as well as contemporary empirical borders.

(Map shown above hand drawn by Denis)

CULTURE AND RELIGIONS – *Guided ‘Footsteps’ Museum Tour*



In his travels, Polo would interact with Eastern Orthodox and Nestorian Christians, Sunni, Shia and Ismaili Muslims, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, Chinese and Indian Jews, Taoists, Hindus and Animists. But he would have also seen the shattered remains of those peoples cultural past including Roman, Greek, Hittite, Achaemenid and Parthian ruins.

A guided “Footsteps” museum tour will reveal the diversity of cultures along Polo’s route and uncover glorious remnants of ancient dynasties that littered his path across the Eurasian landmass and back. Students will discover how environments shaped these various belief systems and see that reflected in the art produced by those cultures. They will also learn how these older cultures and religions influenced the societies that eventually replaced them.

(When a museum visit is not practical, this module can be presented virtually on a Smart Board.)

CHINA

MAO AND MARCO

Using Polo's account of the art and architectural splendors of China as a reference point, this module will look at historic treasures that were both lost and saved during the destructive years of Mao's Cultural Revolution.



YUAN DYNASTY - *China during Polo's period*

Who are Marco Polo's contemporary travelers and historians and just what was their mission's to the courts of the Great Khans? How do their works confirm his accounts or differ from his descriptions? This module is best presented in conjunction with, "The Mongols," below.

CHINA TODAY

In many ways the China that Marco Polo described as an economic superpower, has only come to fruition in recent memory. A discussion will introduce the dynamic growth of China, its relationship to the West and how trade and commerce between peoples helps to foster greater understanding between nations.

THE MONGOLS



It was said you could smell them coming from miles away before they were upon you. Tens of thousands of horsemen riding like the wind and devastating everything in their path. The marauding hordes would eventually reach as far as Eastern Europe before being turned back in perhaps history's luckiest twist of fate.

How had the Mongols been able to conquer and then rule such vast territories? How did these various kingdoms and empires interact? Where did they fail? These questions and more will be answered as we take a look at the largest empire the world has ever known.

DOCUMENTATION



Marco Polo's fame rests in the details with which he records the journey for future generations. But Europeans were by no means the only ones documenting their travels. Chinese traveler Xuanzang, credited for bringing Buddhism to China became famous for his seventeen-year overland journey to India, which is recorded in detail in the classic Chinese text *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*. Arab explorer Ibn Battuta's *rihla* (travel journal) which was traditionally about a hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca, was much more wide-ranging and interesting.

Students will participate in a discussion of why these writers' accounts stand out above the rest of their contemporaries, where and for what reasons Marco Polo's account falls flat for modern readers and what makes good travel writers and journalists today.

This module will prepare students for documenting the 'Silk Road Tasting Tour' in their own 'rihla' and subsequently the comparative texts exercise by looking at the art of storytelling, creative writing and production techniques.

SILK ROAD ARTIFACTS



Silk Road artifacts collected by Denis during his travels are presented in class and passed around, including an Afghan quirt or riding crop given to him by the Shah of the Wakhan Corridor, its well-worn handle made of Marco Polo sheep bone. He will present antique colorful gowns from Central Asia and China and actual silkworm cocoons, whose precious material students can pull and hand spin into one continuous strand, as was done in the days of old.

THE RENAISSANCE AND THE AGE OF DISCOVERY



Polo's book fired the imagination of future explorers to reach the riches of the East, among them Christopher Columbus, whose well-worn and annotated copy of the '*Travels of Marco Polo*' was a constant companion during his trans-Atlantic voyage. Not only was Polo a trailblazer of the Silk Road, he pioneered uncharted territory on another famous avenue of trade, the Spice Route—giving the West its first account as to the origin of these most precious of commodities, - spices, which to Marco's contemporaries and those that followed during *The Age Of Discovery*, also meant herbal medicine, incenses, perfumes, as well as seasonings -all worth their weight in gold. This module is a natural lead in for the tasting tour that follows.

