

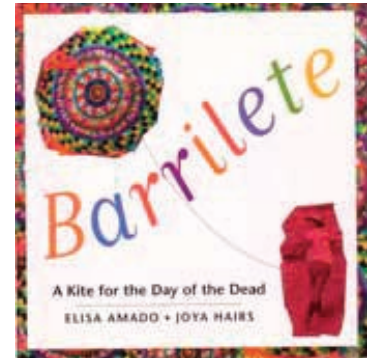
“Let It Fly!” A Selective, Annotated Listing of Books about Kites from Many Cultures for Teachers of K-8 Students

This listing includes books in which kite making and flying are the focus, not just an incidental motif. It does **not** include how-to books. Most titles are still available through sellers of new and/or used books.

Those books appropriate only for the primary level (K-2) are so labeled; others may be useful even for teachers of middle school students, as less time-consuming read-alouds than short novels. **Kite Keys** in each annotation specify what a reader can learn, and a teacher can reinforce, about kite making, kite flying, kite history, and/or kite cultures from the book.

Starred titles indicate not just usefulness of information about kites but also literary quality.

- * Amado, Elisa. *Barrilete: A Kite for the Day of the Dead*. Douglas & McIntyre (A Groundwood Book), 1999, 32 pp. Amado tells this story of the kite flying tradition on Day of the Dead in the Mayan village of Santiago Sacatepéquez, Guatemala through the eyes of Juan, a young boy whose grandfather has died. Juan must use what his grandfather has taught him to build a kite with his friends (little brother Beto prefers to fly little kites because “it is easier.”) On November 2nd they join the villagers in the cemetery, send the kite aloft, and hope that grandfather is pleased.



Kite Keys: Joya Hairs’ photographs illuminate this narrative (and document construction and flying techniques) about one of the world’s great indigenous kiting traditions. They were taken in the 1970s, before the civil war in Guatemala that targeted many Maya; nonetheless, the tradition continues in the two villages of Santiago Sacatepéquez and Sumpango, where The Drachen Foundation has connections with kite makers to commission authentic kits (the kind of kites Beto constructs) for classroom use. This book, most unfortunately, is out of print; *Remembering the Ancestors* by The Drachen Foundation covers the same tradition.

- * Blanco, Alberto. *Angel’s Kite*. Children’s Book Press, 1994, 32pp (text in English and Spanish). The childhood kite making experiences of illustrator Rodolfo Morales, from Ocotlán in Oaxaca, Mexico, inspired this magical story. Angel makes and sells beautiful kites, or *cometas*, in a village that has mysteriously lost its church bell—perhaps to an art collector, perhaps to revolutionaries, perhaps to magic. One day he makes a large kite, with everything in the village pictured on it, including the church bell. The kite sails up in a strong wind—so strong that the kite flies away. The villagers trail after it, dropping away until only Angel and his three dogs wait on a distant hill for the kite to drop when the wind dies. When the kite finally falls, the bell has disappeared from the kite, but has reappeared in the bell tower! The colorful collage illustrations complement the narrative’s magic realism.



Kite Keys: Both text and illustrations support the point that “a few bits of colored thread and broom straw, some tissue and glue—that was all it took for Angel’s imagination and hands to bring the most beautiful fantasies to life.” Students can also learn that being a kite maker is an

recognized occupation. The kites are eight-sided; an illustration of the large kite shows how edges are folded in for reinforcement and fringe glued around all edges, for decorative effect and to help stabilize the kite's flight. As to the magical potential of a masterpiece kite...



* Buckley, Helen E. *Moonlight Kite*. Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1997, 32 pp. Only three monks, observing their vows of silence, still live in the monastery where Nicholas and his sister Anarilla climb the hill to fly a kite one afternoon, sure that the monastery is deserted. At the end of the day the kite catches in a tree; they decide to retrieve it the next day. The monks have been watching: in the moonlight they dislodge the kite and spend a joyful evening flying it, each remembering where he flew kites as a boy. They leave the kite in a different tree, where the puzzled children find it the next day. Eventually, the kites make another kite, which they leave for the children; more children come to the hill with their kites; the monks enjoy the company of their shouts and laughter—and continue their own flights by moonlight. The soft-edged illustrations by

Elise Primavera, especially of the monks climbing on each others' backs and flying their kites as boys, should charm students.

Kite Keys: the kites pictured are all diamond-shaped, with tails. The monks clearly know how to fly kites, apparent from the description of their flying technique ("At first [the kite] wavered and wobbled, but when Brother André gave the line a sharp tug, the orange kite righted itself and began to climb.") The monks' memories of flying kites as boys make the point that, at least for children living in a city, the flying field is more likely to be a rooftop or a courtyard than the beach (where Brother André was lucky enough to fly).

Chen, Jiang Hong. *The Legend of the Kite: A Story of China*. Soundprints, 1999 (originally published in France in 1997), 32 pp. This is a fanciful origins story told by a grandfather to his grandson, to assuage the disappointment when his dragon kite snaps its string and is destroyed on a temple roof. Grandfather tells of Ming-Ming who grows up to be an artist, in love with his neighbor's daughter, the beautiful Ying-Ying. When the Emperor spots Ying-ying and orders her to the palace, Ming-Ming saves the day by creating a "life-size cutout" of his beloved, flying it as a kite on the day the Emperor's servants arrive for Ying-Ying. They are so distracted that the two young lovers slip away to live happily ever after; Ming-ming continues to decorate kites and pass this skill on to disciples, which in turn feeds the Chinese enthusiasm for kite festivals. Grandfather says that "there is always one kite among all the others that represents a beautiful young woman." The book concludes with two pages of factual information about China.

