



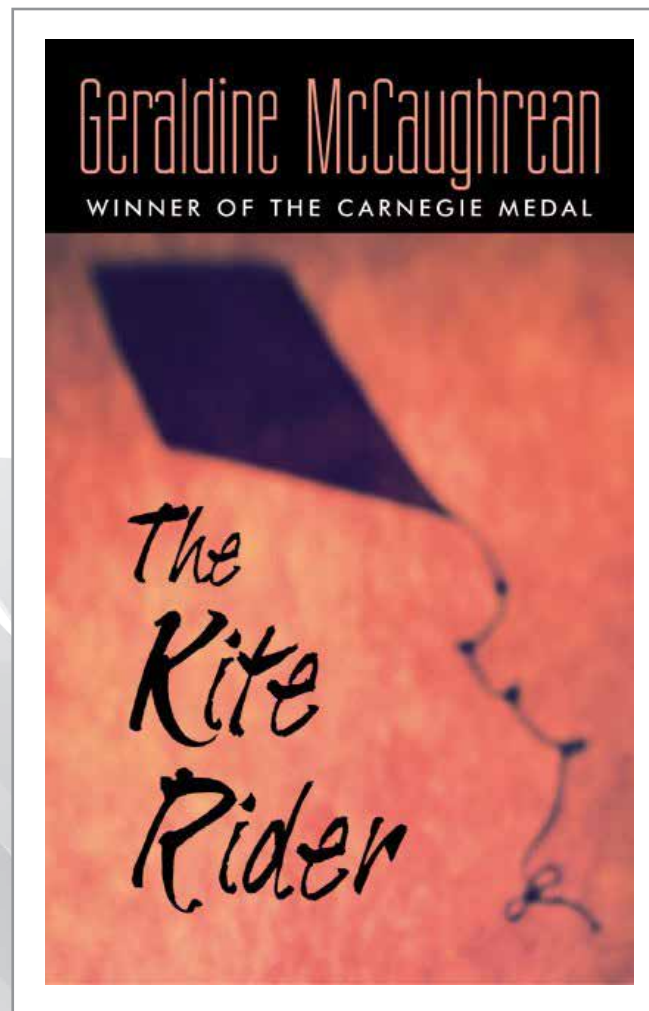
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 6-8**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# The Kite Rider

Geraldine McCaughrean



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# The Kite Rider

Geraldine McCaughrean

## TEACHER GUIDE

### NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

[sales@novelunits.com](mailto:sales@novelunits.com)

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## Skills and Strategies

### Comprehension

Creative thinking, identifying attributes, inferring, concept map, predicting, supporting judgments

### Literary Elements

Story mapping, setting, characterization, conflict, theme, figurative language, author's purpose, cause/effect

### Vocabulary

Definitions, root words, homophones, target words, glossary

### Writing

Creative writing, personal narrative, dialogue, journalism, short story, poetry, essay, report

### Listening/Speaking

Discussion, debate, drama, oral presentation

### Critical Thinking

Brainstorming, research, analysis, evaluation, compare/contrast

### Across the Curriculum

Social Studies—Chinese and Mongolian cultures, history, time lines; Geography—maps; Science—kites, animals, health, inventions, silk, archaeology, astronomy, typhoon preparedness; Math—measuring wind speed; Art—illustration, design, models, Chinese folk art; Music—Chinese instruments

