mystery science

Grades K-5
Mini-Lesson: “Could you walk all the way around the world?”

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

VIDEO 1

Hi, it's Danni. When I was a student, I took a seven-day hiking trip in Costa Rica. We started at the top of an inactive volcano and walked to the bottom. As we walked, our surroundings changed. At first, we were in a chilly cloud forest. Then we were in a dense rainforest where we had to push through thick vines. Then we made it to a drier, flat area, and I was sweating in the hot sun. But the only way to go down the mountain was to walk. We had to keep going. It was one of the most exhausting things I've ever done, but I did it. Someone named Eli has a question about a walk even longer than this one. Let's give Eli a call now.

[Video Call]

- Hi, Danni.

- Hi, Eli.

- I have a question for you. Could you walk around the whole world?

- That's a great question.

Imagine lacing up your sneakers, going outside, and walking, and walking, and walking, until you end up exactly where you started. Since the Earth is a sphere, like a giant ball, you might be able to do that, and there are actually a bunch of ways you could try. One way would be straight around the middle, at the equator. If you wanted to walk around the Earth at the middle, you'd have to walk at least 25,000 miles to get back to where you started. Or maybe

you could walk in a circle around the world somewhere else, like down here. You could go all the way around and end up where you started, but your journey would be a lot shorter. Or you could even do it all the way down here at the South Pole. That's where this person is, the actual South Pole. Now watch what he's doing. He's starting at one spot, walking in one direction around the South Pole until he ends up at the very same place. Before I go on, I'm curious. Does this really mean he walked around the world? What do you think?

VIDEO 2

I'm not sure how you answered, but when people talk about walking around the world, they usually don't mean a short distance like this. They mean walking the long way around, near the equator. But that would be really tough, and not just because it's such a long way to walk. Look closer. See all that blue? Yep. Most of the Earth is covered by the ocean. So, unless you can walk across water like these bugs, you might have a hard time. And that's not all. See those rough, bumpy spots? They're not easy to cross either, especially when those bumps are actually super tall mountain ranges like the Andes. And if you thought climbing mountains was tough, try crossing a desert, like the Sahara, where it's blazing hot and there's barely any water. Oh, and see all that green? Those are thick rainforests packed with plants so dense, it's hard to trek through. Not to mention dangerous animals like jaguars and venomous spiders. So do all these obstacles make walking around the world impossible? Maybe. But here's the wild part. Quite a few people have tried anyway. Like Karl Bushby. He's been trying to walk around the world since 1998 and planned to finish sometime in 2026. At one point, Karl needed to walk from North America over to Asia, but there's a whole lot of ocean in between.

So he chose a route that would take him here, near a narrow spot called the Bering Strait, and then he waited for winter. Can you guess why he waited until winter? That's right. He waited until the water there froze and then walked across the ice. Of course, some challenges can't be solved with waiting for winter. So other world-walkers had to get creative in different ways, like Savannah the dog and her owner, Tom Tursich. When they reached a dangerous jungle with no roads called the Darien Gap, they didn't want to walk through it. It was just too dangerous. So what did they do? They hopped on a motorboat and went around it. Good move. Then there's Polly Litovsky. She walked across four continents, but when she came to the ocean, she used planes and ferries to keep her journey going. Oh, and check this out. Jason Lewis didn't want to use any motors at all. None. So when he reached the Atlantic and the Pacific Ocean, he climbed into a special pedal boat and pedaled across them, like riding a bike on water. So cool. It took these adventurers years, but by thinking outside the box, adventurers like Savannah, Tom, Polly, and Jason found ways to walk around the world, and that's definitely not easy to do. So in summary, walking all the way around the world isn't as simple as just putting one foot in front of the other. The Earth is huge, and it's covered with obstacles like the ocean, deserts, mountains, and jungles. But with a little creativity, like crossing frozen seas, using boats, or even pedaling across the water, some adventurers have managed to do it. But here's the big question: Some people think that using planes or boats to walk around the world means it doesn't really count, since they didn't walk every single mile. But I'll let you be the judge of that. What do you think? Is it possible to walk around the world? That's all for this week's question. Thanks, Eli, for asking it.