

**NAVIGATORS-CAUGHT IN THE “WEB”**  
**OF SOCIAL MEDIA**  
**For 4th thru 6th Graders**

(Live Version- Cyberbullying and Online Dangers)  
by Michele Phillips - © 2022 RESPECT  
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**Character Breakdown -**

**Kiara** - Middle School student, well-intentioned but easily distracted. A dreamer. Has to provide her assigned portion (Marco Polo) of a report on Famous Navigators. (The name KIARA in origin is Irish, Italian, Swahili—in Swahili, it means princess)

**Inez** - Her best friend, goes to the same school but not in the same class. Very practical. Not responsible for the report but is trying to help Kiara. (Popular Spanish & Portuguese name meaning Agnes. 68.8% of Caucasians name their offspring Inez/Ines)

**Marco Polo** - (1254 - 1324), Venetian merchant and adventurer who traveled from Europe to Asia in 1271–95, remaining in China for 17 of those years, and whose story (Il Milioni, “The Million”), is a classic of travel literature.

*(Inez is focused on her tablet, looking up facts. Kiara is thumbing through texts and messages on her phone)*

KIARA

Don't you think he's cute?

INEZ (EE-nehz)

*(Not really listening)* Who? Marco Polo? No idea ...

KIARA

NO! Min-Jun. He's the lead singer of that new group I like. Ya' know, Jebal (Jay-bile) His name, Min-Jun, means quick, gentle and handsome.

INEZ

How do you know that?

KIARA

I looked it up.

INEZ

I don't want to sound like your crabby big brother, James, but how come you haven't been looking up anything you need for this report about Famous Navigators--(*Reminding her*) namely Marco Polo ?

KIARA

(*Defensive*) I have been.

INEZ

Like what?

KIARA

(*Pretending to think hard*) Welllllll, Marco Polo was Italian. I think. And he lived . . . a really, REALLY long time ago. Right?

INEZ

Right! Well, I guess we're done. See ya' later. I'm outta here. (Starts to pack up)

KIARA

No, wait, c'mon. I was kidding. Don't leave. What have we found out so far?

INEZ

We?

KIARA

OK, you, I mean.

INEZ

You're right. He was Italian, born in Venice in 1254 on September 15th.

KIARA

Venice. That's the city where the streets are full of water . . .

INEZ

They're called canals.

KIARA

And the only way to get around is by boat . . .

INEZ

They're called Gondolas.

KIARA

OK! Gondolas. Whatever. But that's the place, right?

INEZ

Right. I found out it's a city that's amazingly beautiful, built on a bunch of islands—118 of them. And there are 403 bridges.

KIARA

Those are some facts I **didn't** know—why would they do that?

INEZ

What, you mean build all their buildings on islands? Because just before 400 BC they were being invaded all the time by Huns and Visigoths, and Vandals who were fierce tribes of invaders indigenous to countries east of Europe. (Hey, that must be where the word Vandal comes from. ) And those islands gave the Venetians some protection. That was a few hundred years before Marco Polo was born.

KIARA

Well, if the Huns and those guys were done invading before Marco Polo was even born, why'd he feel like he had to leave home and go navigating all over the place. I would think Venice was interesting enough—especially if, when you stepped out on the street, you might drown. I would have just stayed home and gone for Gondola rides all day.

INEZ

You mean if someone gave you the chance to visit another country you wouldn't go?

KIARA

Depends. I guess as long as I didn't need to stay too many days, like maybe a week cause I have drill team practice, ya' know. And as long as it was a non-stop flight. And we flew first class and we didn't have to change planes. And they had wifi and great cell service once we got there. **And** a powdery, white sandy beach. I **guess** I would go someplace new. Even if it was pretty far away, like Florida.

INEZ

Good thing nobody had to depend on you to figure out how to get to China.

KIARA

C'mon, Marco Polo's dad and uncle went there before he was born. Because of the Silk Road they already knew how to get there.

INEZ

The Silk Road?

KIARA

Yeah. It wasn't really a road, exactly, but it was a bunch of trade routes merchants like the Polo's used to get to Asia.

