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Marquette and Joliet: Frenchmen Exploring North America

The first Europeans to go into the middle of the United States were Frenchmen. The French had settled in Canada. They sent missionaries to preach to the Native Americans in the west. They also sent traders to buy furs from the Native Americans.

French

The Frenchmen heard the Native Americans, or Indians, talk about a great river in the west. But no Frenchman had ever gone far enough to see the Mississippi River.

Marquette was a priest. Joliet was a trader. In 1672, these two men

were sent to find the great river that the Native Americans talked about.

Mississippi River

1. When were Marquette and Joliet sent to find the Mississippi River?

Marquette and Joliet traveled in two birch canoes. They took five men to paddle the canoes. They took some smoked meat to eat on the way. They also took some Indian corn. They had trinkets to trade to the Indians.

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Hatchets, and beads, and bits of cloth were the money they used to pay the Indians for what they wanted.

canoe

The friendly Indians in Wisconsin tried to persuade them not to go. They told them that the Indians on the great river would kill them.

Wisconsin

The friendly Indians also told them that there was a demon in one part of the river. They said that this demon roared so loud that he could be heard a long way off. They said that the demon would draw the travelers down into the water. Then they told

about great monsters that ate up men and their canoes.

But Marquette and the men with him thought they would risk the journey. They would not turn back for fear of the demon or the monsters.

The two little canoes went down the Wisconsin River. After some days, they came to the Mississippi River. More than a hundred years before, the Spaniards had seen the lower part of this river. But no European had ever seen this part of the great river. Marquette did not know that any European had ever seen any part of the Mississippi.

The two little canoes now turned their bows down the river. Sometimes they saw great herds of buffalo. Some of these came to the bank of the river to look at the men in the canoes. The buffalo had long, shaggy manes, which hung down over their eyes.

For two weeks the travelers paddled down the river. In all this time, they did not see any Indians. After they had gone hundreds of miles in this way, they came to a place

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where they saw tracks in the mud. It was in what is now the state of Iowa.

Marquette and Joliet left the men in their canoes, and followed the tracks. After walking two hours, they came to an Indian village. The Frenchmen came near enough to hear the Indians talking. The Indians did not see them.

Joliet and Marquette did not know whether the Indians would kill them or not. They said a short prayer. Then they stood out in full view, and gave a loud shout.

Native Americans

The Indians came out of their tents like bees. They stared at the strangers. Then four Indians came toward them. These Indians carried a peace pipe. They held this up toward the sun. This meant that they were friendly.

The Indians now offered the peace pipe to the Frenchmen. The Frenchmen took it, and smoked with the Indians. This was the Indian way of saying, "We are friends."

Marquette asked the Indians what tribe they belonged to.

They told him that they were of the tribe called the Illinois.

They took Joliet and Marquette into their village. They came to the door of a large wigwam. A chief stood in the door. He shaded his eyes with both hands, as if the sun were shining in his face. Then he made a little speech.

He said, "Frenchmen, how bright the sun shines when you come to see us! We are all waiting for you. You shall now come into our houses in peace."

The Illinois Indians made a feast for their new friends. First they had mush of corn meal, with fat meat in it. One of the Indians fed the Frenchmen as though they were babies. He put mush into their mouths with a large spoon.

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Then came some fish. The Indian that fed the visitors picked out the bones with his fingers. Then he put the pieces of fish into their mouths. After they had some roasted dog. The Frenchmen did not like this. Last, they were fed with buffalo meat.

The next morning, six hundred Indians went to the canoes to tell the Frenchmen goodbye. They gave Marquette a young Indian slave. And they gave him a peace pipe to carry with him.

2. Name three foods that were eaten by the Frenchmen and the Illinois Indians.

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When Marquette and his men left the Illinois, they went on down the

river. The friendly Illinois had told them that the Indians they would see were bad, and that they would kill anyone who came into their country.

The Frenchmen had heard before this that there were demons and monsters in the river. One day they saw some high rocks with pictures painted on them. The ugly pictures made them think of these monsters. They were painted in red, black, and green colors. They were pictures of two Indian demons or gods.

Each one of these monsters was about the size of a calf. They had horns as long as those of a deer. Their eyes were red. Their faces were like a man's, but they were ugly and frightful. They had beards like a tiger's. Their bodies were covered with scales like those on a fish. Their long tails were wound round their bodies, and over their heads, and down between their legs. The end of each tail was like that of a fish.

The Indians prayed to these ugly gods when they passed in their canoes. Even Marquette and his men were a little frightened when they saw

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such pictures in a place so lonely. The Frenchmen went down the river about twelve hundred miles. Sometimes the Indians tried to kill them, but by

showing the peace pipe they made friends. At last they turned back. Joliet went to Canada. Marquette preached to the Indians in the west till he died.



3. On the map above, trace the **Missouri River** and the **Mississippi River**.

4. Marquette and Joliet were _____ from Canada.

- a. Americans
- b. Englishmen

- c. Frenchmen
- d. Indians

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5. Label each state on the map above: (1) Minnesota, (2) Wisconsin, (3) Iowa, (4) Illinois, (5) Missouri.

6. What do you find most interesting about Marquette and Joliet's explorations?