SILK ROAD SUBWAY TOUR - *A Taste For Geography*



Follow the route of Marco Polo on a subway tasting tour of ethnic neighborhoods and restaurants dispersed along the number 7 line in Queens, N.Y. Considered the most culturally diverse place on earth. Time permitting and between bites, we visit Hindu and Buddhist temples, a Catholic Church, Mosque or Synagogue.

Starting in Long Island City for Italian, we then move on a few stops for Middle Eastern in Sunnyside, then Indian and Tibetan in Jackson Heights and finally ending for Dim Sum in the vibrant Chinese community of Flushing. The students savor firsthand how the geography of that Silk Road country is reflected in its cuisine and uncover the bonds between food and culture. The history and origins of the dishes will be covered along with Polo anecdotes about food and some of Denis' own culinary experiences on the road.

(If not in the Greater New York Area, please ask how this tour can be modified for your region.)

COMPARATIVE TEXTS & SOURCE MATERIALS



For centuries, Marco Polo's book remained the only source of information for Europeans about the geography of the Orient and the mysteries of the Far East. Alternatively titled "*A Description Of The World and The Travels of Marco Polo*" his book became the first international bestseller, being hand copied by scribes throughout Europe. There are over one hundred of these ancient texts still surviving that vary in content, requiring scholars to compare manuscripts looking for additions and omissions.

Students will be introduced to a white glove experience handling a rare, fully detailed facsimile of one of Polo's most famous illuminated books, (seen above) housed in the National Library in Paris (C.1400) along with original printed leafs of Polo's accounts from Sebastian Munster's *Cosmographia*. (C.1540) Complimenting these are marvelous 17th and 18th century prints of flora and fauna, which Polo was the first to describe. Denis' also brings some of his own hand written journals and drawings from the journey (pictured above).

A conversation on the importance of source materials, including research techniques and accessing original manuscripts will take place after class rihla's are presented and discussed.

FILMMAKING & PHOTOGRAPHY



A crash course in the guerilla techniques Denis has learned during a career as an editorial travel photographer and documentary filmmaker. Students will be assigned a personal 2-3 minute short film or photo essay piece entitled, "In the Footsteps of" (Screenings to follow.)

GLOBAL STUDIES

Marco's World Today



Using his golden passport, Marco Polo traveled across basically one giant country, the Mongol Empire. Denis needed to cross 24 modern, geopolitical borders. This module will look at some those countries today, their political and economic makeup, as well as the driving forces behind their integration or isolation in world markets and politics. Of special interest to many students are Denis' experiences in Afghanistan, the Central Asian Republics of Turkmenistan & Uzbekistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

THE CRUSADES



Born in Venice in 1254, Marco would have had a ringside seat to the last Crusade. As the leading trade city and sea power on the Adriatic and Mediterranean, Venice had profited greatly from shipbuilding and other contracts with the warrior knights. Years later, when he returned home in 1295, the last Christian stronghold in the Levant, St. John of Acre, a fortress he knew well, had only just fallen back into Muslim hands four years earlier.

Denis presents a brief, synoptic history on these misguided holy wars and the major impact they had on the world Marco Polo traveled in.

DILEMMAS



Dilemmas are a critical thinking exercise where students are presented with some of the issues Denis faced during his two- year journey. They may work on these individually or in groups..