INEZ

Hey, you **did** do some research.

KIARA

Well, I watched a bunch of Youtube videos, so now I'm kind of an expert.

INEZ

I LOVE Youtube, especially *Dieter and Pita*—they are so cool. They know just about everything about everything.

KIARA

Even Marco Polo?

INEZ

NO, but they know all that other stuff I want to know about. Like staying in shape. And stuff.

KIARA

OK. Back to Marco Polo, Famous Navigator!

INEZ

I feel like **we're** navigators because we're finding our way around the computer and figuring out what life was like for travelers in another century, namely the 13th. A trip to China from Italy was a feat I don't even think we can imagine today— It was a miracle that they stayed alive long enough to get there and back.

KIARA

Only I don't think it was called China back then.

INEZ

No, it was called Cathay.

KIARA

(*Incredulous*) Cathy! That doesn't sound right. Like, what did they call India, Tiffany?

INEZ

Not Cathy—Cath-AY.

KIARA

Oh (*Exaggerating*) Cath-AY.

INEZ

It took Marco Polo, his dad and Uncle four years to get to Cathay.

KIARA

Four years. Forget it. No way would I want to go on THAT trip.

INEZ

You **really** wouldn't have liked it—no planes, trains, cars, buses, taxi's, Ubers. No paved highways. Barely even any dirt roads, period. Lots of mountain ranges and large bodies of water to cross. Then you would have had to ride horses or camels or walk. And you'd be sleeping outside in every kind of weather. Plus, you wouldn't have understood what anybody was saying.

KIARA

Yuck!

INEZ

But if Marco Polo and his dad and Uncle hadn't made all of those sacrifices we wouldn't have paper, or fireworks or gunpowder, to name just a few. There are so many interesting facts about this story.

KIARA

Yeah, but I'm the one that has to make it all fit into a report.

INEZ

I'll help you.

MARCO POLO

As will I.

KIARA

(*They are startled*) Excuse me? Who are you?

MP

Marco Polo, at your service. Buon Giorno.

INEZ

That's Italian, right?

MP

Si.

KIARA

What does it mean?

MP

Good day!

INEZ

Good day to you, too. I'm Inez and this is my best friend Kiara. But how did you get here?

MP

Signorina, I do not know. By some strange magic.

KIARA

I know! The computer.

INEZ

Welcome to the 21st Century, Mr. Polo!

KIARA

Will you really help me with my report? I mean, it **is** about **you**.

MP

Certamente (Chair-ta-mentay)

KIARA

And by the way, we've played your game a million times.

MP

My game?

INEZ

Yeah, you know—MARCO POLO. (*Explaining more because he's really not getting it*) The game you usually play in a swimming pool? It's like Blind Man's Bluff. One person is "it." They're Marco Polo. They keep their eyes closed and yell out "Marco" and the other people in the game yell out "Polo" and the person 's who's it tries to catch them. The nice thing is if you're in a swimming pool, the person who's "it" doesn't fall or bump into things—usually.

KIARA

There aren't many cities like Venice. When we want to cool off or play games or exercise, we swim – in a pool—usually.

MP

Well, when your streets are made of water you learn to swim to preserve life only—not to play games.

INEZ

Too bad. Marco Polo is a fun game. Well, never mind that now, will you tell us what it was like to be a famous Navigator?

MP

I don't know how famous I was—probably more infamous. I had a difficult time getting people to believe even half of what I said we saw on our travels.

INEZ

We have that problem in our century. It means we have to really find out as many real facts as possible before we can say that we know the truth of a news story or any story we hear. We need to investigate them so we aren't making wrong decisions or thinking things are true when they're not. Mr. Polo, Modern experts, historians and anthro . . . anthro. . .

KIARA

Pologists.

INEZ

Anthropologists believe you could not have been able to recall so much detail if you hadn't experienced those sights and sounds yourself.

MP

This is truth? Fantastico! It is so good to know after hearing only doubt in the voices of my countrymen. It took us so long to get to Cathay . . .

KIARA

Four years, right?

