

# Matthew Henson

Matthew Henson was an American explorer. He was a member of the group who are thought to have been the first people to ever reach the North Pole. At the time, lots of people only spoke about the group's leader, Robert Peary. It wasn't until many years later that people also celebrated Matthew's success.



## Early Life

Matthew Alexander Henson was born on 8<sup>th</sup> August 1866. He started working on a ship named 'Katie Hines' when he was 12 years old. Matthew travelled to many different countries on the ship and he learnt lots of new skills.



Later, Matthew worked in a shop. An explorer called Robert Peary visited the shop and spoke to Matthew. He was impressed by everything that Matthew had done and he offered him a job.

Matthew and Robert explored jungles and rainforests in Central America together. After this, Robert asked Matthew to explore the Arctic with him.

## Journey to the North Pole

Matthew worked with the Inuit who lived in the Arctic. They taught him how to build sleds and how to make igloos out of the snow. People think that Matthew taught other people these skills when they joined him on a journey.

Matthew and Robert wanted to be the first people to reach the North Pole. They failed seven times before trying for a final time. The Arctic is not an easy place to explore and the team faced many challenges, such as extremely cold weather and cracking ice.

On 6<sup>th</sup> April 1909, Matthew and five other people made it to what they thought was the North Pole. The five others were Robert Peary and four Inuit men named Ooqueah, Ootah, Egingwah and Seegloo. Matthew said that he was walking at the front of the team so he thinks that he was the first person to ever reach the North Pole.

In 1906, Robert Peary was given a special medal for a trip that Matthew was also a part of. People think that Matthew wasn't given a medal at the time because he was Black. Nearly 100 years later, Matthew's achievements were also celebrated and he was given the medal.

# Questions

1. What was 'Katie Hines'? Tick one.

- ☐ an award
- ☐ a location
- ☐ an explorer
- ☐ a ship

2. Number the events from 1-4 to show the order that they happened in. The first one has been done for you.

☐ Matthew thought that he was the first person to reach the North Pole.

☒ 1 Matthew worked on a ship.

☐ Matthew and Robert explored jungles and rainforests.

☐ Matthew met an explorer named Robert Peary.

3. Where were the jungles and rainforests that Matthew and Robert explored? Tick one.

- ☐ Europe
- ☐ South America
- ☐ Central America
- ☐ Asia

4. How old was Matthew when he started working on a ship? Tick one.

- ☐ 10
- ☐ 11
- ☐ 12
- ☐ 13

5. When did Matthew and five other people make it to what they thought was the North Pole?

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6. Look at the paragraph beginning **Matthew Alexander Henson was born...**

Find and copy one word that means the same as **went**.

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7. Explain why Matthew deserved to be given a special medal.

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# Answers

1. What was 'Katie Hines'? Tick one.

- ☐ an award
- ☐ a location
- ☐ an explorer
- ☒ **a ship**

2. Number the events from 1-4 to show the order that they happened in. The first one has been done for you.

**4** Matthew thought that he was the first person to reach the North Pole.

**1** Matthew worked on a ship.

**3** Matthew and Robert explored jungles and rainforests.

**2** Matthew met an explorer named Robert Peary.

3. Where were the jungles and rainforests that Matthew and Robert explored? Tick one.

- ☐ Europe
- ☐ South America
- ☒ **Central America**
- ☐ Asia

4. How old was Matthew when he started working on a ship? Tick one.

- ☐ 10
- ☐ 11
- ☒ **12**
- ☐ 13

5. When did Matthew and five other people make it to what they thought was the North Pole?

**On 6<sup>th</sup> April 1909, Matthew and five other people made it to what they thought was the North Pole.**

6. Look at the paragraph beginning **Matthew Alexander Henson was born...**

Find and copy one word that means the same as **went**.  
**travelled**

7. Explain why Matthew deserved to be given a special medal.

**Pupils' own responses, such as: Matthew deserved to be given a special medal because he was also on the trip that Robert Peary was given a special medal for.**

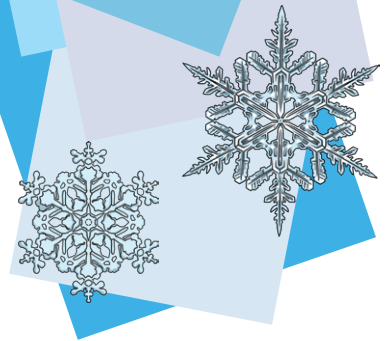
# Matthew Henson

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 8<sup>th</sup> 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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'?

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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.

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

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

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# Answers

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.

- 3** Matthew had seven failed attempts to reach the North Pole.
- 2** Matthew began working in a shop.
- 4** Matthew reached what he believed to be the North Pole.
- 1** 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'?

**'Katie Hines' was the name of the ship that Matthew worked on.**

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.

**Pupils' own responses, such as: In this sentence, the word 'harsh' means difficult.**

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

**Pupils' own responses, such as: Someone would need to be prepared before exploring the Arctic because it's not an easy place to explore. It has freezing temperatures so you would need to have the right type of clothes to keep warm.**



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

**Pupils' own responses, such as: He was an explorer who is thought to be one of the first people to reach the North Pole.**

# Matthew Henson

Matthew Henson was an American explorer who is known for being one of the first people to reach the North Pole. Although Matthew believed that he was the first person to reach the North Pole, many reports after the event only focused on the expedition's leader, Robert Peary. It wasn't until many years later that Matthew's achievements were acknowledged and he was given several awards.