- You have vowed to retrace Marco Polo's entire twenty-five thousand mile journey overland without flying. You are now the guests of an Afghan Warlord who has just offered you a helicopter in order to fly over the most dangerous battlegrounds on your route. Do you take this one small flight for personal safety and never admit it to anyone yet know deep in your heart you failed at your mission? Or do you take his counter offer and cross the war zone with 25 heavily armed warriors expecting to see action?
- You come to the desert of Lop in the Gobi chain, which is where the Chinese do their nuclear testing. The area is strictly off limits for foreigners and if you are caught there you could end up in a Chinese prison, but Marco Polo surely passed this way. What do you do? Hire local guides who risk their very lives by taking you through at night? Bypass it altogether?
- You are caught in the restricted zone and accused of being spies. The police ask you to sign a confession stating the local guides persuaded you to go there. If you sign you will be asked to leave China with your freedom but the guides will most likely spend years in jail and may even be executed for treason. If you refuse to sign, you and the guides will be thrown in prison but there is a slim chance, with American political pressure and international media attention you might get out after a few years. Which would you choose and why?
- You've been staying with a poor yet hospitable Mongolian family who insist on slaughtering a sheep to honor you at a feast. Instead of offering you lamb chops which they hang up to dry for later consumption, they offer you what to them, as nomads, is considered the choicest pieces because they are the highest in protein: the heart, lungs, liver, eyes and brain. If you refuse to eat, you will greatly insult them. What do you do?
- You've come to a very remote island and are staying with locals in their jungle hut. Their child has severe conjunctivitis or pink eye and you have just enough medicine in your first aid kit to treat it but are concerned that others might be carrying it and have passed it on to you. It takes 10 days to walk out of the thick jungle if you're not half blind and another 4 or 5 of rough traveling until a town and doctor. Do you save the medicine in case you need it or offer it for the child?

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT **Marco and The Macedonian**



“Whether it was contemplating a colossal Buddha statue he had once stood before or crossing a forbidding desert he’d so accurately described, the most powerful moments from my travels are the ones when it felt like Marco Polo was truly with me. I would read passages from his book and the distant, centuries old words became present, in-the-moment realities.” – *Denis Belliveau*

Marco himself would have had a similar experience when he rode into the legendary cities and towns he had read of during his boyhood studies of *his* hero, Alexander the Great. He mentions the Macedonian four times in his book. This module takes a look at the map and these passages, rife with hero myth and legend as students discuss how Polo himself must have felt, walking in the footsteps of history.

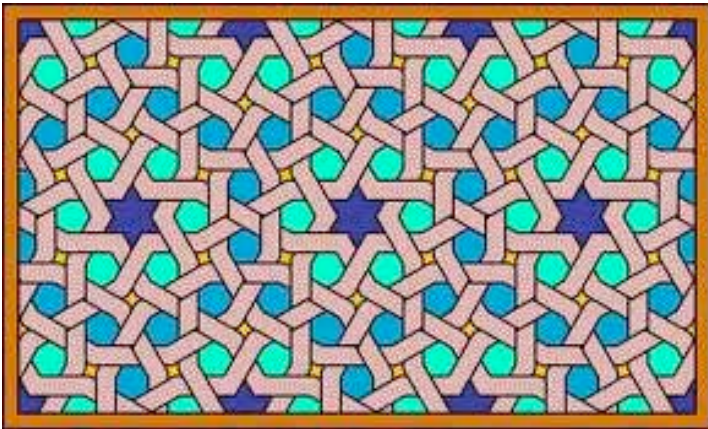
ANIMALS HE SAW ...OR PERHAPS NOT.



Polo was an early naturalist putting to pen bears, boars, crocodiles, camels, elephants, horses, leopards, tigers, Marco Polo Sheep (named for him), mountain goats, all manner of birds, Persian lions, porcupines, snow leopards and yaks. Students take a look at these passages and uncover many facts regarding these species.

Mythic creatures including giant Roc birds that can lift elephants, a nation of dog headed men, islands of headless people whose faces reside in their chests and others where tiny ape like-men dwell in the forest are also included in Polo's book. A detailed discussion will investigate why these fantasies are included and why, even today, people still believe in mythical creatures like Bigfoot, Yeti's, the Loch Ness Monster and Chupacabras.

ISLAMIC GEOMETRIC PATTERNS



The most recognizable visual expression of Islamic art and architecture are dazzling geometric patterns that are magnificent in their beauty and awe-inspiring in their execution.