Kite Keys: Despite a very slight story, perfunctorily told, the illustrations are attractive (the author is a painter), depicting the lively variety of traditional Chinese kites.

Compestine, Ying Chang. *The Story of Kites*. Holiday House, 2003. The third in a series of origin stories starring the Kangs—Ting, Pan, and Kùai—this outing starts with the brothers chasing birds away from the rice harvest. Tired of blowing whistles and banging pots and pans, they try wings—one set of paper, one set of paper and bamboo chopsticks, one of chicken feathers. Not the solution. They next paint scary faces on straw hats, but once they frighten the birds, the hats disappear on the wind. Simple wings, made from their bamboo chopsticks and pages of math homework, at first surprise the birds but are not intimidating enough. Finally they make kites in the shape of birds and butterflies, one with a flute strapped on for the wind to play. An author's note adds detail about the evolution of Chinese kites and explains how to make a diamond-shaped kite and how to fly a kite safely. Figures and shapes in the illustrations, by Yong Sheng Xuan, are brightly colored

and outlined in black, to suggest Chinese papercuts. The combination makes for visually busy pages, in some cases difficult to “read.”

Kite Keys: This book could trigger discussion of kite making in China both past and present. The story is cleverly built on the hypothesis, explained more fully in the author’s note, that the invention of kites may have been suggested by a farmer’s hat flying away. The story also explains the origin of the word for kites in Chinese, *fengzheng*: the sound the wind (*feng*) makes flowing through the flute attached to the kite is like that from the strings of a Chinese zither (*zheng*). However, many kite historians disagree with Compestine’s assertion in her author’s note that “kites originated in China.” They believe that kites were more likely to have originated in the islands and peninsulas of the Pacific (where the needs of seafaring cultures could have driven the development of simple, utilitarian leaf kites for fishermen) or perhaps were invented independently by several Asian cultures. The ending of the story, in which the Kang family establishes “the very first kite factory in China” could lead to further discussion of China’s current role as primary source of manufactured kites (as of so many other goods) for export all over the world).

The kites pictured throughout the narrative show the many animal shapes—birds, butterflies, dragons—characteristic of Chinese kites. (However, the double-page spread with which the story ends includes in the lower right corner a rectangular kite with a kabuki-style face, more reflective of Japanese than Chinese traditional kite design.)

Emmett, Jonathan. *Someone Bigger*. Clarion Books, 2003, 24 pp. Writers of books about kites for the very young seem drawn to the plot device of a kite’s pulling its flier into the air. In this version (partially in rhyme), Sam and his father have made a large, light kite. Sam is refused permission to fly the kite because “*This* kite needs someone bigger.” Sam’s dad starts flying, only to be pulled into the air—as are the postman, a bank robber, and many other townspeople and animals. Finally Sam grabs hold and winds in the line, proving that he is “not too small” to manage. **Primary**

Kite Keys: Very young students may be amused by the silly sequence of folks pulled off their feet, and will identify with young Sam in his triumph. Regrettably, the illustrations show the kite line strung from the back instead of the front side of the kite.

Galouchko, Annouchka Gravel. *Shō and the Demons of the Deep*. Annick Press (with the support of The Canada Council for the Arts), 1998, 24 pp. This is a fantastical origins tale, set in “ancient Japan,” based on the saying that the Japanese “cast their nightmares into the sea.” The heroine Shō convinces the people to play with their dreams rather than fear them, to toss them into the air instead of the sea, which has been so roiled by all the bad dreams that it has stopped providing fish. Hence, kites are born, and kite festivals continue around the world.

Kite Keys: Despite this book’s ostensible setting in Japan, there is nothing particularly Japanese about the story or the types of kites depicted. Students may enjoy the fantasy and the colorful, swirling style of illustration.



* Garay, Luis. *The Kite*. Tundra Books, 2002, 32pp. This story is set in a barrio of an unspecified country (the author-illustrator was born in Nicaragua). Francisco sells newspapers every day to help support his family, as his father has recently died and his mother is about to give birth. He longs for a kite that hangs in the corner of Señor González’s market stall, but realizes that his family cannot spare even the “few cents” it would cost to purchase. Francisco helps his neighbors clean their fruit stall; in turn, he gets both a new baby sister and the kite as a gift. With some effort he gets the kite into the air, and it seems as though “he and the kite and the blue sky and the white clouds were all a chain.” His father joins the chain,

as Francisco remembers being with him in the same field watching kites “scud across the sky.” Although all his wishes cannot come true, some of the surprises that life brings are “wonderful.” The book is dedicated to the “thousands of children” in Latin America “who live in poverty”: the most poignant indication of poverty is that neither Francisco nor the other sellers has learned to read; they must memorize the day’s headlines as recited to them in order to attract customers.

