



**Classroom Guide for
CARAVAN**

by **Lawrence McKay, Jr.**
illustrated by
Darryl Ligasan

Reading Level

*Reading Level: Grades 2–3

Interest Level: Grades K–4

Guided Reading Level: Q

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 4.3/.5

Lexile™ Measure: 860

*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Themes

Fathers and Sons, Traditions, Afghanistan, Rite of Passage, Caravans

National Standards

SOCIAL STUDIES: Culture; Time, Continuity, and Change; People, Places, and Environments; Individual Development and Identity

LANGUAGE ARTS: Reading for Perspective; Understanding the Human Experience; Multicultural Understanding

SCIENCE: Earth and Space Science; Personal and Social Perspectives

Ten-year-old Jura's first Caravan trip with his father is full of adventure. Set against the icy backdrop of the Hindu Kush mountain range in northeastern Afghanistan, this father-son story also sparkles with the warmth of family and cultural tradition.

Dynamic illustrations guide readers through the arduous Caravan ride along steep mountain passes, and the hustle and bustle of an Afghan marketplace. Caravan presents young readers with the opportunity to embark on a fascinating journey. . .

*" . . .in the Caravan swaying back and forth,
where the mountains meet the sky,
and the trail leads ever on."*

Background

This story is based on the experiences of the Kirghiz Caravaneers of Afghanistan. The Kirghiz area nomadic people of Turko-Mongolian descent are also indigenous to parts of Russia and China. In the Afghan Pamirs of the Hindu Kush Mountains, the Kirghiz Caravans ply their trade routes. The Pamirs are a rugged land and span southern Russia, northeastern Afghanistan, and northern Pakistan. There the term, "Roof of the World" was coined, for this area of grand mountain ranges—the Hindu Kush, the Karakoram, and the Himalaya—was once believed to be the highest land mass on earth.

Twice each winter, the Kirghiz Caravaneers travel west for ten days from the mountains to the regional capital. There they trade their felts and furs for grain. It is a journey of 125 miles over mountain passes, frozen rivers, and great valleys. Each driver brings his own horse and is responsible for three camels. Camels are the most valuable animals the Caravaneers own; more valuable than yaks or horses or sheep. Camels are often associated with the desert, but these Bactrian "two-humped" camels are well acclimated to the high regions of the Central Asian Plateau. Able to carry up to 600 pounds and weighing up to half a ton, the camels are slow, but sure-footed.

Some of the words mentioned in the story may not be familiar to readers. A *chogun* is a small teapot, while a samovar is a large metal container used to heat water for tea. Mosques are Muslim places of public worship; the rounded domes at the tops of mosques are called cupolas. A kilim is an Afghan carpet of tight woven design. Finally, a yurt is a circular tent made of thick felt with a small opening at the top to let out smoke from a low campfire that is kept burning inside. The Caravaneers sleep in a star pattern with their feet toward the fire, for warmth.

BEFORE READING**Prereading Focus Questions**

Before students read the story, you might want them to discuss one or more of the following questions as a motivation for reading.

1. Have you taken or do you regularly take any special trips with either your father, mother, or another older relative?
2. How would you define "adult"? Who do you think of when you think of an adult? Why do you think of that person?
3. What do you think of when you think of Afghanistan? Where is it located? (Jot down the students' comments on a large piece of chart paper.)

Exploring the Book

Tell students to look first at the front cover and then at the back cover of the book. Do the pictures show the same scene? How might these scenes be related? How might they be related to the title of the book? What does the title suggest about the book's contents?

Have students turn to the title page and discuss the image. Ask students to write down what role they think the items pictured will play in the story. Remind students to check their predictions after reading the book.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

Have students read to find out what a caravan is and what happens to the boy pictured on the cover of the book.

VOCABULARY

Ask students to write down the words they do not know in their vocabulary notebooks. (Some of the words are defined in the Author's Note on the last page of the book.) Then check for comprehension by having students draw a picture for the word or point to an example of the word.

AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, review comprehension, and deepen students' understanding. Encourage students to refer back to the text and illustrations to support their responses.

1. What is special about this day that is noted by Jura?
2. How does Jura prepare for the trip? What is the purpose of this trip? What is expected of Jura?
3. What are the benefits, in this case, of traveling in a Caravan?
4. In what ways does the journey seem difficult? In what ways does it seem easy? What do they need for the journey?
5. Jura's father was the leader of the Caravan. What do you think it takes to be a leader, and the leader of a Caravan, in particular? What responsibilities and/or privileges come with being in charge?
6. Why was "[Jura's] body weary but his heart singing" as he was returning home?
7. How do you think Jura changed? What do you think he learned from this Caravan trip?

Literature Circles

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in focusing on the different roles of the group members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to those in the Discussion Questions section of this guide.
- The **Passage Locator** might look for passages that suggest Jura's feelings at different points in the story.
- The **Illustrator** might draw make a poster showing items bought and sold at the bazaar.

- The **Connector** might find other books that take place in the same region of the world as CARAVAN.
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of the group's reading and discussion points for each meeting.
- The **Investigator** might research to learn about the various mountains identified on the map on pages 2 and 3 of the book.