This workshop expands and enriches students' appreciation of geometry in a cultural context through the study of this ancient Islamic practice. Students will have the opportunity to become familiar with the relationship between shapes and design by approaching an abstract subject in a concrete way. Using just a pencil, ruler, protractor and compass they will recreate classic examples taken from a particular historic building or artwork created during Marco Polo's lifetime, while discussing how the religious restriction on figural imagery resulted in the emergence of this unique art form.



Activities based on geometric patterns support learning about shapes, space and measures. Younger students become adept at recognizing circles, triangles, squares and hexagons, and creating pictures using 2-D shapes. They learn to identify lines of symmetry and to recognize reflective and rotational symmetry. Older students can study transformational and symmetrical patterns to produce tessellations.

Younger grades can be provided with circular templates with the circumference divided into six or eight equal parts to help them start the exercise. Materials will be given to the teachers to continue working with these activities after Denis' visits.

ULTRAMARINE PIGMENT



Lapis lazuli was worth its weight in gold in Marco Polo's day as there was no other mineral known to produce the rich ultramarine blue pigment that European artists craved for their frescoes and altar pieces decorating the continents Gothic cathedrals. It was so rare and valuable that it was reserved mainly for painting the majestic robes of the Virgin Mary or the infant Jesus.

Polo correctly places the source for the highest grade of this semi precious stone in the mountains of Badakhshan, Afghanistan, which is where the stones that have been crushed and refined for the class come from. This still rare and costly pigment is then mixed with egg to recreate the tempera paint of the old masters and will be used sparingly by students when adding a luminescent touch of the kingly color to their Islamic geometric patterns.

MAKING PAPER



Legend has it that the secret of papermaking was obtained from two Chinese prisoners from the Battle of Talas, which led to the first paper mill in the Islamic world being founded in the Silk Road city of Samarkand. Papermaking was then diffused across the Islamic world where it traveled further west into Europe through Spain.

Paper is recorded as being manufactured in Italy in 1276, so when Marco Polo writes of the Chinese use of paper money his readers knew exactly the material he was talking about but couldn't conceive that it could represent value as a currency.

Students make their own paper as we discuss its history to China, the Silk Road and Marco Polo.

SAMARKAND & BUKHARA - Jewels of the Silk Road



Samarkand and Bukhara, in modern day Uzbekistan, have stirred the imaginations of Silk Road travelers and explorers for centuries. Important to Marco Polo's story, many of our modules come together here.

The Mongols devastated both cities but it was said that the towering Kaylan Minaret in Bukhara was spared because Genghis Khan himself thought it too beautiful to destroy.

The Islamic influences were revived, recreated, and restored under the reign of Genghis' direct descendent, Timur, or as he's known in the West, Tamerlane (1336-1405) It is believed that the melon-shaped domes of the tomb chambers are imitations of the yurt or ger tents of the nomadic Mongols.

The color of the buildings also have significant meaning, as noted, blue was the color of kings but also the color of mourning in Central Asia at the time, as it is in many cultures even today. In addition to representing water, a rare resource around the Middle East and Central Asia, blue also warded off "the evil eye" and the notion is evident in the number of doors in and around the two cities that are still painted the color to this day.



The very layout of all the tombs and mosques follow the Islamic passion for geometry, as does the tile work, which is famous for flowing images of Arabic calligraphy, beautifully arranged throughout the buildings. Words like the 99 names for "Allah" and whole passages of the Koran compliment the geometric patterns, creating a sense of atheistic harmony and peace.

Samarkand and Bukhara are jewels of the Silk Road. Throughout history, their stunning monuments have witnessed many turbulent times and events, but perhaps none are more intriguing than the one called, *The Great Game*.

THE GREAT GAME



The Great Game is the term for the strategic rivalry and conflict between the British Empire and Russian Empire for supremacy in Central Asia in the 19th Century. It was the precursor for the Cold War and determined much of what modern Asia looks like on a map today.

