Introduction to Antarctic Exploration

1. Near the end of the nineteenth century, Antarctica was one of the last unexplored places on earth.

2. Only a handful of ships had ever sailed into its waters. And no man had ever set foot on the continent.

3. In 1901, Captain Robert Falcon Scott of England set out in his ship, Discovery, on the first expedition to the southernmost point on earth, Antarctica's South Pole.

4. From his crew he would choose two men to accompany him on the trek to the Pole: a biologist, Dr. Edward Wilson, and a young Merchant Marine officer, Ernest Shackleton.

5. Scott's goal was ambitious: a round-trip journey of nineteen hundred ten miles to reach the South Pole and claim it for Britain.

6. Hauling supplies on overloaded sleds, the men pushed themselves to the limits of their strength.

7. At 82 degrees south latitude, still more than 500 miles from the Pole, they reluctantly called it quits and turned back.

8. Though it had come nowhere near Scott's goal, the expedition had opened up the continent.

9. Shackleton became determined to head his own expedition to the Antarctic. The race to the South Pole was on.

10. Born in Ireland in 1874, Shackleton left school at age sixteen to go to sea and rose quickly in the ranks of the British Merchant Navy.

11. In 1907 Shackleton realized his dream and led his own expedition south on the Nimrod.

12. After weeks of hard overland travel, Shackleton and his men struggled to within a little more than a hundred miles of the South Pole, further south than anyone had ever been.

13. But they were frostbitten, dangerously short of supplies and starving. Shackleton gave the order to turn back, a decision that saved his men's lives.

14. For his efforts he was knighted, Sir Ernest Shackleton. But the Pole remained unclaimed.
15. In 1910, Shackleton's old rival, Robert Scott, led a second expedition south, determined to succeed where Shackleton had failed.

16. But the British were not alone in wanting to claim the Pole for their country.

17. Roald Amundsen, a Norwegian explorer with experience in the Arctic, decided to turn his attention south to the Antarctic.

18. Both the British and Norwegian expeditions established winter camps on the Ross Sea ice shelf and waited for spring, to begin their race to the pole.

19. In October 1912, both Scott and Amundsen set out following different routes.

20. To haul his supplies, Scott relied on ponies, which floundered in snow up to their bellies, and dogs, which no one knew how to drive. In addition, his men were not proficient on skis.

21. In contrast, Amundsen and his men were superb skiers, traveling with a team of 52 trained sled dogs in a well-organized venture.

22. The results were predictable: success and triumph for the Norwegians. Failure and tragedy for Scott.

23. On their return from the Pole, a blizzard confined Scott and his men to their tent for days. Starving and suffering from scurvy, the entire party died on the ice. They were only a dozen miles from a supply depot.

24. For Shackleton there now remained only one great prize in polar exploration: the crossing of the Antarctic continent.

25. Shackleton's plan was ambitious: he would require two ships.

26. The first would sail to Cape Royds, where his men would lay supply depots as far inland as possible.

27. The second ship would establish a winter station on the opposite side of the continent, from which the overland trek would begin.

28. The second ship would have to withstand the ice of the treacherous Weddell Sea.

29. For this, Shackleton settled on a Norwegian-built vessel named *Polaris*. Inspired by his family motto, "By endurance we overcome," Shackleton renamed the ship-*Endurance*. 