MP

Yes, and because it was such a difficult trip, we were in no hurry to return . . .

INEZ

So you stayed there for 17 years!

MP

Well, yes, how did you know . . .?

KIARA

It was in the court of Kublai Kahn, the Emperor of China. He was the son of Genghis Kahn, a fierce ruler, but Kublai Kahn was much more civilized than his father and welcomed your family to his court. You all learned the Chinese language and went on many adventures at his request.

MP

Indeed, but how . . .

INEZ

In the end, he did not want you to leave. So in order for him to allow you to return to Venice, he only agreed if for you to accompanied a Chinese Princess, a member of his Royal Family, to travel safely to Persia. Was she beautiful?

KIARA

Did you fall in love with her?

MP

Signorinas, you ask many questions.

INEZ

How else will we find out the really important facts about your trip?

MP

Don't you want to know more about Cathay and the strange and fascinating cultural customs? Their great wealth? How practical the empire's paper money was (it meant that we didn't have to carry around heavy sacks of gold and silver coins); How they burned charcoal, not wood for heat? The invention of gunpowder? And porcelain? Oh, and the castle, Xanadu, "the greatest and most exquisite palace that ever was!"

INEZ

Yes, of course we want to know all that . . .

KIARA

But tell us more about the Princess.

MP

*(Huge sigh, envisioning her)* She was *molta bella*—that means very beautiful. She had long hair, like black silk, hazel eyes and flawless skin—*bellissima*! We only saw her from afar—she was royalty, closely guarded, and we were not allowed to speak with her. *(They start to ask more questions but he holds up his hand for silence)*. Per favore—allow me to ask **you** questions. What is this device? It is . . . intriguing!



KIARA

It's a tablet (*He looks at them quizzically—she keeps going*) Like a computer.

MP

A mathematician?

INEZ

Kind of—but not really. It's how we researched all those facts about your trip. Let's ask it a question you think we won't know anything about?

MP

Agreed—(*Thinking*) You will like this question—What was the name of the Princess we escorted to Persia.

INEZ

I'll type it in—What was the name of the Princess the Polo's escorted to Persia. (*Enters it, then looks up when it's answered*) I'm not sure exactly how to pronounce this, but is **Princess Cocochin** the answer?

MP

In-cra-**dee**-bilay! That IS the right answer. (*Indicating the tablet*) So, I may bring this amazing artifact back to Venice with me, yes? After you show me how it operates, obviously. Finally, my connazionali (cone-nas-eon-alee), my countryman, will have to believe me when I show them this marvel.

KIARA

I'm so sorry, but no. This tablet belongs to our family. And electricity hasn't been invented yet in your century so you could never re-charge it. But Mr. Polo, a warning—there are a lot of things that can happen with electronic devices that can be dangerous for you.

MP

(*Scoffing*) Pazzo! (Pots-oh) This little thing?

INEZ

She's right, Mr. Polo—Look at this alert that just popped up on my screen from the internet. (*Reading it*) It says I have a phone message and I can click on the link and hear it.

KIARA

That's not how we usually get messages on our cells. (*She holds up her cell but he is clueless about what it is—he shrugs*) Usually your phone just dings.

MP

Phone? Dings? Cell? Non Capisco (Non-**kapees**-co) I do not understand

INEZ

The message doesn't say much about it, but it's never a good idea to just click on a link until you take the time to stop and think about it first. Where did this link come from? Where will it take me? It could mean infecting your computer with a virus . . .

MP

Do you mean an illness—a machine with an ailment?

KIARA

Not an illness like one that infects humans—but one that can ruin the inside workings of your computer or tablet. Make it impossible for it to function. Or you might wind up on an inappropriate website or one that could freeze up your computer.

Or maybe that link will allow an identity thief a chance to steal your personal information. If your identity is stolen online it could mean someone

1. Could steal money from your bank account
2. Apply for credit cards in your name and buy stuff with them
3. Cyber bully or harass someone while pretending to be you
4. Create false identification documents
5. Apply to a bank for a car or house loan that you would have to pay for
6. Get a driver's license or a job using your name.

