



Classroom Guide for
Surfer of the Century: The Life of Duke Kahanamoku
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Reading Level

*Reading Level: Grade 3–4

Interest Level: Grades 2–8

Guided Reading Level: T

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 6.2/1.0

Lexile™ Measure: 980L

*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Themes

Sports (swimming, surfing), Discrimination, Overcoming Obstacles/Achieving Goals, Olympic Games, Cultural Heritage, biography, Asian/Asian American Interest

Synopsis

Growing up in Honolulu with the Pacific Ocean as his backyard, Duke Kahanamoku learned to swim and surf at a young age. His natural swimming abilities soon attracted a coach, and Duke began to train for the 1912 Olympics. In a race in August 1911, Duke shattered swimming records, but the Amateur Athlete Union would not recognize his accomplishments because it found his times too amazing to be believed. Nonetheless, Duke's lightning-fast swimming won him a place on the 1912 United States Olympic team and a gold medal in the 100-meter freestyle race.

Over the years Duke struggled with racism and financial troubles, but by the end of his twenty-year Olympic career, he was a six-time medal winner. Although a swimming champion, Duke's passion was surfing. He traveled the world, introducing surfboarding to Australia and the east and west coasts of the United States. Considered the father of modern surfing, Duke spread his love of the ocean and Hawai'i wherever he went. He also did much to popularize the sport of surfing through his travels and his later career.

Throughout his life Duke Kahanamoku was beloved for his modesty, sportsmanship, and amazing skill in the water. Today he remains a legendary waterman and an inspiration to all to live life with aloha*.

**aloha*: love, kindness, grace, affection, compassion; also traditional Hawaiian greeting or farewell

Background

Duke Kahanamoku was born in 1890 during turbulent political times in Hawai'i. At the end of the 19th century, Hawai'i was ruled by a monarchy. In 1893, Queen Lili'uokalani, the reigning queen, was forced by powerful commercial factions to abdicate her throne, and on July 4, 1894, Hawai'i became a Republic, presided over by President Dole. By July 7, 1898, when Duke was eight years old, the United States flag flew over the Hawaiian Islands. Two years later, on April 30, 1900, the Organic Act made young Duke and all other Hawaiians citizens of the United States.

At the same time, surfing, an ancient Hawaiian sport, was little known beyond the islands. Duke Kahanamoku almost single-handedly introduced the sport to the rest of the world, where it quickly gained popularity in coastal areas with big surf. An excellent summary of the history of surfing can be found online at "[Surfing for Life](#)."

Swimming has been an Olympic event since 1896, and the event has been open to women since 1912. The first four Olympic swimming meets were held in the open water as opposed to a swimming pool. The United States has won the most swimming medals, with Australia coming in second. In 2012, American swimmer Michael Phelps became the most decorated Olympian of all time, with a total of 22 medals.

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

(CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Craft & Structure, Strand 5)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

1. What do you know about swimming? About the Olympics? About surfing?
2. What do you already know about the way people of color were treated at the beginning of the 1900s in the United States? What questions do you have about that era?
3. What are some of your goals? What have you done to try and achieve them? How do you deal with obstacles?
4. What do you think it would be like to leave your family and friends to go and compete in a sporting or other event? What would you do if spectators booed you?
5. What is a biography? Why are biographies of interest to readers? What biographies have you read?

Exploring the Book

(CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Craft & Structure, Strand 5)

Read the title of the book. Ask students why they think the book is called *Surfer of the Century*. Then open the book to the title page and read the subtitle: *The Life of Duke Kahanamoku* (kah-HAN-ah-MOE-koo). Invite students to comment on the illustration and how it might relate to the title and subtitle.

Open the book so students can see both the front and back covers. Ask students what they think the connection is between the man on the front cover and the photograph on the back cover.

Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: title page, acknowledgments, author and quotation sources, dedications and quote from Duke, illustrations, timeline, and map.

Ask students to predict what the book is going to be about. Which parts of the book did they use as clues to making their predictions?

Setting a Purpose for Reading

Have students read to find out:

- who Duke Kahanamoku was and what were some of the key events in his life
- how Duke contributed to Olympic swimming
- how Duke contributed to surfing

VOCABULARY

(CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Craft and Structure, Strand 4)

The book contains several words and terms that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below. Then ask students to write their own meanings and sentences for each word and term. If students also know synonyms for any of the vocabulary, have them list the synonyms as well.

