

TOPIC PACKS · GRADES 3–6

Antarctic Explorers

A cross-curricular themed week

Suggested timetable

Day	Subject	Activity
Monday	Geography	Antarctica today — facts about the frozen continent
Tuesday	History	The race to the Pole — Scott vs Amundsen (1911–12)
Wednesday	English	Shackleton's Endurance — survival diary writing
Thursday	Science	How animals survive the cold — penguins, seals, krill
Friday	DT	Plan your own polar expedition — kit list and route

Day 1 — Antarctica facts

Question	Answer
Size	1.5x larger than Europe — 14 million km ²
Population	About 1,000 in winter, 5,000 in summer (researchers only)
Coldest temp ever	-89.2°C at Vostok Station (1983)
Average rainfall	Almost zero — Antarctica is a desert
Ice depth	Average 2km thick. Thickest is 4.7km



Question	Answer
Wildlife	Penguins, seals, whales, krill, seabirds — no land mammals or trees
Native peoples	None — no humans ever lived here permanently
Who owns it?	No one. Governed by international treaty since 1959

Day 2 — The race to the South Pole

Aspect	Roald Amundsen (Norway)	Robert Falcon Scott (UK)
Reached Pole	14 December 1911	17 January 1912
Transport	Skis and dog sleds	Manhauling sledges, ponies
Team size	5 men	5 men
Outcome	All returned safely	All 5 died on return journey
Lessons	Knew dogs and ice	Underestimated conditions, bad weather

Day 2 discussion

Why did Amundsen succeed and Scott fail? Discuss: • Amundsen used dogs (faster, can be eaten if needed). Scott used ponies and manhauling. • Amundsen had detailed Arctic experience. Scott was more of a naval explorer. • Amundsen's clothing was learned from the Inuit — fur. Scott used wool, which gets wet. • Weather played a big role too — Scott hit unusually bad storms on the return. LESSON: Preparation, learning from local people, and humility before nature.

Day 3 — Shackleton's Endurance (60 min)

Tell the story: In 1914, Ernest Shackleton sailed to Antarctica to be the first to cross the continent. His ship, Endurance, got stuck in ice. The ice crushed it. He and his 27 men were stranded for months. They escaped in lifeboats to a tiny island. Shackleton then sailed 1,300 km in a small boat to South Georgia — and crossed mountains no one had crossed before to find help. Every single one of his men survived. WRITING TASK: Children write a diary entry from one of Shackleton's crew on a chosen day: • The day the ship was crushed • The day food started running low • The day they reached land for the first time • The day Shackleton came back to rescue them INCLUDE: Sensory detail (cold, hunger, fear), real emotion, and Shackleton's leadership in the action.



Day 4 — Survival in the cold

<p>Emperor penguins</p> <p>Stand for 2 months in winter without food, hatching eggs on their feet. Huddle in groups, taking turns at the cold edge. Bodies covered in dense feathers.</p>	<p>Weddell seals</p> <p>Live under the ice. Use teeth to keep breathing holes open. Can dive 600m and hold their breath for over an hour.</p>
<p>Krill</p> <p>Tiny shrimp-like creatures. Look small but there are SO many — billions of tonnes. The base of the entire Antarctic food chain.</p>	<p>Antifreeze fish</p> <p>Some Antarctic fish have a special protein in their blood that stops them freezing solid — natural antifreeze!</p>

Day 5 — Plan your expedition (60 min)

Children plan their own modern Antarctic expedition. They produce: 1. A KIT LIST: 20 essential items, with a sentence on why each matters 2. A ROUTE MAP: Where they'll start, where they're going, key waypoints 3. A TIMELINE: How many days for each leg? 4. A 'WHY' LETTER: Why do they want to go? What do they want to find or prove? DISCUSS: What's different now from Scott's day? GPS, satellite phones, modern fabrics like Gore-Tex, freeze-dried food, helicopters for emergencies. But Antarctica itself? Just as cold and dangerous.