MP

Mi scusi . . . I do not understand these words.

KIARA

OK, it's a lot like following a trail you're not familiar with – will this pathway end up getting me lost, cold and starving? Or will I meet up with an unfriendly group of unfamiliar people who I can't communicate with? Or maybe a band of wild animals I don't recognize (didn't I read that when you first saw a rhinoceros you thought it was a unicorn?) **Or** will there be no water once I get there?

MP

I begin to see—a little.

INEZ

I'm going to use the email address to figure out whether this phone thing is real. Come see, Mr Polo. We press here and hold . It will show me who it's really from. (*She does so*) It's really from some guy named Jeff. I can't trust it, so I'm going to delete it. Kiara, hey, you're getting a message from Miah.

KIARA

*(To Marco Polo)* Miah is a friend from school. What's she have to say?

INEZ

*(Reading it)* It looks like it's addressed to the group doing these reports on Famous Navigators. There's a bunch of people. Are you sure you want me to read it?

KIARA

Sure – Miah is a good friend.

INEZ

Here goes. "Is anybody else mad that Kiara was assigned to our group. She hasn't turned anything in yet. She's so unreliable."

KIARA

*(Laughing it off)* She's teasing. My deadline isn't 'til next Wednesday.

INEZ

Well, here's another one from Jerome. "What do you expect? She never keeps her promises." And here's another one from Jesse. "Why'd we have to get stuck with Kiara? Might as well face it, Group, our grade is doomed." Um, do you know a Valerie?

KIARA

No.

INEZ

She just said you have ADHD and that's why you never get anything in on time.

KIARA

I don't even know her. And I don't have ADHD! And if I NEVER get anything in on time, how come I have an A- in this class so far? *(Very upset)* Why are they saying all this mean stuff. OK, I admit it– I'm a procrastinator and maybe it takes me a while to get on the ball but I always get it done by the deadline. I am NOT a promise breaker. Is there more?

INEZ

Somebody named Jerusha wants the group to report you to Mrs. Hobbs.

MP

You both seem very agitato–agitated. May I be of assistance?

KIARA

Thank you, no. Excuse me, Mr. Polo—I've gotta call my mom, now!

INEZ

*(To Marco Polo)* We'll explain in a few moments.

KIARA

*(Takes out her phone and punches in the speed dial #.)* Mom, hi. I know. *(Knows she's not supposed to call unless it's an emergency)* It IS an emergency. Ok—*(Takes a deep breath)* Ya'know my Navigator's Report Group? Well my deadline to hand over my part is next Wednesday—but Miah's got everybody worked-up because she thinks I don't have anything to hand over yet . . . I don't—but we're working on it right now . . . Yes, Miah is supposed to be my friend . . . I don't know what the problem is with her . . . I could post a ton of really mean things about her right now. All of it true—and she sure wouldn't be too happy.

INEZ

Hey wait—that's maybe not such a good idea. It could backfire and **you** might get in trouble instead.

KIARA

I know—but they're all saying such nasty stuff. And none of it is true. Well, most of it isn't true, anyway. Excuse me for a sec . . . *(Holding phone up to her ear and listening)* I could do that. *(To Inez)* My Mom says I should try to find out what's going on with Miah— from Miah. Talk face to face.

INEZ

I think that's a good idea. Maybe something bad is happening in her life right now. My dad says it's better not to judge or retaliate—just stand your ground and always tell the truth so that people don't think you started the whole thing.

KIARA

*(Putting the phone back up to her ear.)* Ok. *(To Inez)* Can you do a screenshot of all these messages and save them?

INEZ

I already did.

MP

*(To Inez)* So is now the moment you can explain what is going on? I do not understand.

INEZ

Mr. Polo, this group is doing what we call Cyber Bullying, but we don't have any idea why. They are sending messages to our schoolmates saying that Kiara isn't doing a good job on the Navigator's report, (the one about you) even though her deadline to hand in her work isn't until next week. It's pretty unfair of them, because these messages are going to many, not just a few students, making her seem like a poor study partner—one you don't want to get stuck with.

