

# An Educator's Guide to The Camel in the Sun

An Educator's Guide for Grades 1 through 3.

Prepared by We Love Children's Books

## About the Book

The camel has worked its entire life for the merchant Halim, carrying bundles of spices, dates, incense, silver and wool on long journeys across the desert east of the Red Sea. It has to climb steep dunes, run when it is exhausted and wait in the hot sun. The camel is overwhelmed by sadness and thinks its life will never change. And then one day the Prophet appears ...

Inspired by a retelling of a traditional Muslim hadith, or account of the words or actions of the Prophet, which the author first heard in Sri Lanka, this is the story of a camel whose cruel owner only realizes what suffering he has caused when the Prophet appears and shows love to the animal.

## About the Author and Illustrator

**Griffin Ondaatje** is a writer and documentary filmmaker. He edited *The Monkey King and Other Stories*, a collection of South Asian tales. He directed *Complete Unknown*, a documentary feature film on Bob Dylan and worked as a producer for CBC's Documentary Unit. His next book is a children's novel entitled *The Mosquito Brothers*. He has three children and lives in Toronto with his family.

**Linda Wolfsgruber** is a world-renowned artist who has exhibited her work throughout Europe and in the United States and Japan. She has won many awards, including the Austrian Children's and Juvenile Book Award for Illustration (four times) and the Golden Apple of the Biennial of Illustration Bratislava and she has been nominated for the Hans Christian Andersen Award. Her striking illustrations appear in many books, including *Inanna: From the Myths of Ancient Sumer*, *Stories from the Life of Jesus*, *Brunhilda and the Ring* and *A daisy is a daisy is a daisy*. She lives in Vienna.

## Praise

"Ondaatje narrates with graceful lyricism ... A tender story, eloquently rendered."

— *Publishers Weekly*, starred review

"A lesson in empathy — for animals but also in general — delivered at a pace as stately as a camel's."

— *Kirkus Reviews*

## Pre-Reading Questions and Activities

As a class, examine the cover of the book. What do students think this story is going to be about? Where will the action take place? Do they think it is fiction or non-fiction?

What do students know about camels? What do they imagine the life of a camel would be like?

This is a story about compassion and empathy. What do these words mean? Have students give examples of what it means to be compassionate. Can they think of any other books that address these themes?

## Vocabulary

In this book students will encounter a world and a life far from their own, both in time and space. This book is set in the Middle East, during the 6th century. Discuss the following words as they are used in this book and what they mean in this context:

- Hadith
- Merchant
- Oasis
- Prophet
- Spices
- Incense
- Dates

## Post-Reading Discussion Questions and Activities

### Authors and Illustrators

Picture books are unique. They combine the strengths of both words and illustrations to tell their story. Working with the class, discuss the following questions:

Who is the author of this book? What does an author do?

Who is the illustrator of this book? What does an illustrator do?

What parts of the story are best conveyed by the words of the story?

What elements of the story are best told in pictures?

### Get Out the Map

This story begins with a poetic description of the lands where the tale is set. At first reading, it seems like a fairy tale with the names of strange, faraway places. However, these places are very real. Working in small groups or as a class, find the cities and geographical features identified in this book. Have students mark them on a map.

## Who Are You? Describing the Characters

Have students identify the main characters of this story. Working as a class, read the story closely to determine the key personality traits of each individual. Record them on a chart. Discuss how the author conveys information about each character to the reader.

## Tell Me A Story

*The Camel in the Sun* is based on a Muslim hadith. A hadith is an account of the words or actions of the Prophet Muhammad and often teaches a lesson. Break students into pairs and have them retell the story to each other. Have them identify the beginning, the middle and the end of the story. Have them decide what the central lesson or main message of the story is. Have students share their conclusions with the class.

## The Main Event

The story revolves around the relationship of the camel and his owner, the merchant. Break students into small groups and have them discuss the following questions:

What is the relationship between the camel and the merchant like at the beginning of the story? What is it like at the end? Why did their relationship change? What important event was the cause of this change? Come together as a class and discuss the responses.