GENERAL VOCABULARY

spawned	volcanic eruptions	aloha	taro	tadpole
guardian	refused membership	penniless	maneuvers	amateur
eligible	wharf/wharves	mainland	piers	harbor
wake	potluck dinners	sarcastic	benefit	contributions
manager	native	crippled	cramped	jeered
milled around	paddlewheel steamer	virtually	diplomats	people of color
relented	public address system	curt	adrenaline	wreath
obliged	integrating	descendant	modestly	leis
gangway	lifesaving techniques	surveyors	plank	chaperone
stereotypes	hollow	sidelined	capsize	shallows
feeble	abolished	officiated	hospitality	
"unusually large pedal extremities"				

SPORTS-RELATED VOCABULARY

"Bluebirds"	Outrigger canoe	watermen	squad	crawl stroke
athlete	flexible-knee	freestyle	flutter kick	Olympics
merman	record-breaking	spectators	qualify	tryouts
self-trained	superhuman	somersaulted	standard equipment	
gold medal	Olympic record	silver medal	sportsmanship	
tandem surfing				

AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. **Encourage students** to refer to passages and photographs in the book and **to cite evidence from the text to support their responses.**

Literal Comprehension

1. What is a Bluebird? Where do they come from? How are Bluebirds important to the text? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer. (CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1–3 & Reading Standards, Informational Text, Craft and Structure, Strand 4)
2. Describe Duke's childhood. Where did he grow up? Who was in his family? What information does the author share with us about Duke's life growing up? (CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1–3)
3. Duke was built to be a swimmer. How did his size and the shape of his body help him in the water? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer. (CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1 & 3)
4. Who was Duke's first coach? How did Duke meet him? What did Duke do to ensure he could swim competitively? (CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1 & 3)
5. How did Duke get chosen to swim in the Olympics? Why were his times questioned in his first race? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer. (CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1 & 3 & Reading Standards, Informational Text, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, 8)
6. How was Los Angeles different than Hawai'i? How was Chicago different? Pittsburgh? What happened to Duke in each city? How was he treated? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer. (CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1 & 3 & Reading Standards, Informational Text, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, 8)

7. What happened to Duke during his first swim in Pittsburgh? Why? How did he solve his problem? (CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1 & 3)
8. What happened to Duke the morning of his first swim meet in Sweden? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer. (CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1 & 3)
9. What special honor was given Duke when he in Sweden? Why was this honor important in the context of history? (CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1 & 3 & Reading Standards, Informational Text, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, 8)
10. What did Duke contribute to the sport of Olympic swimming? How do you know? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer. (CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1 & 3 & Reading Standards, Informational Text, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, 8)
11. What important contribution did Duke make when he was Australia? (CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1 & 3 & Reading Standards, Informational Text, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, 8)
12. What important contribution did Duke make to the Red Cross? (CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1 & 3 & Reading Standards, Informational Text, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, 8)
13. List three important things that Duke did after the Olympics in Belgium. Cite evidence from the text to support your answer. (CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1 & 3)

Extension/Higher Level Thinking

1. The first page of the book is in a different style of type than the rest of the text (it's in italics and the rest is not). Why do you think the author made that choice? What does the different type tell the reader? (CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Craft & Structure, 5 and Reading Standards, Informational Text, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, 7)
2. What does *aloha* mean? How does understanding aloha help you understand Duke Kahanamoku? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer. (CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Craft & Structure, 4 and Reading Standards, Informational Text, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, 8)
3. Do you know how to swim? How did you learn? Was the way Duke learned to swim similar to or different from the way you learned how to swim? (CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Craft & Structure, 6)
4. What did Duke do to improve his swimming? What does this tell you about who he was and what he valued? (CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, 8)
5. How are Duke's surfing and swimming skills related? How did one support the other? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer. (CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, 8)
6. What happened at the AAU-Hawai'i's first meet? What did this mean for Duke? How do you know? (CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1 & 3 & Reading Standards, Informational Text, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, 8)
7. How was Duke treated on the mainland of the United States? How was this different from how he was treated in Hawai'i? How do you feel about the difference? (CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1 & 3 & Reading Standards, Informational Text, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, 8)
8. How did Duke react to the way he was treated? How would you have reacted if you were Duke? How did reporters treat Duke? (CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1 & 3 & Reading Standards, Informational Text, Craft & Structure, 6, and Reading Standards, Informational Text, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, 8)
9. Who was Cecil Healy? Why was he an important person in Duke's life? What did he do? What do his actions tell you about him? Cite evidence to support your answer. (CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1 & 3 & Reading Standards, Informational Text, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, 8)

10. What did Duke do to earn a living in the years between Olympic games? What does his choice of occupations tell you about his character? Cite evidence to support your answer. (CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1 & 3 & Reading Standards, Informational Text, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, 8)
11. Why is Duke known as the Father of Modern Surfing? What sort of legacy did he leave behind? (CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1–3 & Reading Standards, Informational Text, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, 8)
12. How would the book have been different if it was told in another genre, such as a memoir, an informational text, or a fantasy? What would the author need to change to rewrite the text in that genre? What could the author keep? Why? (CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, 9)

Literature Circles

(CCSS: Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3 & Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

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 the ones in the Discussion Question section of this guide.
- The **Passage Locator** might look for lines in the text that suggest how each Duke is feeling at different points in the book.
- The **Illustrator** might create scenes on a timeline that follow the events in the text.
- The **Connector** might find other nonfiction stories about swimming, surfing, and Olympic swimmers.
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of the group's reading and discussion points for each meeting.
- The **Investigator** might look for information about the challenges faced by Jim Thorpe, another athlete of color mentioned in 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

(CCSS: Reading Standards, Informational Text, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, & Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7–9)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader's journals, essays, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work, if they wish to.