**Genre:** historical fiction

**Setting:** thirteenth-century Cathay/China

**Point of View:** third-person

**Themes:** obedience, duty, honor, sacrifice, betrayal, courage, family, cultural differences, personal identity

**Conflict:** person vs. society, person vs. person, person vs. self, person vs. nature

**Tone:** informational, thought-provoking

**Date of First Publication:** 2001

## Summary

*The Kite Rider* is a story about 12-year-old Haoyou, a boy growing up in thirteenth-century China after Kublai Khan conquers the country. Haoyou watches his father die when his father is unwillingly strapped to a kite and sent aloft to “test the winds,” a practice used to predict the success of a ship’s voyage. To save his mother from marriage to the man who killed his father, Haoyou volunteers to ride a kite. He eventually becomes a kite rider for the Jade Circus and, along with his cousin Mipeng, travels to the imperial city of Dadu. In the sky, Haoyou awes the crowds as he searches for his father’s spirit. On the ground, he struggles with obedience to elders—a duty his father taught him—especially difficult when dealing with pompous, gambling Great-uncle Bo. Haoyou learns The Great Miao, master of the Jade Circus, also struggles with obedience. The Miao, as a member of the overruled Sung Dynasty, made a filial promise to kill Kublai Khan. Haoyou regrettably betrays his friend The Miao and is forced into the Khan’s army as a reconnaissance pilot, a secret weapon. When Haoyou returns home, he again outwits the man who killed his father and rescues his mother and sister. Through his adventures, Haoyou discovers obedience won’t always guide him through a complicated world. He must honor his duties in his own way to find inner peace.

## About the Author

Geraldine McCaughrean was born in 1951 and raised in North London. As a shy child, she escaped into the world of reading at the public library, and wrote so she could go somewhere else and be someone else. She still writes for the same reasons and hopes her books provide an “escape route” for readers. McCaughrean studied to become a teacher at the Christ Church College of Education, Canterbury, but shyness prevented her from teaching. Instead, she worked at a publishing house before becoming a full-time writer in 1988. With over 130 books and 50 short plays to her credit, she has won numerous awards including the Carnegie Medal, England’s most prestigious children’s book award, and she is the only writer to win the Whitbread Children’s Book Award three times. McCaughrean was selected to write *Peter Pan in Scarlet*, the official sequel to J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*. She lives in Berkshire, England, with her husband, daughter, and golden retriever.

## Background Information

The idea for *The Kite Rider* came after McCaughrean saw a poster about Japanese “man-lifting kites.” Research led to Marco Polo’s account of the first Westerner to witness an oriental kite and events surrounding Kublai Khan, such as the cart of soil, a carpet execution, and the typhoon that prevented the Khan’s fleet from invading Japan. McCaughrean doesn’t know what the themes of her books are going to be ahead of time. With *The Kite Rider*, she says, “the theme of obedience kept poking out its ugly head....” McCaughrean also says, “...style and rich language matter to me.” She thinks “children can cope with quite demanding vocabulary without turning a hair.” *The Kite Rider* has won the Blue Peter ‘Best Book to Keep’ Award, the Nestlé Smarties Book Prize (Bronze Award), and the American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults Award. The novel was also an ALA Notable Children’s Book and short-listed for the Carnegie Medal.

## Characters

**Haoyou:** 12-year-old boy; naive; has a strong sense of duty

**Pei:** Haoyou’s father; sailor

**Qing’an:** Haoyou’s mother; traditional Chinese wife; beautiful

**Wawa:** Haoyou’s little sister

**Great-uncle Bo:** head of the Gou family; pompous; gambler

**Great-aunt Mo:** Bo’s wife; traditional Chinese wife

**Mipeng:** Bo’s sister-in-law’s niece; a medium

**Di Chou:** first mate of Pei’s ship; wants to marry Qing’an

**Miao Jié (The Great Miao):** circus master of the Jade Circus

**Bukhur:** Mongolian bird catcher

**Khutulun:** Bukhur’s daughter

**Kublai Khan:** Mongol conqueror of thirteenth-century Cathay (China)

**The Sung Dynasty:** Chinese rulers before Kublai Khan’s invasion (also called The Song Dynasty; Sung is from the older Wade-Giles Romanization system. The more recent Pinyin system uses Song.)

## Chapters 1–3

Haoyou accompanies his seaman father, Pei, to the docks. He is eager to see the “testing of the winds,” a practice to determine the prosperity of a voyage. Di Chou, the ship’s first mate, forces Pei to be the kite rider sent aloft to test the winds. Haoyou’s shame at the humiliation of his father turns to horror when Pei does not survive the flight. Evil omens abound at Pei’s funeral. However, Great-uncle Bo, head of the family, is pleased Di Chou intends to marry Haoyou’s mother, Qing’an, solving the problem of supporting Qing’an and her children. Bo reluctantly changes his mind after Mipeng, a medium, speaks with Pei’s spirit. Despite Di Chou’s use of fists to influence her reading, Mipeng announces Pei’s wishes: there will be no weddings and Haoyou will earn money by making and selling kites.