## The Story Heats Up

This story is set in a desert. The author and illustrator do an excellent job of evoking the atmosphere of intense heat and sunlight and the hardships the camel endures. Work with the class to identify specific words and phrases that convey the impression of heat. Explain the difference between literal and figurative language. Which phrases are literal descriptions of circumstances? Which are figurative? What is the impact of each?

Review the illustrations as a class. What elements of the illustrations communicate to the reader the setting for this story (i.e., a desert) and its atmosphere (i.e., heat and bright sun)? How does it help convey the message of the story?

## Word Choice and Shades of Meaning

The following words are used by the author to describe the camel as he travels across the desert. Have students locate the words in the book. Using contextual clues, have students define these words and identify the subtle differences between them. If appropriate, have students act out the words as used in the text to show comprehension.

- Walked
- Carried
- Climbed
- Lumbered
- Run
- Struggling
- Drifted
- Traveling
- Guided

## Changes

By the end of the story, the merchant and the camel have experienced a change in their relationship. The reader sees how the merchant's behavior reflects his new attitude. For example, at the beginning of the story, the merchant "always yelled at the camel to run, so he could reach the place where he'd sell his goods as fast as possible." After his encounter with the Prophet, the merchant changes his behavior towards his camel. The story concludes with the merchant saying, "We will rest a while before we go on ... There is no need to hurry." Work with the class to identify other things the merchant does that make the camel's life miserable and lonely. Have students write a new passage of the story showing how the merchant's behaviors will change. Break students into small groups and have them share their first drafts. Based on peer feedback, have students revise and present their work to the class.

## What Was He Thinking?

When the Prophet confronts the merchant about the way he treats the camel, the merchant is unable to speak. Review this passage as a class. Why do students feel the merchant reacted that way? Have students write an opinion piece on what the merchant is thinking and feeling.

## Desert Life

The camel and the merchant travel every day through the desert. Have students work with an adult to research life in the desert, drawing on internet resources and the library. What is the desert like in the daytime? What is it like at night? How do people live, travel and survive in the desert? This story is set in the 6th century AD; how much has desert life changed since then? Have students write a brief report on what they have found and then have them revise and publish their research.

## Skills and Subjects Used

### Reading – Grade 1

#### *Key Ideas and Details*

Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

Retell stories, including key details and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.

Describe characters, settings and major events in a story, using key details.

#### *Craft and Structure*

Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses.

#### *Integration of Knowledge and Ideas*

Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting or events.

## Writing – Grade 1

### *Text Types and Purposes*

Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or name the book they are writing about, state an opinion, supply a reason for the opinion and provide some sense of closure.

Write informative/explanatory texts in which they name a topic, supply some facts about the topic and provide some sense of closure.

Write narratives in which they recount two or more appropriately sequenced events, include some details regarding what happened, use temporal words to signal event order and provide some sense of closure.

### *Production and Distribution of Writing*

With guidance and support from adults, focus on a topic, respond to questions and suggestions from peers and add details to strengthen writing as needed.

With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers.

### *Research to Build and Present Knowledge*

With guidance and support from adults, recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

## Speaking and Listening – Grade 1

### *Comprehension and Collaboration*

Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 1 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

- Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion).
- Build on others' talk in conversations by responding to the comments of others through multiple exchanges.
- Ask questions to clear up any confusion about the topics and texts under discussion.

Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

### *Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas*

Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts and feelings.

## Language – Grade 1

### *Conventions of Standard English*

Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

- Print all upper- and lowercase letters.
- Use common, proper and possessive nouns.
- Use singular and plural nouns with matching verbs in basic sentences (e.g., He hops; We hop).
- Use personal, possessive and indefinite pronouns (e.g., I, me, my; they, them, their; anyone, everything).
- Use verbs to convey a sense of past, present and future (e.g., Yesterday I walked home; Today I walk home; Tomorrow I will walk home).
- Use frequently occurring adjectives.
- Use frequently occurring conjunctions (e.g. and, but, or, so, because).
- Use determiners (e.g., articles, demonstratives).
- Use frequently occurring prepositions (e.g., during, beyond, toward).
- Produce and expand complete simple and compound declarative, interrogative, imperative and exclamatory sentences in response to prompts

Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation and spelling when writing.