Kite Keys: The kite Francisco longs for is a large paper diamond, with tassels at either edge and a long tail; the picture of his flying the kite shows how the tassels help to balance the kite in flight. Teachers can use the story to touch on two points common to several titles in this list: that kites can be inexpensive (thus contributing to their popularity worldwide; even a store-bought kite may be only a “few cents”) and that kites are often seen as a way for the living to commemorate or communicate with the spirits of the departed.

Gerstein, Mordicai. *The Mountains of Tibet*. Harper & Row, 1987, 30 pp. A young boy who “loved to fly kites” grew up in the mountains of Tibet. After his death he can choose to live another life anywhere in all the galaxies. Among all the possible choices, he chooses the same setting for his next life—except that he will be a girl.

Kite Keys: The book includes three images of flying Chinese-style animal kites.

Gibbons, Gail. *Catch the Wind! All About Kites*. Little, Brown, 1989, 32 pp. Within the framework of a visit to Ike’s Kite Shop, Katie and Sam learn about kite history, kite types, materials for making kites, and flying techniques. The colorful illustrations show various kites clearly.

Kite Keys: This book offers a useful overview of kite types and techniques for young readers. Gibbons divides kites into “five basic designs”: flat, bowed, box, delta, and flexible. Three pages at the end of the book give simple instructions for making a flat kite, launching a kite on one’s own and with a friend, landing a kite, and following safety rules. **A few caveats:** Gibbon’s statement that kites originated in China is now questioned by many kite historians; her assertion that Egyptians were among early kite fliers is questionable; although most illustrations show kites bridled from the correct side of the kite (the front), the illustration that accompanies “Parts of a Flat Kite” shows the kite bridled from the back of the kite.

* Hall, Bruce Edward. *Henry and the Kite Dragon*. Philomel, 2004, 32 pp. Based on true events, this story is set in New York City’s Chinatown of the 1920s, where Henry Chu enjoys life in a protective ethnic enclave. A favorite activity is flying kites with Grandfather Chin, a neighbor. But when Tony Guglione and his friends from Little Italy first destroy a lovely butterfly kite, then attack Grandfather Chin’s magnificent dragon kite, children from the two neighborhoods are ready to attack each other. Only when Henry and his friends discover that the kites are chasing and frightening the homing pigeons that Tony and his friends raise can they avoid a battle and work out an amicable solution to share the sky.

Kite Keys: Paintings by William Low testify to the vibrancy and variety of Chinese kites. The text also makes clear through Grandfather Chin (who would rather make a new and better kite than confront the boys who have thrown stones at the kites he has been flying) that kites can be made of simple materials found around the neighborhood: wood from packing crates, cardboard, rice paste, and newspaper.

Harding, Les. *McCurdy and The Silver Dart*. University College of Cape Breton Press, 1998, 126 pp. This short biography, appropriate for intermediate and middle school readers, concerns Canadian aviation pioneer J.A.D. McCurdy. As is the case with Samuel Franklin Cody (see listing under John Hulls), the first chapters of the book concern McCurdy’s involvement with kite experiments through his association with Alexander Graham Bell, inventor of the tetrahedral kite. McCurdy grew up in the village of Baddeck, site of Bell’s

kite laboratory, and became a member, with Bell, of the Aerial Experiment Association.

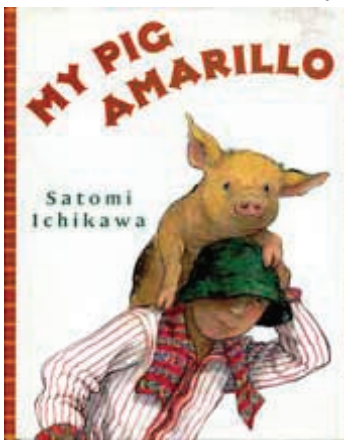
Kite Keys: The book (paperback) includes a number of historical photographs of kites and early airplanes; as with the biography of Cody, this book could be useful in clarifying the role played by kites in the evolution of manned flight.

* [Hitz], Demi. *Kites: Magic Wishes Fly Up to the Sky*. Crown Publishers—Dragonfly Books, 2000, 34 pp. This book combines an origins story with many illustrations, in Demi's exquisitely detailed style, of traditional Chinese kites. A mother approaches a painter of holy pictures with a request: instead of a picture to present to the gods at a temple, she wants a dragon kite to fly in the sky—easier for the gods to see when the message is right before their eyes. The ploy seems to work (wishes fulfilled), and soon the sky is full of different creatures, each symbolizing particular virtues. Soon the gods themselves, flowers, and symbols are also being pictured on kites. Kite traditions then develop: kites are released to send away bad luck; kite festivals are celebrated.

Kite Keys: The illustrations convey lots of visual information about typical Chinese kites; the author also mentions kite fighting contests and kite accoutrements (whistles, gongs, drums). She dates China's Double Ninth Festival (an occasion for flying kites) by the Gregorian calendar, on September 9th; according to other sources, the Double Ninth Festival occurs on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month and thus usually falls in October. (Since 1989 the festival has also been an occasion to honor elders.) The book ends with instructions for making a diamond-shaped kite. Students may notice that none of the Chinese kites pictured in the text is of this shape.