### Vocabulary

ponderously  
corpulent  
auspicious  
pinioned  
humiliation  
quay  
moil  
intoned  
rickrack  
platitudes  
blighted  
cormorant  
fractious  
medium  
malevolent  
supercilious  
coffers  
pompous  
truculent  
imbue

### Discussion Questions

1. What kind of relationship does Haoyou have with his father? What information in the book supports your answer? *(Answers will vary. Suggestion: a close relationship based on love, honor, and respect; Haoyou is proud to have his father think he is growing up and ready to follow in his footsteps as a seaman. Haoyou and Pei laugh together. Haoyou can laugh at his father’s comments about the circus people, yet without being told, he knows he is expected to act respectably. Father and son focus on each other when Pei is wind testing.)*
2. Why is “testing the wind” important to the merchants and seamen? Do you see any flaws with using this method to predict the prosperity of a voyage? Do you think it is necessary to bind a man to the kite, or could the testing take place with only a kite? *(If the wind tester flies badly, merchants will put their cargo on another ship, leaving the seamen without a job; Answers will vary. Suggestions: Wind testing is a superstition that cannot predict trouble, such as conflicts with pirates. However, knowing wind patterns could help predict weather, warn of oncoming storms or becalming.)*
3. Based on information in Chapter 1, what do you know about the citizens of Dagou? *(The people depend on the sea for a living, either as seamen or merchants shipping their cargo. They are superstitious, extremely aware of what might bring good or bad luck. They are accustomed to seeing foreigners, such as the circus people. Some, like the Chabi’s captain, try to “curry favor” with the Khan; others, like Pei, consider the Mongols to be barbarians.)*
4. What is the foreigner’s purpose in the story? Why does the author include him? *(Answers will vary. Suggestion: The author uses the foreigner as a way to explain “testing the wind” to readers, rather than slow down the story with long sections of exposition. The foreigner may be Marco Polo, who described “testing the wind” [See “The Thirteenth Century and Kublai Khan” at the end of the novel.]*
5. Why does Haoyou consider being a wind tester a “humiliation of his honored father” (p. 7)? What do the Chabi’s crew members think of Pei? *(Answers will vary. Suggestion: Pei is a respectable, hardworking man who would be appalled at being a wind tester and the attention it would bring to himself. Wind testing shows that the life of a poor crew member isn’t valued; the crew thinks highly of Pei, except for Di Chou, who is envious.)*

6. What events cause guests at Pei's funeral to leave abruptly? Why do these events upset the guests? (*A stray firework rips through the guests and kills a chicken; Wawa displays her kite that has a man hanging beneath it; A gull sweeps down to grab Haoyou's rice cake. The events are considered unlucky omens.*)
7. Explain the meaning of Haoyou's dream. (*Answers will vary. Suggestion: Di Chou will come after Haoyou. Di Chou appearing as a cormorant ties into Haoyou's father's death in the sky. A cormorant can also mean a greedy person, which applies to Di Chou.*)
8. What motivates Di Chou? What do his actions tell you about him? (*Di Chou wants to marry Qing'an; Answers will vary. Suggestion: Di Chou is mean, violent, and self-centered.*)
9. Does Great-uncle Bo's power extend beyond the family? Does he use his power wisely? (*Bo only has power at home; at work he is a "second-rank warehouseman"; Answers will vary but should include that Bo uses his power to bully.*)
10. Why is Haoyou grateful to and proud of Mipeng? (*Mipeng stands up to Di Chou despite his hitting her, saves Qing'an from a marriage with Di Chou, and turns Haoyou into a kite maker.*)
11. **Prediction:** Why is Mipeng a medium if she doesn't speak to spirits?

### Supplementary Activities

1. Literary Analysis: Begin Character Webs (see page 31 of this guide) for Haoyou, Mipeng, Great-uncle Bo, and Great-aunt Mo. Add information as you read the story.
2. Literary Analysis: Begin the Story Map on page 32 of this guide.
3. History: Research the history of kites and write a report about an important person or event you found interesting.
4. Creative Writing: Haoyou wonders if his father can "see into the Past or into the Future" (p. 9). Write a story or poem about a wind tester who does see into the past or future.