In his own lifetime, Marco Polo wasn't believed. His exotic tales, such as the Chinese invention of paper money and black rocks that burned like fuel, (coal) were looked upon as fantasies. Today, ironically, his disbelievers claim he never reached China because of the things he *didn't* mention, such as foot binding.

The truth of the matter is, never before nor since has one man contributed more to the knowledge of terrestrial as well as cultural geography.

Incredibly, his account of the environments and peoples of the Eurasian landmass stood as the Western World's main source of knowledge regarding the Orient for hundreds of years. Indeed, parts of it weren't validated until '*The Great Game*' was being played out across Asia in the 19th century, when British explorers and spies disguised as Muslims and Buddhists followed dangerous sections of Polo's Silk Road path and were amazed at how many details he got right. One even wrote that their trip threw, "a promise of light even on what seemed the wildest of Marco's stories."

We'll take a look at some of those 'stories', as well as why the Silk Road had been closed to Europeans for so long. We'll also discuss how, in many ways, *The Great Game* is still being played out in Central Asia today.

Suggested reading and viewing: The Great Game and European colonial attitudes of the era can best be discussed if prior to Denis' arrival, students have had a chance to read the novel *Kim*, by Rudyard Kipling or have had a chance to watch the 1975 film, *The Man Who Would Be King*, which was adapted from a Kipling novella, written and directed by John Huston and stars Sean Connery and Michael Caine.

A definitive, non-fiction work on the subject is Peter Hopkirk's, *The Great Game*.

THE 19TH CENTURY IN EXPLORATION



This module will look at the 19th Century as an exciting time for exploration, when people took incredible risks trying to reach the last, wild, unknown regions of the globe. Some, hoping to gain the kind of glory, riches and fame we today can only compare to that of a rock star, others for more altruistic reasons, such as the advancement of knowledge in the sciences, culture and art.

In the spirit of Marco Polo, Lewis and Clark kicked the century off by trekking to the Pacific and back from 1804 to 1806. The search for a Northwest Passage inspired polar explorers, such as the doomed British sailors of the Franklin Expedition and by the end of the century explorers and adventurers had finally mapped Africa's interior.

It is not by accident that Denis has gravitated to this century because it ushered in the birth of photography and film. As a visual artist he has chosen many expeditions that can be presented which have rich source material to draw from; Daguerreotype's and other early photographs, films, paintings and prints made by the explorers and expeditionary artists will be part of the fabric of the story he weaves in class.

Sometimes the artist's themselves are the subject of discussion, as with one of the explorers who discovered Mayan ruins in the jungles of Central America in 1839, Frederick Catherwood. A painter unrivaled in his day for depicting the lost worlds he encountered, fine reproductions of Catherwood's works will be presented alongside Denis' own images taken some 150 years later on the exact same spot and from the same point of view.

Having seen first hand the injustice of the prevailing colonial views of the times, many 19th century explorers returned home to become champions of the people they lived amongst. They had experienced what one great mind of that century summed up as this,

"Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime."
Mark Twain

ARCHAEOLOGY



Denis has worked on many archeological digs photographing finds and the sites themselves as well as getting his hands dirty in the trenches. He'll discuss those experiences, the importance of this science in decoding clues from the past and how a relatively recent excavation in India has contributed to validating the account made by Marco Polo of a certain Rudrama Devi, the Queen of Warangal.

ARCHITECTURAL MONUMENTS



The twelfth and thirteen centuries saw an explosion of architectural creativity all over the world. In India there are carved stone monuments by the Chola and Hoysala Empires, and in Angkor Wat and Bagan (Southeast Asia) there are the largest temple complexes on the planet. In Turkey and Persia we have the striking mosques and minarets of the Seljuks and of course the great Christian Gothic cathedrals of Europe. In China, Polo describes the city of Hangzhou as "*the city of heaven*" with thousands of houses, bridges, public baths and streets paved in brick and stone.