Hulls, John. *Rider in the Sky: How an American Cowboy Built England's First Airplane*. Crown, 2003, 102 pp. This biography profiles a fascinating pioneer of flight for middle school-age readers. As the title makes clear, Samuel Franklin Cody (no relation to Buffalo Bill Cody, although he did his best to take advantage of the confusion) eventually built and flew the first airplane in England. But his early research (as was the case for the Wrights and Alexander Graham Bell as well) was with kites, specifically controllable man-lifters.

Kite Keys: The book includes intriguing historical photographs and drawings (many of them from The Drachen Foundation, which is acknowledged in the Author's Notes) of Cody's enormous box kites and the intricate Cody man-lifters he developed. The first third of the book deals with Cody's kite experiments, and could be useful to clarifying for students the relationship between kites and manned flight.



* Ichikawa, Satomi. *My Pig Amarillo*. Philomel, 2003 (originally published in France in 2002), 32 pp. The story is set in Guatemala (with many cultural details included in the illustrations), where Grandpa brings his grandson Pablito a little pig, whom the child names Amarillo. They play together every day until Amarillo suddenly disappears. Pablito is inconsolable until he makes a kite for All Saints' Day, sends it aloft, and gets what he believes is a response from Amarillo.

Kite Keys: Because of the seasonal winds, kite flying is common in Guatemala around the time of All Saints' Day: indeed, two villages north of Antigua traditionally make, display, and fly giant kites. The story's illustrations accurately depict the hexagonal kites, with fringe, that are typically flown. It also illustrates that kites can be made from very simple materials, the kinds that even the poorest households have. The story also highlights the belief, common to many cultures, that one can communicate with the spirit world by flying a kite.

Jagtenberg, Yvonne. *Jack's Kite*. Roaring Brook Press, 2004 (originally published in the Netherlands in 2003), 24 pp. Young Jack is stuck at the campground without his dad,

unable to get his kite into the air. Another family of campers offers to help, but then the kite escapes. Who comes to the rescue? Despite the simple story, intermediate-level students may appreciate the deadpan tone of both text and illustrations.

Kite Keys: The story reinforces the perception that flying a kite can be tricky. The family that offers to help—has the right ideas: run to create some lift; add some tail when the kite falters; let out more line as the kite climbs. In this story kite flying is also a family, cross-generational activity—as it often is in real life.

- * Khan, Rukhsana. *King of the Skies*. North Winds Press (Scholastic Canada), 2001, 30 pp. Khan tells the story of a boy, wheelchair bound, who participates from his rooftop in the kite fighting during the festival of Basunt in Lahore, Pakistan. The boy's kite, Guddi Chore or Kite Thief, is small and nimble, able to cut the string of the large slow kite flown by the bully next door. The boy is helped by his sister on the rooftop, who snares some lines of falling kites with her bamboo pole, and by his brother, a "kite runner" in the street. The narrative is a straightforward account of the day, punctuated by the boy's kindness in surreptitiously dropping one of the many kites his family has captured to a little girl in the street below who has lost her kite. The full-page illustrations, with some two-page spreads, in lush oil on canvas, sustain interest through varied perspectives, several from overhead, looking to the rooftop and the street.



Kite Keys: This book is invaluable for introducing kite fighting, a popular type of kite flying, particularly in Asia. Khan accurately describes the techniques of kite fighting—tangling and cutting lines, and using glass-powdered string—and the rules of the game, which decree that any kite cut from the sky belongs to the person who can retrieve it. A page after the story ends describes the history of Basunt. Note: find this book through Scholastic Canada.

- Krensky, Stephen. *Ben Franklin and His First Kite*. Simon & Schuster/Aladdin (in the "Childhood of Famous Americans" Ready-To-Read series, Level 2), 2002, 32 pp. Young students are unlikely to be familiar with the first story of Ben Franklin and a kite—not the kite he flew as an adult, in a thunderstorm with a key attached, but the kite he flew as a boy that pulled him across a swimming hole without his swimming a stroke (an example of traction kiting). The book ends with a brief timeline of Franklin's life, including his proof that lightning is a form of electricity. **Primary.**

Kite Keys: The kite shown is a large diamond-shaped kite with a tail. When his friends comment that "that kite's nothing special. It's just paper, sticks, and string," young Ben replies, "But you see, the kite isn't the invention. The invention is what I'm going to do with it." This book can introduce very young students to an intriguing story about kites and also to the spirit of experimentation.

- Lies, Brian. *Hamlet and the Enormous Chinese Dragon Kite*. Houghton Mifflin, 1994, 32 pp. The first book that Lies both wrote and illustrated, the story tells of adventuresome Hamlet the pig, carried away by an enormous kite that he insists on flying despite the warnings of his friend, the worrywart porcupine Quince. A "swarm" of eagles destroys the kite, but Hamlet is saved from destruction by his kite string, which catches in the branches of a tree as he falls. Best suited as a read-aloud for **Primary.**

Kite Keys: Quince's fears about the lifting power of a large kite turn out to be true, and the lively language and illustrations do justice to the subject. Note: Lies' most recent book (in rhyme), *Bats at the Beach* (2006), has one mention of kite flying, with some bats "flying" other bats, who hold kite line in their claws, as kites.

