



Meet the Kite Maker

Greg Kono



Greg Kono [Koh Noh] is a kite maker from the USA. His heritage is Japanese. His family has lived in the USA for three generations.

Kites on a Farm

Greg grew up on a farm. His parents owned twenty-five acres in Sacramento, California. He made his first kites from greenhouse plastic, newspaper, and bamboo or wood. Sometimes he spent a dollar to buy a kite in a store.

A Love of Puzzles

Greg loved tricky wooden puzzles when he was a boy. Once his uncle brought puzzles to a family party. Greg worked and worked on the puzzles. His aunt let him take one puzzle to bed with him. He played with the puzzle all night! He solved it just as the sun



Wooden puzzles

Photo by Greg Kono

came up. The next week his uncle sent Greg more puzzles. Greg tried to put the puzzles together faster and faster. He has made some kites based on wooden puzzles.

Kites at a Family Reunion

Greg studied environmental design in college. He learned how to make exhibits for museums. He started to make kites again in 2001. He designed a poster for a family reunion and made some kites for his nieces and nephews. Kites caught his interest, just like his puzzles had. Then he took a workshop with a Japanese kite maker, Nobuhiko Yoshizumi. Greg made lots of kites to develop his skills. Now he builds exhibits about kites and teaches kite making workshops for school children.



Reunion Poster

Photo by Greg Kono



School Workshop

Photo by Cathy Palmer

Materials and Tools

Greg uses bamboo and *washi* (paper) to make his kites. Kite makers in Japan have used these materials for hundreds of years. Bamboo and *washi* are strong and lightweight. Greg can paint the paper with watercolor or fabric dye. The paper that he uses is also translucent.



Translucent Kite

Photo by Greg Kono

“Translucent” means that the sun can shine through it. The bamboo framework shows through the paper sail. The colors brighten in the light. The kite is like a stained glass window in the sky.



At the Beach

Photo by Greg Kono

Greg also uses modern tools to make kites. Sometimes he uses a computer program like Photoshop. He changes the colors and shapes of a digital image. This image on a beach was too gray. Greg added contrasting color. Then he printed the image on *washi*. He had to be careful. The *washi* could jam in his printer!



Testing

Photo by Kiyomi Okawa

Kites as Puzzles

Greg tinkers with kites the way he tinkered with puzzles when he was a boy. He keeps his wooden puzzles on a shelf in his studio for inspiration. His studio is near a beach. He can take a new kite right outside to test it. He may add more tail to help a kite fly well. He may add an extra spar in heavy wind. A kite design is not finished until the kite flies.

Key Vocabulary for reading

Bamboo: the woody stem of the bamboo plant (which is a grass). The stem is jointed and often hollow.

Compromise: a settlement in which each side gives up some of what it wants

Design: to plan, create, or carry out in a systematic way, often graphically, artistically, or in a highly skilled manner

Digital: expressed in numbers, especially for use by a computer

Environmental: related to external conditions or surroundings, often natural

Exhibit: a public display

Image: a picture or reproduction

Spar (stick): one of the parts of the kite frame

Tail: like the tail of an animal, in that a kite tail extends beyond the main part of the kite frame

Translucent: transmitting diffused light; not see-through

Washi: Japanese for “paper”; often handmade, although washi can also be produced by machine



Photo by Renea Nielsen



Making Washi

Photo by Daniela Zitzmann