The world is a big place. That doesn’t come as a surprise to you and me. All of our lives, we’ve had maps that show us where we are compared with every single nation on earth. We can count the time zones and know what time it is in a country on the opposite side of the world. We can even look at online maps and webcams and see what is happening a hundred or a thousand miles away.

But have you ever stopped to think about the men and women who have made all that knowledge possible? Explorers, cartographers, and record keepers who left everything familiar and set off to discover something new? Maybe it was a continent. Maybe it was a hidden treasure. Maybe it was a lost city or a mythical land. Sometimes it was simply to know what lay beyond what was known at the time.

They didn’t have satellites, cell phones, or GPS. Some of them never returned. But because of the ones who did, and the ones who recorded their stories, trade routes were formed, lands were settled, nations were founded, and the Gospel was preached.

We’re going to look at the stories of twenty-six of these explorers and record keepers, moving through the alphabet from A to Z. We’re going to skip over some of the better-known explorers like Christopher Columbus and Vasco da Gama and learn about men like Antonio Alaminos, Fabian von Bellingshausen, Jacob Roggeveen, and Francisco Xeres.

On the next several pages, you’ll learn about six of these men. Every few weeks, we’ll discover a few more until we’ve worked our way from A to Z. There are a few questions to get you thinking and some space to record your answers. There are also some notebooking pages at the end of the printable to write down other things you learn about the explorers and their destinations. One page is blank; the other four are themed so you can give each explorer a sheet that is related to the types of places he visited, if you’d like.

Before we get started, keep in mind one important thing. There is still more exploring to be done. There are still hidden places, forgotten lands, and lost peoples. There are languages to be translated, cultures to discover, and stories to be recorded. Is there something God is calling you to discover?
The *Investigator* was a good name for the ship Robert John McClure took command of in 1850. He was an Irish naval officer who was given the job of finding British explorer Sir John Franklin. Franklin had gone missing on an expedition in the North American Arctic in 1845. McClure did not find Franklin, but he did get the chance to finish his mission—find a water route through the Arctic that connected the Pacific and Atlantic oceans.

Explorers had searched for such a route for hundreds of years because of its enormous value as a trade route. But dangerous ice and incredibly cold temperatures made it an extremely challenging mission to accomplish. McClure finally did find the passage but was unable to successfully sail through the entire thing. He had to make part of his journey by land after the *Investigator* became stuck in the ice near Banks Island.

How much distance did the discovery of the Northwest Passage reduce a trip from London to Tokyo by? What honor was given to McClure for his discovery?
Gustav Nachtigal: Explored the Sahara (Germany)

Gustave Nachtigal was an explorer who was also a doctor. He was born in Germany in 1834. He served in the military as a surgeon, then traveled to Tunisia to be the doctor for the ruler there. During his time in Africa, he traveled to many places that Europeans had never before explored. His journeys took him to what is today Nigeria, Chad, Sudan, and Egypt.

The Sahara is the world’s largest desert—approximately 3,000 miles from one end to the other. There are many places where there are very few plants that grow. Many different dangerous and poisonous animals live there. There is very little rain, often only inches each year, and of course, it is very hot! Temperatures over 100°F are not uncommon.

If you had to choose between exploring someplace cold like Siberia or the Arctic or someplace hot and dry like the Sahara, which would you choose and why?

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Francisco de Orellana:  
Amazon River  
(Spain)

Francisco de Orellana started his career as an explorer in the service of another explorer, Francisco Pizarro. After helping Pizarro conquer Peru, de Orellana settled in the town of Guayaquil in modern-day Ecuador. I suspect he never lost his urge to explore, however. When another opportunity arose to explore, Orellana joined the expedition, working for the half brother of Pizarro. While on the expedition, he was sent on ahead to look for supplies. At some point during his search, he decided that returning to Pizarro’s half brother was impossible and decided to instead explore the Amazon River with the soldiers he had with him.

He successfully explored the river and eventually returned to Spain. Once there, he told amazing stories of unique cultures and unimaginable wealth. He tried for some time to get permission to return to the Amazon. When he finally did return, he ran into one disaster after another and drowned before he was able to continue his exploration.

How long is the Amazon River? Are there any places in the Amazon rainforest that have still not been explored? What are some of the features of the region that make exploration difficult?

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Vincente Yáñez Pinzón: 
Central America and Parts of Brazil 
(Spain)

Vincente Pinzón made several voyages to the New World, but it was his first that secured his place in history. In 1492, Vincente and his brother Martin commanded the Pinta and the Niña on a journey with a third explorer, Christopher Columbus. While Martin left Columbus for a portion of the journey, Vincente stayed with him the entire time.

On later trips to the New World, Vincente explored parts of the Brazilian coast and traveled to Venezuela. It is thought that on one of his expeditions, he may have even seen the coast of Honduras and the Yucatán.

How do you think it would feel to be a part of a famous expedition like Columbus’ but not be in the spotlight? How do you think you would have reacted if you had been in Vincente’s place?

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Pedro de Quirós: 
Vanuatu and the South Pacific 
(Portugal and Spain)

*Terra australis incognita.* The “unknown southern land” was the destination at the heart of the mission of Pedro de Quirós. He didn’t make it all the way to the land of modern-day Australia, but he did make several discoveries in the South Pacific. In 1606, he spotted Vanuatu. He also reached the Cook Islands and a small atoll that is now part of the Solomon Islands.

How far is Vanuatu from Australia? What about the Cook Islands and the Solomon Islands? Just how close did Quirós come to reaching the “unknown southern land”? 

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Jacob Roggeveen:  
Easter Island  
(Netherlands)

Easter Island today is perhaps best known for its huge moai statues, but it was Dutch explorer Jacob Roggeveen who was the first European to land there in 1722. During a journey across the Pacific from east to west, he landed at Easter Island and spent one day there. He also sighted the islands of Samoa, Makatea, and Bora-Bora that same year.

How do you think you would have felt to be the first person from your country to see the beautiful statues on Easter Island? How tall are they? What would you have written about what you saw that day?

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Explorers set out on expeditions for many reasons. Some wanted fame, money, and power. Some wanted to serve the people they came into contact with. Some simply could not stay in one place and were always looking for something new to discover. For Georg August Schweinfurth, it was a love of science, specifically botany, that led him to explore.

His love of botany and interest in African plants led him to travel and explore the upper Nile River basin and parts of Sudan. He published important works about the people and places he studied. He also spent several years in Cairo studying the vast history of Egypt and the surrounding regions.

What are some of the reasons you can think of that might motivate explorers to leave the comforts of home and set out to chart undiscovered countries?

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