- * Lin, Grace. *Kite Flying*. Dell Dragonfly, 2002, 32 pp. Despite the title, this book is as much about kite making as about kite flying. The spare text and bright illustrations tell the story of a young girl whose Chinese American family helps her make and fly a dragon kite.

Primary

Kite Keys: The kite making materials, pictured in the frontispiece, are more sophisticated than those used by the family in *The Kite Festival* by Torres: they include such tools as joining tubes and a craft knife, and this family goes to a crafts store to purchase them. All family members (father, mother, and three sisters) participate in the making and flying, emphasizing that these activities are often collaborative. The line "Our dragon in talking to the wind" also introduces the idea of the necessary "conversation" between wind and kite if the kite is to fly well. Pages after the story ends provide a short history of kites and show a variety of Chinese animal kites, with associated virtues, such as wisdom and joy.

- Loo, Sanne te. *Ping-Li's Kite*. Front Street, 2002 (first published in 2001 in the Netherlands), 24 pp. This is a slight story with attractive illustrations (the author is an illustrator) about Ping-Li, who "wanted to make a kite that would fly higher and be bolder than any kite he had ever seen." When he buys materials from Mr. Fo's shop, he is warned against flying an unpainted kite, lest he displeases the emperor. Nonetheless, he flies the unpainted kite until commanded by the emperor, flying around in a dream-like dragon ship, to decorate his kite. The result is a swallow-shaped kite with an image of the emperor.

Kite Keys: The kites pictured reflect the variety of shapes and motifs among Chinese kites; the kite Ping-Li eventually creates is one of the most characteristic shapes, painted with an image of the emperor.

- * Luenn, Nancy. *The Dragon Kite*. Harcourt Brace, 1982, 32 pp. Based on a historical legend from Japan, this story tells of the thief Ishikawa, who steals from the rich to benefit the poor and covets the pair of golden dolphins adorning the castle the Shogun has built for his son. Ishikawa plans to lift himself to the roof with a giant kite (tales of man-lifting kites occur in many Asian cultures), and tells three friends of his plans. He apprentices himself to the kite maker Katsuta to learn the necessary skills, and eventually builds an enormous dragon kite, which he frees to the heavens once he has stolen the golden scales. But one of his friends betrays him, and Ishikawa, his wife, son, and Katsuta are condemned to die in a pot of boiling oil. On the verge of execution, the grateful dragon, now alive, swoops from the sky, scoops up all four prisoners, and transports them to a distant city that "has need of kitemakers."



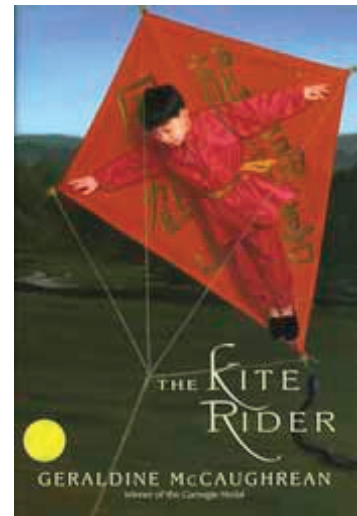
Kite Keys: This beautifully told and illustrated story includes many images of typical Japanese kites (the dragon, though more characteristic of China, is certainly known in Japan), and the "reins" (Katsuta's term) are drawn to suggest, at least, the complexity of Japanese kite bridles. Luenn also creates, through the struggles Ishikawa undergoes, a compelling account of the skills a Japanese kite maker must master (patience; the ways of bamboo and paper; skill with brush and paint). **Note:** Luenn seems to conflate two Japanese legends, one about Ishikawa Goemon, a Robin Hood-like thief (subject of many later *kabuki* plays, and now video games) who tried to assassinate Toyotomi Hideyoshi in 1594 and was boiled in oil for his troubles, and one about Kakinoki Kinsuke, another thief who in 1712 launched his assault by kite on Nagoya Castle and was boiled in oil for his attempt. In Luenn's version the name of the earlier thief-hero is appended to the activities of the later; each is spared a fiery fate by her magical dragon (see the book by Valerie Reddix for a similar dragon).

- Mayer, Mercer. *Shibumi and the Kite Maker*. Marshall Cavendish, 1999, 46 pp. In this twisty "original fairy tale," Shibumi, the beloved daughter of the emperor, is confined to the

palace garden. When she glimpses the dire conditions outside its walls, she commissions the royal kite maker to create an enormous kite. She straps herself to the kite and, with the help of the kite makers, soars over the city and tells her father that she will not descend until conditions outside the garden wall match those within. The councilors who benefit from the townspeople's wretchedness try to shoot her down; instead, both Shibumi and the kite maker are carried away on a strong wind. Shibumi's grieving father dedicates himself to fulfilling his daughter's wish. She is prompted to return many years later in the same way she had left, flying on a giant kite, this time one she has constructed herself. Kites continue to fly over the beautified city.