1. What kind of person was Duke? How would you describe him? What did he value? How did he act in the face of adversity? Of accomplishment? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.
2. Which parts of the text did you connect with the most? Why? Which parts of the text did you have a hard time connecting with? Why?
3. Either ask students to read or read to them the biography entitled *Jim Thorpe's Bright Path*. What do Jim Thorpe and Duke Kahanamoku have in common? What obstacles did they face? How did each of them respond to or overcome these obstacles?

4. How does this book affect your thinking about prejudice and the ways people are sometimes treated by others?
5. Do you think surfing should be an Olympic sport? Why or why not?
6. Make a timeline of events in Duke Kahanamoku's life. Then write what his feelings were during each event.
7. Have students write a book recommendation explaining why they would or would not recommend this book to other students.

ELL Teaching Activities

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English language learners.

1. Assign ELL students to read the text aloud with strong English readers/speakers.
2. Have each student write three questions about the book. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
 - Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
 - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the text or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about what they admire about a character or central figure in the book.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(CCSS: Introduction to the Standards, page 7, "Students establish a base of knowledge across a wide range of subject matter by engaging with works of quality and substance. They become proficient in new areas through research and study. They read purposefully and listen attentively to gain both general knowledge and discipline-specific expertise. They refine and share their knowledge through writing and speaking.")

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas.

Social Studies

1. When did Hawai'i become a US state? How was Duke able to compete for the United States in the Olympic games? Ask students to research the history of Hawai'i's statehood.
2. Ask students to research the history of swimming at the Olympics to learn about how the sport has changed and evolved over time.
3. Duke believed in living with *aloha*. Reread Duke's Creed of Aloha at the end of the book and review what the word *aloha* means. Discuss how people can live with *aloha*. How might living with *aloha* help the world today?

Science

1. Have students research the scientific forces at work on the body when a person swims (e.g.: resistance, drag, buoyancy, etc.), and how swimmers adapt to swimming in different types of water (e.g.: the ocean vs. a swimming pool).
2. Discuss some of the most common swimming strokes and kicks. Then let students find out which muscle groups swimmers use when performing each stroke and kick.
3. Provide a detailed map of the United States and have students locate the places mentioned in the book. Discuss the weather and climate in each place and whether or not it would be a good place for swimming and/or surfing.

Math

1. Ask students to research how many gold, silver, and bronze medals the United States and Australia have each won in swimming at the past four summer Olympics. Graph the information in different ways (e.g.: chart, line graph, bar graph, etc.).
2. Teach or explain how a swim meet is measured and scored, or have the gym teacher or a knowledgeable student explain these procedures.

Writing

1. Duke's favorite sports were swimming and surfing. What is your favorite sport? Write a passage about it.
2. Long after his death, people honored Duke Kahanamoku in different ways. Write a paragraph to describe what you would do to honor him.
3. Study the surfboards in the book's illustrations. Then research online what today's surfboards are like. Write compare-and-contrast paragraphs about those surfboards and the ones surfers ride today.
4. Pretend you are a reporter for the sports page of a newspaper. Write a story about an imaginary race in which Duke Kahanamoku participated, or describe how you felt when you saw him riding the huge wave, the Bluebird.

Sports

1. Surfing as a sport has changed from the time Duke lived. How have surfboards changed? How have the methods of maneuvering a surfboard changed? Find out how scientific research and experimentation have changed surfing equipment and how people surf.
2. Students might log onto the websites for the [International Swimming Hall of Fame](#), [Surfing Hall of Fame](#), and [United States Olympic Committee/Team USA](#) and plan an imaginary trip to one of these places or enjoy a virtual visit online.

Art

When Duke returned to Hawai'i in 1912, fans and supporters piled leis around his neck. Help students create their own leis. Use real flowers or create flowers out of crepe or tissue paper.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ellie Crowe has written several children's books, as well as guidebooks to Hawai'i. Crowe first heard of Duke Kahanamoku while living in Australia and swimming at Freshwater Beach, where she saw Duke's statue and the surfboard he made in a surfing museum. Moving to Hawai'i, Crowe found Duke was a hero there too. "He is a great role model and I wanted to introduce him to young readers today," says Crowe. She and her husband live in Honolulu. They have three grown children, all of whom love swimming and surfing. Visit her online at elliecrowe.com.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Richard Waldrep is an award-winning illustrator who has created images for editorial, publishing, advertising, and corporate clients, including *U.S. News and World Report*, the *Washington Post*, and Parker Brothers. His paintings honoring the Olympic Games, American music, and history have appeared on U.S. postage stamps. He lives in Sparks, Maryland.

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RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Learn more about **Surfer of the Century** at:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/115/hc/surfer_of_the_century_the_life_of_duke_kahanamoku