KIARA

People sure can be cruel. *(To Inez)* Thanks, Inez, for the screenshot—that will help a lot.. *(With phone back up to her ear, listening)* What, no, wait! *(Alarmed)* Mom, I don't want you to go to the principal. Can I just show these messages to my teacher tomorrow? Then if nothing gets done, I guess that's when we can both go to the principal—will that work? Can you take me to school really early so I can tell my side of the story? . . . Thanks, Mom. *(She hangs up)*

INEZ

Kiara, here's a message from Nate. Is he even in your report group?

KIARA

No! But he's mad at me about something else. What's **he** saying?

INEZ

That any promise you make isn't worth anything. That nobody can rely on you. Why is he mad at you?

KIARA

Last week I promised to help him with his math homework, which I did--but all he wanted were the right answers. He wasn't even trying to figure anything out for himself. I was showing him how to do it on his own but he just wanted **me** to do all the work so he could go shoot hoops.

MP

Hoops—are they small animals that you shoot? You know, the Chinese invented gunpowder.

KIARA AND INEZ

*(In unison, as they exchange a look)* We know.

INEZ

Hoops is another game we play, Mr Polo, called Basketball—with a ball about like this *(She demonstrates the size)*

MP

There is so much to learn about the 21st Century.

INEZ

I'm sorry, Mr. Polo. We didn't mean to ignore you for a bit there. But this situation is exactly what we were talking about when we said there can be pitfalls and dangers when you use technology and media.

MP

*(To Kiara)* I understand your pain. It was how I felt when it seemed no one would believe what I had experienced in the Orient. They all thought I was telling tall tales.

KIARA

Thank you, Mr. Polo. I appreciate that. Inez, are there any more of those creepy messages?

INEZ

Not for you. But now **I'm** getting a message on my phone. *(She is surprised by the call)* Who's Snapchatting me? We sure don't need this right now. *(She opens the message and is taken aback)* It's Mr. Gardiner! Why would **he** be trying to get in touch with me? *(Very confused about receiving a "text" from an adult)*

KIARA

Well, he WAS our soccer coach. And he **is** Brian's dad.

INEZ

Yeah, but Brian's "*too cool for school*" now. He never talks to us anymore. And Mr. Gardiner hasn't been our coach for *(Counting them up)* . . . three years. This is so strange.

MP

Who is this man you speak of?

KIARA

He's the father of a schoolmate. And he was our soccer coach. Soccer is a game played with two teams, two goal posts and one ball. You can't use your hands but you try to get the ball away from the opposing team and kick it into your team's goal to make points.

MP

I have seen a game like that played in Cathay and in other parts of Italy. Venice, though, would not be a good location for it.

INEZ

No way. For Water Polo, maybe.

MP

Is it strange to have a parent contact you?

INEZ

Yes, very strange.

KIARA

What else is he saying

INEZ

That I shouldn't be weirded out because I've known him since Brian and I were in Kindergarten. And he was our favorite soccer coach.

KIARA

Um . . . not mine. He was too crabby.

INEZ

Now he's telling me he spoke to my mom at the grocery store the other day and she told him about me having trouble with my game.

KIARA

You didn't tell **me** that. I'm supposed to be your best friend.

INEZ

You are! I'm sorry. I'm just embarrassed about it. You know I'm on this new team and I keep making these dumb moves on the field. We've been losing points every game, so nobody seems to like me much.

MP

What does this man want of you?

INEZ

He says he wants to help me improve my skills.

KIARA

How's he gonna do that?

INEZ

*(Looking at the phone and reading)* Um, by meeting him after school at the soccer field. Wait, no, now he's saying that he'll pick me up after school and take me there. He's says he's already talked it over with my mom.

MP

Scusi, Signorina but it does not sound like a good plan. Who can best help you with this?

KIARA

You gotta call your mom!

INEZ

Yeah, I'd better. *(She takes out her phone and enters the number, then listens, frustrated)*. She's in a meeting. I guess I have to leave a message. Mom, did you talk to Mr. Gardiner and tell him to talk to me? Can you please call me back asap? Thanks. Ugh, I can't get an immediate answer. *(She looks back at her phone)* Now he's saying he's sorry about my teammates not liking me. That someone as pretty as me should have lots of friends.