- Capitalize dates and names of people.
- Use end punctuation for sentences.
- Use commas in dates and to separate single words in a series.
- Use conventional spelling for words with common spelling patterns and for frequently occurring irregular words.
- Spell untaught words phonetically, drawing on phonemic awareness and spelling conventions.

*Vocabulary Acquisition and Use*

Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 1 reading and content, choosing flexibly from an array of strategies.

- Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
- Use frequently occurring affixes as a clue to the meaning of a word.
- Identify frequently occurring root words (e.g., look) and their inflectional forms (e.g., looks, looked, looking).

With guidance and support from adults, demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings.

- Sort words into categories (e.g., colors, clothing) to gain a sense of the concepts the categories represent.
- Define words by category and by one or more key attributes (e.g., a duck is a bird that swims; a tiger is a large cat with stripes).
- Identify real-life connections between words and their use (e.g., note places at home that are cozy).
- Distinguish shades of meaning among verbs differing in manner (e.g., look, peek, glance, stare, glare, scowl) and adjectives differing in intensity (e.g., large, gigantic) by defining or choosing them or by acting out the meanings.

**Reading – Grade 2***Key Ideas and Details*

Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures and determine their central message, lesson or moral.

Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.

*Craft and Structure*

Describe the overall structure of a story, including describing how the beginning introduces the story and the ending concludes the action.

*Integration of Knowledge and Ideas*

Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting or plot.

## Writing – Grade 2

### *Text Types and Purposes*

Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or book they are writing about, state an opinion, supply reasons that support the opinion, use linking words (e.g., because and, also) to connect opinion and reasons and provide a concluding statement or section.

Write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points and provide a concluding statement or section.

Write narratives in which they recount a well elaborated event or short sequence of events, include details to describe actions, thoughts and feelings, use temporal words to signal event order and provide a sense of closure.

### *Production and Distribution of Writing*

With guidance and support from adults and peers, focus on a topic and strengthen writing as needed by revising and editing.

With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers.

### *Research to Build and Present Knowledge*

Participate in shared research and writing projects (e.g., read a number of books on a single topic to produce a report; record scientific observations).

Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

## Speaking and Listening – Grade 2

### *Comprehension and Collaboration*

Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

- Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., gaining the floor in respectful ways, listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion).
- Build on others' talk in conversations by linking their comments to the remarks of others.
- Ask for clarification and further explanation as needed about the topics and texts under discussion.

Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media

*Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas*

Tell a story or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking audibly in coherent sentences.

Create audio recordings of stories or poems; add drawings or other visual displays to stories or recounts of experiences when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts and feelings.

**Language – Grade 2***Conventions of Standard English*

Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

- Use collective nouns (e.g., group).
- Form and use frequently occurring irregular plural nouns (e.g., feet, children, teeth, mice, fish).
- Use reflexive pronouns (e.g., myself, ourselves).
- Form and use the past tense of frequently occurring irregular verbs (e.g., sat, hid, told).
- Use adjectives and adverbs and choose between them depending on what is to be modified.
- Produce, expand and rearrange complete simple and compound sentences (e.g., The boy watched the movie; The little boy watched the movie; The action movie was watched by the little boy).

Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation and spelling when writing.

- Capitalize holidays, product names and geographic names.
- Use commas in greetings and closings of letters.
- Use an apostrophe to form contractions and frequently occurring possessives.
- Generalize learned spelling patterns when writing words (e.g., cage → badge; boy → boil).
- Consult reference materials, including beginning dictionaries, as needed to check and correct spellings

*Vocabulary Acquisition and Use*

Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 2 reading and content, choosing flexibly from an array of strategies.

- Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
- Determine the meaning of the new word formed when a known prefix is added to a known word (e.g., happy/unhappy, tell/retell).
- Use a known root word as a clue to the meaning of an unknown word with the same root (e.g., addition, additional).
- Use knowledge of the meaning of individual words to predict the meaning of compound words (e.g., birdhouse, lighthouse, housefly; bookshelf, notebook, bookmark).
- Use glossaries and beginning dictionaries, both print and digital, to determine or clarify the meaning of words and phrases.

Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings.

- Identify real-life connections between words and their use (e.g., describe foods that are spicy or juicy).
- Distinguish shades of meaning among closely related verbs (e.g., toss, throw, hurl) and closely related adjectives (e.g., thin, slender, skinny, scrawny).