## Early Life

Matthew Alexander Henson was born on 8<sup>th</sup> August 1866 in Maryland, USA. When he was only 12 years old, Matthew got a job working onboard a ship named 'Katie Hines'. Here, he worked as a cabin boy. Captain Childs, who also worked on the ship, looked after Matthew and made sure that he had an education. Many people believe that Captain Childs taught him how to read and write, as well as how to sail a ship. While onboard 'Katie Hines', Matthew travelled to many continents and countries.

When he finished working on the ship, Matthew started to work at a shop in Washington DC. Robert Peary visited the shop on his way back from an expedition in Greenland and he spoke with Matthew. Robert was impressed by Matthew's previous experience with travelling and working on a ship so he offered him a job as his personal assistant.

At the time, Robert was making maps of the jungles in Nicaragua. Together, they spent two years exploring rainforests in Central America. After this, Robert asked Matthew to explore the Arctic with him. This was something that would keep Matthew and Robert working together for the next 18 years.

## Reaching the North Pole

While exploring the Arctic, Matthew worked with the Inuit who lived in the harsh climate. With their help, he learnt how to train dogs to pull sleds, how to build sleds and how to make igloos using snow. It is said that Matthew used his knowledge and skills to train others 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 for their eighth attempt. In 1908, they reached their starting point and began gathering the supplies that they would need. The Arctic is not an easy place to explore and the team experienced many challenges, such as freezing temperatures and cracking ice.

At the end of the expedition, the team was made up of six people. These were Matthew Henson, Robert Peary and four Inuit men named Ooqueah, Ootah, Egingwah and Seegloo. On 6<sup>th</sup> April 1909, the six people reached 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 awarded a special medal for travelling farther north than any other human – an expedition that Matthew accompanied him on. Although Matthew also deserved the award, it was felt that he was overlooked at the time due to the fact that he was Black. Nearly 100 years later, this was acknowledged and Matthew was named as a recipient.

# Questions

1. Why did Matthew believe that he was the first ever person to reach the North Pole? Tick one.
- ☐ he saw it first
  - ☐ he planned the trip
  - ☐ he was walking at the front of the group
  - ☐ he was the only one in the group to reach it

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

- ☐ Robert asked Matthew to explore the Arctic with him.
- ☐ Matthew met Robert Peary in Washington DC.
- ☐ Matthew reached what he believed to be the North Pole.
- ☐ Matthew learnt how to sail a ship.

3. Fill in the missing words.

While exploring the \_\_\_\_\_, Matthew worked  
with the \_\_\_\_\_ who lived in the harsh climate.

4. **In 1906, Robert Peary was awarded a special medal for travelling farther north than any other human – an expedition that Matthew accompanied him on.**

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

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5. Name **two** things that Matthew did aboard 'Katie Hines'.

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6. Summarise Matthew's time in the Arctic using 20 words or fewer.

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7. Using evidence from the text, argue that Matthew is brave.

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8. Matthew reached what he believed to be the North Pole over 100 years ago.  
How do you think the trip would have been different if he was doing it today? Fully explain your answer.

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# Answers

1. Why did Matthew believe that he was the first ever person to reach the North Pole? Tick one.

- ☐ he saw it first  
☐ he planned the trip  
☒ **he was walking at the front of the group**  
☐ he was the only one in the group to reach it

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

- 3** Robert asked Matthew to explore the Arctic with him.  
**2** Matthew met Robert Peary in Washington DC.  
**4** Matthew reached what he believed to be the North Pole.  
**1** Matthew learnt how to sail a ship.

3. Fill in the missing words.

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

4. **In 1906, Robert Peary was awarded a special medal for travelling farther north than any other human – an expedition that Matthew accompanied him on.**

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

**Pupils' own responses, such as: In this sentence, the word accompanied means that Matthew was with Robert Peary.**

5. Name **two** things that Matthew did aboard 'Katie Hines'.

**Accept two of the following: he learnt to read; he learnt to write; he learnt how to sail a ship; he travelled to many continents; he travelled to many countries.**

6. Summarise Matthew's time in the Arctic using 20 words or fewer.

**Pupils' own responses, such as: In the Arctic, Matthew tried to reach the North Pole lots of times, facing freezing temperatures and cracking ice.**

7. Using evidence from the text, argue that Matthew is brave.

**Pupils' own responses, such as: Matthew is brave because the text says that the Arctic is not an easy place to explore yet he spent 18 years of his life exploring it. He also kept trying to reach the North Pole despite being unsuccessful lots of times.**



8. Matthew reached what he believed to be the North Pole over 100 years ago. How do you think the trip would have been different if he was doing it today? Fully explain your answer.

**Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that the trip would be different because we have a lot more technology now. In the text, it says that Matthew learnt how to train dogs to pull sleds but they might use snowmobiles instead today. GPS will probably make it easier to find the North Pole, too.**