KIARA

*(Indignant)* You **do** have lots of friends.

INEZ

This is just getting worse. He has a gift for me—he says it's no big deal, just a little ring he found at a swap meet and thought of me. It's my birthstone—emerald.

MP

Is emerald your birthstone?

KIARA

Yes it is—her birthday's in May.

He's saying I need to be around people who understand me and appreciate my abilities. **Like him**. That once we work together, I'll have more confidence, I'll play better and I'll realize how great I look, on and off the field.

MP

I do not know this man but from what he is saying, I do not find him trustworthy.

INEZ

You're right Mr. Polo—I wish my Mom would call. Now he's saying I shouldn't tell my parents about meeting with him for soccer practice—instead we should surprise them with how much my game's improved after I've worked with him for a few weeks.



MP

I do not like the sound of that.

KIARA

Me either.

INEZ

Wait, this might be her. *(It is. Answers)* Mom, hey, did you talk to Mr. Gardiner at the store the other night about getting me help with my game? . . . Well, he didn't wait a few days for you to talk it over with me—he's texting me right now about it. Wants to pick me up after school tomorrow . . . Mom, I know you were just trying to help. Yes, I've been miserable on this new team. Hold on, can I just send you these texts? . . . *(Listening as her Mom reads them)* My Mom is freaking out, kind of a lot. *(Explaining to Marco Polo)* She's a social worker. *(He smiles and nods like he knows what she's talking about. Then he looks at Kiara like he hasn't got the foggiest).*

KIARA

*(Explaining)* Because of her work, she knows a lot about situations like this.

MP

Of course, I do not know him but it seems his man needs help of some sort, yes?

KIARA

Yes. It's scary that it's someone we know and used to trust. I feel sorry for his son, Brian

INEZ

*(Still listening on the phone)* Both my parents are talking to each other now. They're looking into parental safeguards for cell phones which will hopefully make me feel more protected.

MP

I think perhaps, also, it is a good thing that your friend and I were here, was it not?

INEZ

Yes, it was. You helped me stay calm, not jump into the whole thing feet first because it seemed like such a nice offer. You also helped me to see that the situation could easily have become dangerous, right?

KIARA

It's a good thing we could contact your parents and get help.

INEZ

I am really appreciative, Mr. Polo and Kiara. Thank you.

KIARA

Now that that's under control for the moment, I'm gonna completely change the subject. So, Mr. Polo (or should we say Signore Polo) even though you don't really understand the language of electronics, is it possible you learned anything helpful about Internet safety?

MP

Si. It seems that in these dangerous situations that arose, you and your amica knew that something wasn't right. On our trek to Cathay we always had to rely on instincts because we encountered so many unfamiliar situations. You must do the same with this device. When you run into possible danger you must listen to those instinctive feelings, then take the next step.

INEZ

Yeah! If kids get a funny feeling about something that's happening online, they should stop and think "what could happen?" before acting on anything.

MP

That is always a good plan in life. But there is one more thing to consider, I think.

KIARA

Asking for help from a trusted adult? That would definitely be the right thing to do.

MP

Corretta. That is correct. Get help from a trustworthy adult, as you are doing. From what I observed, those were the right answers to your questions?

INEZ

Yes, Mr. Polo. Great job, but don't you think we could all use a break from this computer stuff? Sometimes we need to remember to turn them off and go do something else that's energetic or fun when we get too involved. We all need time away from these "intriguing devices," as you call them—you know, cells and tablets and computers and video games.

KIARA

For sure. Let's break out the Splash Fizz Lemonade and Oreo's and take em' out on the porch.

INEZ

Deal! C'mon, Mr. Polo—you're in for a total taste treat—one you could never have imagined in 1295.

MP

Oho, you think we did not have desserts in the 13th Century?

INEZ

Well, you probably had desserts—but you didn't have Oreos!

*(They exit ad libbing)*