## Reading – Grade 3

### *Key Ideas and Details*

Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

Recount stories, including fables, folktales and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.

Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.

### *Craft and Structure*

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, distinguishing literal from nonliteral language.

### *Integration of Knowledge and Ideas*

Explain how specific aspects of a text's illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g., create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting).

## Writing – Grade 3

### *Text Types and Purposes*

Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons.

- Introduce the topic or text they are writing about, state an opinion and create an organizational structure that lists reasons.
- Provide reasons that support the opinion.
- Use linking words and phrases (e.g., because, therefore, since, for example) to connect opinion and reasons.
- Provide a concluding statement or section.

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

- Introduce a topic and group related information together; include illustrations when useful to aiding comprehension.
- Develop the topic with facts, definitions and details.
- Use linking words and phrases (e.g., also, another and, more, but) to connect ideas within categories of information.
- Provide a concluding statement or section.

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details and clear event sequences.

- Establish a situation and introduce a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally.
- Use dialogue and descriptions of actions, thoughts and feelings to develop experiences and events or show the response of characters to situations.
- Use temporal words and phrases to signal event order.
- Provide a sense of closure.

### *Production and Distribution of Writing*

With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising and editing. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1–3 up to and including grade 3.)

With guidance and support from adults, use technology to produce and publish writing (using keyboarding skills) as well as to interact and collaborate with others.

### *Research to Build and Present Knowledge*

Conduct short research projects that build knowledge about a topic.

Recall information from experiences or gather information from print and digital sources; take brief notes on sources and sort evidence into provided categories.

### *Range of Writing*

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes and audiences.

## **Speaking and Listening – Grade 3**

### *Comprehension and Collaboration*

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 3 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

- Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation and other information known about the topic to explore ideas under discussion.
- Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., gaining the floor in respectful ways, listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion).
- Ask questions to check understanding of information presented, stay on topic and link their comments to the remarks of others.
- Explain their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion.

Determine the main ideas and supporting details of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively and orally.

Create engaging audio recordings of stories or poems that demonstrate fluid reading at an understandable pace; add visual displays when appropriate to emphasize or enhance certain facts or details.

## **Language – Grade 3**

### *Conventions of Standard English*

Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

- Explain the function of nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs in general and their functions in particular sentences.
- Form and use regular and irregular plural nouns.
- Use abstract nouns (e.g., childhood).
- Form and use regular and irregular verbs.
- Form and use the simple (e.g., I walked; I walk; I will walk) verb tenses.
- Ensure subject-verb and pronoun-antecedent agreement.
- Form and use comparative and superlative adjectives and adverbs and choose between them depending on what is to be modified.
- Use coordinating and subordinating conjunctions.
- Produce simple, compound and complex sentences.

Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation and spelling when writing.

- Capitalize appropriate words in titles.
- Use commas in addresses.
- Use commas and quotation marks in dialogue.
- Form and use possessives.
- Use conventional spelling for high-frequency and other studied words and for adding suffixes to base words (e.g., sitting, smiled, cries, happiness).
- Use spelling patterns and generalizations (e.g., word families, position-based spellings, syllable patterns, ending rules, meaningful word parts) in writing words.
- Consult reference materials, including beginning dictionaries, as needed to check and correct spellings.

Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading or listening.

- Choose words and phrases for effect.
- Recognize and observe differences between the conventions of spoken and written standard English.

*Vocabulary Acquisition and Use*

Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning word and phrases based on grade 3 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

- Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
- Determine the meaning of the new word formed when a known affix is added to a known word (e.g., agreeable/disagreeable, comfortable/uncomfortable, care/careless, heat/preheat).
- Use a known root word as a clue to the meaning of an unknown word with the same root (e.g., company, companion).
- Use glossaries or beginning dictionaries, both print and digital, to determine or clarify the precise meaning of key words and phrases.

Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings.

- Distinguish the literal and nonliteral meanings of words and phrases in context (e.g., take steps).
- Identify real-life connections between words and their use (e.g., describe people who are friendly or helpful).
- Distinguish shades of meaning among related words that describe states of mind or degrees of certainty (e.g., knew, believed, suspected, heard, wondered).