

Matthew Henson

Matthew Henson was an American pioneer who explored the Arctic. Although Matthew was a member of the party who are thought to have been the first people to reach the North Pole, many reports after the event only spoke about the lead explorer, Robert Peary. It wasn't until many years later that Matthew's achievements were also celebrated.



Early Life

Matthew Alexander Henson was born on 8th August 1866 in the USA. When he was 12, Matthew got a job working as a cabin boy on a ship named 'Katie Hines'. On the ship, Matthew was looked after by someone named Captain Childs. Many people believe that he taught Matthew how to read and write, as well as how to work on a ship. Matthew travelled to many different countries while working on the ship.



When he finished working on the ship, Matthew started working in a shop. An explorer called Robert Peary visited the shop on his way back from Greenland and he spoke with Matthew. He was impressed by Matthew's experience with travelling and working on a ship and he offered him a job.

At the time, Robert was making maps of jungles and rainforests. Together, they spent two years exploring Central America. After this, Robert asked Matthew to explore the Arctic with him.

Reaching the North Pole

While exploring the Arctic, Matthew worked with the Inuit who lived in the harsh conditions. They taught him how to train dogs, how to build sleds and how to make igloos using snow. People believe that Matthew trained other people in these skills when they joined him and Robert Peary in their attempt to reach the North Pole.

After seven failed attempts to reach the North Pole, the group started to prepare to try for an eighth time. The Arctic is not an easy place to explore and the team experienced many challenges, such as freezing temperatures and cracking ice.

By the end of the journey, the team of explorers was made up of six people. These were Matthew Henson, Robert Peary and four Inuit men named Ooqueah, Ootah, Egingwah and Seegloo. On 6th April 1909, they arrived at what they believed to be the North Pole. Matthew said that he was the first ever person to reach the North Pole because he was walking at the front of the team when they reached their destination.



In 1906, Robert Peary was given a special medal for going farther north than any other human. This was something that Matthew was also a part of. It was felt that Matthew wasn't given the award at the time because he was Black. Nearly 100 years later, Matthew's achievements were also celebrated and he was named as a winner.

Questions

1. In which country was Matthew born? Tick one.

- England
- the USA
- Greenland
- the North Pole

2. What did Matthew **not** do while working as a cabin boy on a ship? Tick one.

- learn how to read and write
- learn how to work on a ship
- travel to many different countries
- meet Robert Peary

3. Number the events from 1-4 to show the order that they happened in.

- Matthew had seven failed attempts to reach the North Pole.
- Matthew began working in a shop.
- Matthew reached what he believed to be the North Pole.
- Matthew got a job working as a cabin boy.

4. Tick one answer to show the missing part of the sentence.

Many people believe that _____ taught Matthew how to read and write.

- Captain Childs
- Ooqueah
- Egingwah
- Robert Peary

5. What was 'Katie Hines'?

6. **While exploring the Arctic, Matthew worked with the Inuit who lived in the harsh conditions.**

Explain what the word **harsh** means in this sentence.

7. Explain why someone would need to be prepared before exploring the Arctic.

8. Summarise what you have learnt about Matthew Henson using 20 words or fewer.