Kite Keys: Although the story takes place "many years ago...in a faraway kingdom," it is inspired, according to the author's note at the end of the story, by Japanese culture (the illustrations are computer-generated and very busy). Many typical Japanese kite shapes are featured in the full-page illustrations on the right in each two-page spread: particularly elegant is the *sode* kite (in the shape of a kimono) that Shibumi flies as she is pushing the kite maker to create larger and larger kites. The illustrations of the largest kites accurately depict the substantial bamboo frames, lashed together with rope, that are characteristic of Japanese kites; however, the many kites flying in the last image all have one-point bridles (line attached directly to the face of the kite) instead of the multi-point bridles Japanese kite makers usually construct.

- * McCaughrean, Geraldine. *The Kite Rider*. HarperCollins, 2001, 272 pp. Kites are at the center of this hyper-exciting tale appropriate for middle-school students. Twelve-year-old Haoyou, living in the China of Kublai Khan, has begun making kites to support his family. His father has recently been killed "testing the wind" (sent aloft on a crude kite, a practice Marco Polo observed during his travels in China). Di Chou, the corrupt first mate of the ship, then burns up Haoyou's stock of kites in hopes of forcing the widowed mother to marry him. To stave off this horror, Haoyou enlists the help of his cousin, Mipeng, and himself volunteers as a wind tester. He is spotted by The Great Miao, who leads The Jade Circus (traveling circuses were also new to thirteenth-century China) and recruits Haoyou as a kite rider, bringing messages from the spirits of the dead back from the sky. But can he be sprung from the clutches of his avaricious Great-uncle Bo, who sees Haoyou as a meal ticket? Will he survive the vagaries of the wind, and a possible attempt on the Khan's life? Can he rescue his mother, foil the vengeful Di Chou, and escape Uncle Bo for good? Last sentence: "He turned his thoughts back to making kites."



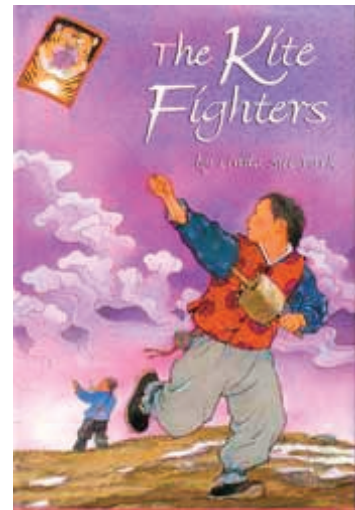
Kite Keys: McCaughrean is an accomplished writer whose fluent and poetic sentences encompass both practical details involved in constructing kites (Haoyou learns, and relates, a lot about making the small kites he first builds and the large man-lifters that he rides) and the communion of kite flier/rider with the wind. It is also clear that kite maker was a recognized occupation in ancient China: at one point Mipeng asks Haoyou, "What else can a boy with clever hands make from cheap materials?"

- Molarsky, Osmond. *A Sky Full of Kites*. Tricycle Press, 1996, 32 pp. A young Chinese American boy makes an enormous painting. No one—not at the school, the firehouse, the department store, the bank, the church, the museum—will make room to display it until he makes the painting into a "huge, huge kite" and attracts newspaper and television attention when he flies it. The hero's ethnicity is simply a matter-of-fact part of the story, not its focus—a welcome stance for storytelling in a multicultural society.

Kite Keys: It is not the author's intention to convey any realistic advice about kite making or flying; nonetheless, students can pick up pointers about the pulling power of a large kite and the advisability of flying in a large, comparatively empty space.

- * Park, Linda Sue. *The Kite Fighters*. Clarion Books, 2000, 136 pp. This **outstanding** short novel by the Newbery-award-winning Park is recommended for students in grades 3-7. Set in Seoul, Korea in 1473, the story tells of brothers, Kee-sup the elder and Young-sup the younger (age eleven), whose father introduces them to kites. Kee-sup can barely launch or fly a kite, but he is a meticulous and inspired kite maker; Young-sup is a careless builder but understands the “language kites speak” as they swoop and dip in the wind. The brothers learn to collaborate through kite making and flying, and in the process expand their father’s attitude toward traditional Korean family responsibilities and relations. The story ends with the New Year kite fighting competition, in which the brothers are making and flying a kite as covert representatives of the young King. In an author’s note, Park says that the boy-King figure is based on the historical King Songjong, who ruled Korea from 1469 to 1494.

Kite Keys: If you and your students can read only one book about kites, let it be this one! The many details about kite making and flying are accurate (Park consulted with Dave Gomberg, president of the American Kitefliers Association), and are seamlessly woven into Park’s elegant and exciting narrative. Students can learn that kite making and kite flying are different skills: splitting these skills between the two brothers supports Park’s exploration of their need to collaborate, by joining their skills, to win the competition, despite traditional Korean beliefs that the younger son must defer to the older, responsible for upholding the honor of the family. Similarly, a plot twist about the invention of cutting line (kite line to which powdered pottery has been glued) and whether its use will be permitted in the kite fight fits with an exploration of Korea’s Confucian emphasis on proper behavior. Finally, and most important, Park’s sparely poetic phrasing very aptly conveys the pleasures and rewards both of building and decorating a fine kite and of conducting that kite through its conversation with the wind.



