Unit 6: expansion

**Directions:** Read each of the passages from the writings of Marco Polo. In each passage Polo describes food, objects, or habits that he observed in China but was unknown to Europeans. Explain what Polo was describing in each passage and how you came to that conclusion.

**Passage One:**

“It is a fact that all over the country of Cathay there is a kind of black stone existing in beds in the mountains, which they dig out and burn like firewood. If you supply the fire with them at night, and see that they are well kindled, you will find them still alight in the morning; and they make such capital fuel that no other is used throughout the country. It is true that they have plenty of wood also, but they do not burn it, because those stones burn better and cost less.”

What are the stones Polo is describing? What clues convinced you?

**Passage Two:**

“When these sheets have been prepared, they are cut up into pieces of different sixes… All these pieces of paper are issued with as much solemnity and authority as if they were of pure gold or silver; and on every piece a variety of officials, whose duty it is, have to write their names, and to put their seals. And when all is prepared duly, the chief officer deputed by the Khan smears the Seal entrusted to him with vermilion, and impresses it on the paper, so that they form the Seal remains printed upon it in red; it is then authentic… and he makes them to pass current universally over all his kingdoms and provinces and territories, and whithersoever his power and sovereignty extends. And nobody, however important he may think himself, dares to refuse them on pain of death. And indeed, everybody takes them readily, for wheresoever a person may go throughout the Great Khan’s dominions he shall find these pieces of paper current, and shall be able to transact all sales and purchases of goods by means of them…”

What are the paper Polo is describing? What clues convinced you?

**Passage Three:**

“Now you must know that from this city of Cambaluc proceed many roads and highways leading to a variety of provinces, one to one province, another to another.... [and] every twenty-five miles

of the journey [there is] a station which they call Yamb, or, as we should say, the “Horse-Post-House.” And at each of those stations... there is a large and handsome building... in which they find all the

rooms furnished with fine beds and all other necessary articles.... At some of these stations, moreover, there shall be posted some four hundred horses standing ready.... at others there shall be two

hundred, according to the requirements, and to what the Emperor has established in each case.... Even...through a roadless tract where neither house nor hostel exists, still there the station-houses have

been established just the same....But they are provided with horses and all the other necessaries just

like those we have described, so that the Emperor’s messengers, come they from what region they may, find everything ready for them.... And in this way the Emperor, who has an immense number of these runners, receives dispatches with news from places ten days’ journey off in one day and night; or, if need be, news from a hundred days off in ten days and nights; and that is no small matter!”

What kind of system is Polo describing? What clues tell you this?

**Passage Four:**

“There are wild elephants in the country, and numerous unicorns, which are very nearly as big. They have hair like that of a buffalo, feet like those of an elephant, and a horn in the middle of the forehead, which is black and very thick. They do no mischief, however, with the horn, but with the tongue alone; for this is covered all over with long and strong prickles and when savage with anyone they crush him under their knees and then rasp him with their tongue. The head resembles that of a wild boar, and they carry it ever bent towards the ground. They delight much to abide in mire and mud.”

What animals are the “unicorns” describing in the passage? What clues convinced you of this?