Why is this all happening during this time period? What is driving these monuments to be built? Who is paying for them? Where is the labor coming from? How does modern architecture compare? What drives the construction of the great works of today?

THE ROLE OF WOMEN & GIRLS

Then And Now



In many places Marco visited, women and girls had more rights in his day than they do now. In others, the reverse is true. We take a detailed look at specific passages from Polo's book that illustrate both these points and continue the discussion on the future of women and girls in developing and developed countries.

rites of passage

coming of age



Coming of age is a young person's transition from childhood to adulthood. The age at which this takes place varies in societies, as does the nature of the transition. It can be a simple legal convention or can be part of a ritual, as practiced by many cultures. In some, such a change is associated with puberty and early adolescence, ages 12-14, in others, commonly at ages 16-21. In either case, many cultures retain ceremonies to confirm the coming of age, and significant benefits come with the change or rite of passage.

We will take a look at the various rites along Polo's path and how Marco Polo himself was only 16 or 17 years old when left for China, making his adventure, in a real sense, one of the greatest coming of age stories ever told.

THE WAKHAN CORRIDOR



The Wakhan Corridor in far northeastern Afghanistan forms a land link or "corridor" that leads into China. Roughly 140 miles long and in some places only a few miles wide, it naturally divides the Pamir Mountains to the north and the Hindu Kush Range to the south. During the *Great Game*, Britain and Russia agreed that the narrow strip would be the buffer between the two Empires and to this day, it can only be traversed on foot or by horse or camel caravan. "What are the most magical places on Marco Polo's path?" students often ask. This module and the next will answer that question.

TAKLAMAKAN- *Land Of No Return*



"When a man is riding through this desert at night, sometimes he hears spirit voices talking to him as if they were his companions, sometimes even calling him by name...these voices lure him away from the path so that he never finds it again."

As was true for Marco as he crossed this desert, was true for Denis today. Only Polo didn't know it was actually the sands' silica or glass crystals, clashing together in high winds that created the eerie, otherworldly voices. Marco's tale of spirits, calling one's name, could be the origin of the "Marco...Polo" game kids play in a pool.

The local Uighurs still believe the desert is haunted. Perhaps they had seen the ghostly remains of the people who had settled here over 3000 years ago, Indo-Europeans, six feet tall with red and blonde hair and thousands of miles away from their homelands. Their bodies, naturally mummified in the arid sands, have rewritten the history of human migration and are a striking testament to the antiquity of the fabled Silk Road.

MARCO POLO AS THE FIRST GLOBAL CITIZEN



Polo's relevance comes from the fact that unlike a lot of other famous seafarers and voyagers the purpose of his journey was not to colonize and subjugate people. In fact, he became a vehicle for Europe's understanding of civilizations much older and more prosperous than theirs. Along the way, he wrote of the grandeur and benevolence of the Eastern kings and assimilated himself in the culture of the local people. And, most importantly, he considered it his duty to return to his birthplace and share his experience with others.

Marco Polo was truly one of world's first global citizens. In an increasingly divided world, separated by boundaries, actual and presumed, his story forces us to look back and redefine globalization, to encompass not only trade and politics, but also human contact and cross cultural communication.

- What does it mean to be a global citizen?
- How does being a global citizen reflect the reality of your future?
- Why is it critical for you to hone advanced geopolitical skills and knowledge?
- Why does a solid understanding of world geography and how it shapes international relations help you become a global citizen?

MASTERY

Pursuing mastery requires a sacrifice. Mastery is not easy. It is not simple or quick or painless. Even so, as you earn your way through effort and dedication, mastery will more than pay you back in discovery, fulfillment, and growth.

This final module is a candid discussion on what it takes to master your field, how to overcome obstacles that stand in your path and the commitment to succeed.

"We have not even to risk the adventure alone, for the heroes of all time have gone before us - the labyrinth is thoroughly known. We have only to follow the thread of the hero path. And where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god; where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves; where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence. And where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world."

Joseph Campbell