- Pilegard, Virginia Walton. *The Warlord’s Kites*. Pelican Publishing, 2004, 32 pp. This story, set in “ancient China,” tells of clever Chuan, servant to an absent warlord, and his friend Jing Jing, daughter of a puppet master, who manage to fend off an army besieging the palace with kites they construct of six hands by six hands worth of paper (math lesson incorporated). The warlord’s son first suggests that Chuan be tied to the kite to spy on the army; Jing Jing instead suggests that they use the secret of a Han dynasty emperor: scaring away the army with the “eerie sounds” of ghosts, produced by bamboo flutes attached to the kites. The trick works. The book is the fifth in a series.

Kite Keys: Both strategies—man-lifting with a kite and noise-making with a kite—are documented in Chinese history. The author’s note pointing out the significance for kites of the invention of paper during the Tang dynasty (“kites became lighter and more beautiful”) may oversimplify (after all, silk kites are beautiful), but is useful in helping students think about the relationship between available materials and technology. Instructions of making a simple sled kite (not a kite depicted in the story) are also included.

- * Reddix, Valerie. *Dragon Kite of the Autumn Moon*. Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, 1991, 30 pp. Young Tad-Tin of Taiwan (called Formosa in the story) has been accustomed each year to flying a new kite that his Grandfather has made for Kite’s Day. At the end of the day, according to Taiwanese custom, they would cut the kite loose to carry away misfortune. This year, however, Grandfather is sick, unable to complete the box kite he has started. Tin decides to fly instead the cherished dragon kite that hangs protectively above his bed, the one Grandfather had made in honor of his birth. When the moon rises, Tin runs



harder than he ever has to lift the dragon into the air—and the results he discovers when he returns to his Grandfather’s bedside are magical.

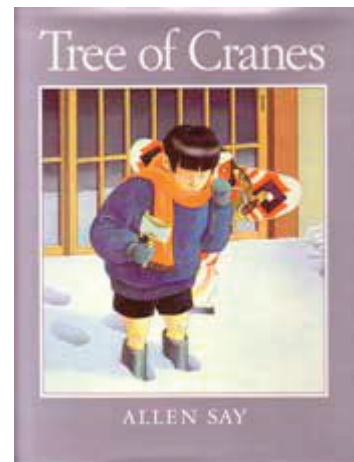
Kite Keys: Reddix thanks Tom Casselman, Jim Miller, and Dave Gomberg of the American Kitefliers Association for their assistance, which is apparent in the accurate vocabulary (“skin” and “bones” of the dragon kite) and flying techniques incorporated within the narrative. Students can also glean lots of accurate information about kites in general, and Chinese kites in particular, from the illustrations by Taiwanese couple,

Jean and Mou-Sien Tseng) A variety of kites is pictured; Tin himself has a typical swallow kite and a box kite-in-the-making (the frame shown in one illustration) as well as his beloved dragon, the prototypical Chinese kite, with both a “harp” and lanterns for night flying. The language describing how Grandfather launches Tin’s swallow kite and how the dragon kite reacts to Tin’s running is both accurate and gracefully phrased. Kite’s Day occurs on “the ninth day of the ninth month”; see note above under Demi [Hitz] describing the Double Ninth Festival.

Rey, Margret. *Curious George Flies a Kite*. Houghton Mifflin, 1958. This entry in the ever-popular *Curious George* series details a sequence of adventures with string that takes the little monkey from finding a lost bunny, experimenting with fishing, and launching a large, diamond-shaped kite with his friend, Bill. Warned against flying the kite by himself in a high wind, George, of course, cannot resist, and is lifted by the kite high into the air. His kite-flight prompts a rescue via helicopter by the Man in the Yellow Hat and the conclusion that “you will not want to fly a kite again for a long, long time.” **Primary**

Kite Keys: Very young students can be introduced to the idea that sturdy kites in strong winds can lift not just little monkeys but also people.

* Say, Allen. *Tree of Cranes*. Houghton Mifflin, 1991, 32 pp. This book is beautifully designed, with full-size illustrations on the right and text on the left of each spread. The story is subtle enough for a shared class reading with intermediate-level or middle-school students, the tone serene, appropriate to a “day of peace and quiet.” A young boy first thinks his mother is preparing for a traditional Japanese New Year. But instead she is preparing for their first Christmas, and explains to her son the traditions with which she grew up in California. He asks for a samurai kite as a present and, in turn, makes his mother a promise.



Kite Keys: Japanese children may still be given a kite on New Year’s Day, although the custom is no longer as common as it once was. The penultimate illustration, in which the boy steps out into boot-deep snow with his kite (a accurately illustrated *yakko* kite, a samurai’s servant) and flying reel, may stimulate questions from students about why kites are common New Year’s gifts in Japan when the weather clearly doesn’t encourage flying then. Answer: the Japanese used a lunar calendar until January 1, 1873, when the country adopted the Gregorian standard. The lunar New Year falls toward the beginning of February, which the Japanese consider the beginning of spring (RisShun), a much more salubrious time for kite flying. The tradition of a gift kite has continued despite the change in the date of New Year.

* Torres, Leyla. *The Kite Festival*. Farrar Straus Giroux, 2004, 32 pp. Three generations of the Flórez family set off on a Sunday drive, encounter a kite festival, and join in the fun by creating a kite from found materials (luckily, a booth is open to see bamboo from



which a frame can be built). The string from little sister's pull toy, a map, crayons, bandaids, napkins, and a fabric belt all contribute to the kite, and the family wins a prize for the most original kite.

