Copernicus

By Mary Lynn Bushong

[1] *Caption: "Astronomer Copernicus: Conversation with God" painted by Jan Matejko (1872).*

[2] If you looked at a map of Europe from 600 years ago, how would it appear to you? Well, it might look a little bit funny. The names and borders of many countries would be different than they are today. One country that did not appear was Poland, the homeland of Nicolaus Copernicus.

[3] Copernicus was born in 1473 in Torun but educated in Krakow. His father was wealthy but died when Nicolaus was only ten. He was raised by his mother's brother, a church canon.

[4] He helped young Copernicus with his education. At first the young scientist wanted to be a cleric. As his education progressed, many subjects interested his mind. In addition to his church studies, he also pursued studies to become a physician, a lawyer, an economist, a governor, and a diplomat. He also studied mathematics and astronomy.

[5] Much of his later education was received in Italy where he studied in Bologna, Padua, and Ferrara. He learned about some of the greatest astronomers in the past, the Arabs and Indians. They were so good at it because of the time they spent studying the skies. Copernicus read their writings and the heliocentric (sun-centered) theory they had formed.

[6] That theory said that the sun was the center of the solar system. The planets revolved around it. It is what we have found to be true, but at that time many Europeans thought that the Earth was the center and everything else went around it.

[7] In 1497, Copernicus was named as a church canon at Frombork Cathedral in his homeland. He did not immediately go there but stayed in Italy. He went home for a brief time in 1501 but returned to Italy to finish his studies.

[8] He returned to Frombork about 1504 and eventually worked for Albert, Duke of Prussia. He became an advisor on monetary reform. As governor of Warmia, he traveled and spoke to many people. His travels gave him lots of time to think about many things including astronomy.

[9] In 1514, he gave copies of his short handwritten book called "Little Commentary" to his friends. It described his hypothesis for the sun being the center of the solar system. It was the starting point for what would later be the basis of his Magnus Opus (great work).

[10] Rumors of his ideas were spread to Rome in 1533. Some wrote to Copernicus asking him for more information. Even so, he put off publishing the book he had been working on for decades.

[11] When Copernicus died in May 1543, his book "On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres" had just been published. Astronomy had been merely a side interest in his life as a lawyer, physician, and cleric, yet it is the field in which he left the greatest mark. Copernicus did not just influence the people of his time, he influenced men and science for centuries to come.

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Name _____ Science Pd _____

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1. What things do you think might cause the borders and names of countries to change? _____ _____	2. Copernicus was interested in many subjects. List three things he studied or trained to be. _____ _____
3. What two of the following cultures did Copernicus learn astronomy from? (A) Spanish and French (B) Italian and Chinese (C) English and Polish (D) Arab and Indian	4. Heliocentric means sun-centered. (A) False (B) True
5. Copernicus called his small book a "Little Commentary." (A) False (B) True	6. Copernicus could not wait to publish his big book of ideas. (A) False (B) True
7. Copernicus received most of his education in: (A) Prussia (B) Spain (C) Italy (D) Poland	8. Astronomy was Copernicus' main interest. (A) False (B) True