*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Three such books you may wish to refer to are: *Getting Started with Literature Circles* by Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 1999), *Literature Circles: Voice And Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 2002), and *Literature Circles Resource Guide* by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

Reader's Response

Use the following questions or similar ones to help students practice active reading and personalize what they have read. Suggest that students respond in reader's journals, oral discussion, or drawings.

1. You were asked earlier what you thought it was to be an adult. Has this story affected your view in any way? If so, how?
2. What new things did you learn about Afghanistan? What more would you like to know about this country and its traditions? (Allow students to investigate some of these areas further.)
3. What role do you play in your family? What chores are you responsible for? Who teaches or taught you how to do some of these things? How are the tasks divided in your family?
4. Compare a trip to the market with your family to Jura's trip. How is it different? How is it similar?
5. Do you live in a city or in a rural area? When and why do you go to the city or the rural area?
6. Jura's sister and mother met Jura at the doorway and wanted to know all about the trip. What aspects of the trip would you highlight?
7. Describe Jura's second trip to the market.

ELL/ESL Teaching Strategies

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English language learners or who are learning to speak English as a second language.

1. Ask students to read *Caravan* aloud. When they come to the repeated phrase, "in the Caravan swaying back and forth," read it together as a group.
2. Assign a section to each student to summarize and if they wish, to draw. Then reconstruct students' summaries in consecutive order, based on the book.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

To help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas, you might try some of the following activities.

Social Studies

1. Learn more about Afghanistan, i.e. its size, history, contemporary state of affairs, geography, customs, and so on. Create a brochure.
2. Discuss the process of exporting goods for sale. Have small groups of students study exports of your area or any other area of interest. Each group should choose a particular item to market and set up a “booth” in the classroom. Alert students that each group will be responsible for conveying the details of their export, i.e., how it is cultivated, why it is valuable, and what it is worth (perhaps even in bartering terms, such as so many camels or sacks of grain). Also ask each group to display a map of where its export is found and where it is sent.
3. Trail Jura's trading route on a map. Students may create their own map or use one that already exists.

Science

1. Study how mountains form.
2. Investigate how and why avalanches form and occur.
3. Learn more about camels in general and Bactrian “two-humped” camels in particular: what they eat, how much weight they can carry, and so on. Compare and contrast the different types of camels. Then ask students to create “care manuals” for the camels that give a description of the camel as well as directions for how to care for the animal.

Art

1. Chart, in comic strip fashion (without necessarily being humorous), the sequence of events in Jura's journey.
2. Show slides or pictures of different kilim designs. Then have students create their own.

Math

1. Compare heights of various mountains and mountain ranges.
2. Create a chart that compares the distance each class member travels in order to get home to the market. Encourage students to ask parents to participate by helping them read the odometer.

Drama

Mix up the order of events in the story. Have students act out the events while the others decide on a sequence that correctly represents the story as told in the book.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lawrence McKay, Jr. was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He received his B.A. from the University of Denver. Currently, he lives with his wife and their two children in Waitsfield, Vermont, where the family owns an historic inn. McKay's second book, *Journey Home* (also published by Lee & Low), also involves the role of family and culture. McKay says, "I have come to believe that human truths are the same for all of us, regardless of race, color or creed. Culture often colors reality, and thus truth can be difficult to recognize, yet sadness is sadness, happiness is happiness, no matter what our ethnicity or culture."

McKay is a full-time writer and an experienced mountaineer with a lifelong interest in the Hindu Kush mountain ranges. Also among his interests are "devour[ing] world literature," cycling, and music.

When asked where he gets his ideas for stories, McKay states, "Everywhere! The world is filled with ideas. All I need to do is open my eyes." *Caravan* was his first picture book.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Darryl Ligasan is a full-time illustrator. He graduated from and teaches at the School of Visual Arts in New York City.

In order to achieve surface texture for the illustrations for *Caravan*, Ligasan used gel mediums, pumice, and sandpaper. He applied the paint using a combination of wet brush and dry brush techniques. Ligasan has also illustrated *Allie's Basketball Dream* and is a contributing illustrator to *America: My Land, Your Land, Our Land*, both published by *Lee & Low Books*.

A native of Bacolod City, the Philippines, Ligasan now lives and works in New York City.

Awards & Reviews

Best Children's Books of the Year, Bank Street College

"The poetic writing skillfully describes a world far different from one containing automobiles, VCRs, and computers. The illustrations, glowing in earthy hues of browns, golds, and blues, show the details of this way of life. The layout with the richly textured illustrations set in a stylized frame, is handsome. Words and pictures elucidate not only the customs of another culture, but also a boy's rite-of-passage and adventure with his father. Refreshing and unobtrusively instructive." —*School Library Journal*

Resources on the Web

Learn more about *Caravan*:

<http://www.leeandlow.com/books/181/pb/caravan>

Other books by Lawrence McKay, Jr.:

***Journey Home*:**

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/74/hc/journey_home

Other books illustrated by Darryl Ligasan:

Allie's Basketball Dream

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/9/hc/allie_s_basketball_dream

America: My Land, Your Land, Our Land (contributing illustrator):

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/11/hc/america_my_land_your_land_our_land

View other **Active Reader Classroom Guides** at:

http://www.leeandlow.com/p/teachers-asian_american.mhtml

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Order Information

On the Web:

<http://www.leeandlow.com/books/181/pb/caravan> (secure on-line ordering)

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/ordering.mhtml> (general order information)

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