Kite Keys: This book is almost ideal for introducing, in a narrative, non-didactic fashion, several points about making and flying kites: how to make a kite from everyday materials; how to launch a kite; how to add a tail for stability; how to disentangle from another flier's line; how to protect one's hands. The grandfather also models the kind of improvisatory persistence that kite fliers call on to overcome problems with bridles or trees. And, as is the case with many other books in this list, kite making and flying are portrayed not only as activities that all members of the family can enjoy together but also as a skill that grandparents can pass on. The book ends with instructions for making a simple hexagonal kite.

- * Vaughan, Marcia & Patricia Mullins. *The Sea-Breeze Hotel*. HarperCollins—Willa Perlman Books, 1992 (originally published in Australia in 1991), 32 pp. In this charming story, with lively language and illustrations (they combine line drawings with torn-paper collage), young Sam has an idea for attracting more guests to a hotel where the heavy wind deters swimmers, fishermen, beachcombers, and sitters-on-the-balcony from visiting. Sam makes a kite and puts it in the hands of Mrs. Pearson, the hotel owner. "This is the most fun I've had in years," she says. The staff sets to making kites, and visitors come "from near and far" to the "kite-flying hotel."



Kite Keys: Through the narrative, the story addresses many aspects of kite making and flying: variety of styles; different construction techniques (scrap materials; sewing; building; designing); seasonal changes in the wind (the sea breeze dies during April, a perfect time for the dedicated kite maker to gear up for the coming season). Note: the publisher recommends this book for age 3-7; it could be used with a wider age range.

- * Ye, Ting-xing. *Share the Sky*. Annick Press, 1999, 32 pp. Fei-fei, a young Chinese girl who loves kites, is living with her grandparents in a Chinese village because her parents have immigrated to North America. Grandfather likens immigrants to kites, "blown up here and down there," and Fei-fei dreams of herself as a kite. When Fei-fei joins her parents and starts to attend school, a kite helps to ease the transition.

Kite Keys: "Sharing the sky" is a metaphor for the connections that immigrants and their families of origin continue to feel despite the distance between them. The story also makes the point that Fei-fei's skill with kites enables her to communicate with her new classmates despite the language barrier—an attraction recognized by kites worldwide. Illustrations by Suzane Langlois feature many traditional types of Chinese kites.

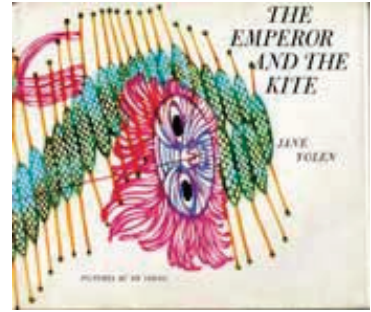
Williams, Vera B. *Lucky Song*. Greenwillow Books, 1997, 24 pp. "Little Evie" delights in the way the world answers her every wish: when she wants a new toy, her grandfather makes her a kite; her legs carry her up a hill; the wind carries her kite into the air; her mother marvels at the height of her kite; her father creates a song about her kite adventures.

Primary

Kite Keys: Although flying a kite is the activity in this story, the real focus is the security a young child can feel when supported by loving adults. Flying a kite is certainly

appropriate, in that it does involve venturing into an unfamiliar arena—the sky—while still tethered to familiar surroundings, but is otherwise almost incidental.

- * Yolen, Jane. *The Emperor and the Kite*. The World Publishing Company, 1967 (republished in paperback by Putnam in 1988), 32 pp. This book, by renowned author Jane Yolen and a Caldecott Honor Book in 1968 for Ed Young's wondrous papercut illustrations, tells the story of the tiny princess Djeow Seow, ignored by her father, whose kite is her favorite toy. She is shown constructing it in the book's first illustration; it is "like a flower in the sky...like a prayer in the wind." When her father is imprisoned by evil subjects, only Djeow Seow comes to his rescue, lifting first food, then a rope to the tower window with her kite. When the emperor escapes, he, of course, never ignores her again.



Kite Keys: The spare but elegant text contains little factual information about kites but is poetically apt about the relationship between a kite and the wind; the illustrations suggest the sinuous motion of Chinese dragon kites. **Note:** Jane Yolen, also author of *World on a String: The Story of Kites* (1968), is the daughter of Will Yolen (*The Complete Book of Kites and Kite Flying*, 1976), one of America's foremost kite ambassadors in the 1960s. The family was introduced to kites by Francis Rogallo, inventor of the flexible kite. Good credentials!

- * Yolen, Jane. *World on a String: The Story of Kites*. The World Publishing Company, 1968, 144 pp. Although long out of print, this book is still useful (and has not been replaced by a more recent publication) for intermediate-level and middle school readers who want a more detailed history of kites around the world than is provided in most general how-to books. The same kind of information can now be accessed on many websites but not written with Yolen's flair.

Kite Keys: Yolen covers the origins of kiting in Asia and the expansion of kiting to the West, the uses of kites in flight research and in war, and variants of kiting around the world. The chapter on "The Strangest Flights" is likely to be of interest to students.

Cathy Palmer
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