



**Classroom Guide for  
CARAVAN**  
by **Lawrence McKay, Jr.**  
illustrated by  
**Darryl Ligasan**

### Reading Level

Reading Level:

Read-aloud: K to Grade 6

Read-alone: Grade 2 and up

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 4.3/.5

Scholastic Reading Counts!™: P-188-BB

Lexile™ Measure: 860

### Themes

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

### Synopsis

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 and son's 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-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 are nomadic people of Turko-Mongolian descent and 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 Himalayas—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. Here, 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 many 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.

### **Awards & Reviews**

#### **Children's Books of the Year Selection, 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*

Please see our Web site, for an update-to-date, complete listing of awards and reviews at: <http://www.leeandlow.com/books/cvan.html>

### **BEFORE READING**

#### **Prereading Focus Questions**

Before students read the story, you might want them to discuss one 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 or mother?
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.)

**Vocabulary**

Ask the 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 section at the back 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 reading, discuss the story. Some questions that can be used to generate discussion are:

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 and/or 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 the 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?

**Reader's Response Journals**

To promote active reading, you might want students to keep a reader's response journal as they read the story. This journal will help students personalize what they are reading.

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. Did you learn anything new about Afghanistan? What things? 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? And 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 your 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.

### **ESL Teaching Strategies**

Following are activities for engaging students who speak English as a second language.

1. Ask students to read *Caravan* aloud. When it comes to the repeated phrase, ". . . in the Caravan swaying back and forth," etc., read it together as a class.
2. Assign a section to each student to summarize and if they so desire, to draw. Then, reconstruct these renditions into consecutive order (based on the book).

### **INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES**

In order to integrate students' reading experiences with other subject areas, you might want to have students complete some of these activities.

#### **Social Studies**

1. Learn more about Afghanistan, i.e., its size, history, contemporary state of affairs, geography, customs, etc. Create a brochure.
2. Discuss the process of exporting goods for sale. Let the class, in groups, study exports of your area (or any other area of interest). Each group will choose a particular good that they want to market and set up "booths" in the classroom. Alert the students that each booth 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, e.g., so many camels or sacks of grain). Also, ask the groups to display a map of where their export is found and where it is sent.
3. Trail Jura's trading route on a map (they can either have made the map or look on one that already exists).

#### **Science**

1. Study how mountains form.
2. Investigate how avalanches form and occur.
3. Learn more about camels in general and Bactrian "two-humped" camels in particular, i.e., what it eats, how much weight it can carry, etc. Compare and contrast the two camels.

Then, ask students to create "care manuals" for these camels that give a description of the camel as well as directions for how to care for the camel.

**Art**

1. Chart, in "comic strip" fashion (without necessarily being humorous), sequence of events for the 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 distances each class member has to travel in order to get to the market. (Ask parents to participate by helping the children read the odometer.)

**Drama**

Mix up the order of events which occur in the story. Have students act them out, while the others decide which sequence correctly represents the book and why the others are inadequate. About the Author and Illustrator

Lawrence McKay, Jr. 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* is his first picture book.

**About the Author and Illustrator**

**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) 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."

**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. Darryl 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).

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

**Resources on the Web**

For reviews, awards and reviews for **Caravan** visit:  
<http://www.leeandlow.com/books/cvan.html>

To learn more about **Lawrence McKay, Jr.'s** other book **Journey Home** visit:  
<http://www.leeandlow.com/books/jhome.html>

To learn more about **Darryl Ligasan's** other book **Allie's Basketball Dream** visit:  
<http://www.leeandlow.com/books/allie.html>

**Darryl Ligasan's** is also a contributing illustrator to **America: My Land, Your Land, Our Land**. To learn more about this book visit:  
<http://www.leeandlow.com/books/amer.html>

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**Book Information**

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Scholastic Reading Counts!™: P-188

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