



Classroom Guide for
HONDA:
The Boy Who Dreamed of Cars
written by **Mark Weston**
illustrated by **Katie Yamasaki**

Reading Level

*Reading Level: Grades 3-4
Interest Level: Grades 1-6
Guided Reading Level: R
Lexile™ Measure: AD870

*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Themes

Motorcycles and Cars, Creativity/Innovation, Overcoming Obstacles, Working Towards Dreams/Aspirations, Reaching Goals, Asian/Asian American Interest

Synopsis

Honda: The Boy Who Dreamed of Cars is a narrative biography of Soichiro Honda, founder of the Honda Motor Company, and his ascent to the top of the automobile world. As a young boy in Japan, Honda had his first encounter with a rumbling car—a Ford Model T—and the oil it left behind. The car appealed to his natural interest in machinery. As a teenager Honda began working in a mechanic's shop, but was forbidden to touch the cars. After almost a year of being a dependable and curious employee, Honda was allowed to begin making small repairs. He turned out to be a natural. Honda soon opened his own automobile service station in a small town in Japan, but his curiosity didn't fade. He took classes to learn more about the properties of metal and started manufacturing piston rings. After World War II, Honda wanted to create a faster yet affordable bicycle. He attached a tiny engine to a bike, and the motorcycle was born. His success led him right back to where it all started—cars! Honda was soon building cars for the Japanese market. Then in 1972 he started exporting cars to the United States. The Honda Civic hit the market at just the right time. It met the new, stricter clean air standards and it got great gas mileage—forty miles to the gallon. At age sixty-six, Honda retired from his company. He thought that the company would stay more creative with younger people running it. Honda died in 1991 at the age of eighty-four.

Background

Soichiro Honda's success as an inventor and a businessman had its roots in his childhood. His father was a blacksmith who instilled in his children a strong work ethic and a love of mechanical things. Young Soichiro grew up to be an independent thinker, and his innovative business practices were unusual in Japan, a country not known for its willingness to accept nonconformity. In spite of this, Soichiro Honda persevered. He created an automobile giant even though he faced the opposition of the Japanese government.

Honda's rise from humble beginnings to a powerful and influential businessman is one of twentieth century's most inspirational stories. More detailed information about Honda's life and innovations can be found on the [Honda website](#).

Teaching Tip

Honda: The Boy Who Dreamed of Cars is an excellent book to use during a unit on inventors or as part of your observance of Asian American/Pacific Islander Heritage Month in May.

BEFORE READING**Prereading Focus Questions**

Before introducing the book to students, you may wish to develop background information, tap prior knowledge, and promote anticipation with questions such as the following:

1. What do you know about cars? What are some of today's popular cars?
2. When do you think the car was invented? Who invented it? How did people travel before cars existed?
3. What advantages did cars have over earlier ways of traveling? What were the disadvantages?
4. Who are some of your favorite inventors? What did they invent? What skills and abilities do you think you would need to be a good inventor?
5. What do you know about Japan? What do you think life is like there?

Exploring the Book

Write the title of the book on the chalkboard. Ask students if they recognize the name Honda. Where have they heard or seen it before? Then ask students to talk about what they think the subtitle means.

Have students look at the illustration on the front cover. Invite them to comment on the images.

Page through the book, noting features such as the title page, acknowledgments, sources, dedications, copyright, text, illustrations, and afterword.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

Have students read to find out what motivated Soichiro Honda throughout his life and how he created innovative motorcycles and cars.

VOCABULARY

Have students look up each of the following words and terms and then write their own definitions. Working in pairs, ask students to pretend they own cars and are having discussions about their cars using the words and terms below.

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| mechanic tire gasoline pump | carburetor transmission loan hose | spark plug piston mileage | brakes piston ring engine |
|--------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|

AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop understanding for the content. Encourage students to refer back to the text and illustrations in the book to support their responses.

1. Where is Japan? What continent is it part of? What is its most famous mountain?
2. What do you learn from the story about Honda's natural curiosity?
3. What was Honda's first experience with cars? What effect did it have on him?
4. What was Honda's first job with cars? What do you think the owner taught Honda by being so hard on him? What was Honda's most important character trait in getting through his first year working for the mechanic?
5. Why was Honda's repair shop in Hamamatsu successful?
6. What happened once Honda built the fastest racecar in Japan?
7. What was Honda's first step toward making his dream of building cars come true?
8. During World War II what did the Japanese government want Honda to manufacture? Why?
9. What did Honda do to make his ride to work quicker? What did his invention lead to?

10. What did Takeo Fujisawa do to help Honda start the Honda Motor Company? What was Fujisawa's role in the company?
11. How was Honda hard on his employees? Why did he expect so much? How was he good to his employees?
12. When Honda began making cars for the United States, how did one of his engineers help him?
13. What was the first car Honda sent to the United States? Was it successful here? Why or why not?
14. Why did Honda retire when he was sixty-six? How did he feel about introducing new ideas into his company?

Literature Circles

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 the passages that illustrate Honda's personality.
- The **Illustrator** might create a poster to introduce the Honda Super Cub motorcycle or the Honda Civic to American buyers.
- The **Connector** might find information about other car makers in Japan or the United States.
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of the group's reading and discussion points for each meeting.
- The **Investigator** might find more information about Honda's life and the Honda Motor Company, including the range of products produced beyond motorcycles and cars.

*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

Use the following questions or similar ones to help students practice active reading and personalize what they have read. Suggest that students respond in reader's journals, essays, or oral discussion.

1. What did you like about this story? Why? Which parts were surprising to you?

2. How did Soichiro Honda's personality and character traits help him overcome problems that arose at various points in his life?
3. What are some of the things that make new products successful? What factors helped make Honda motorcycles and cars successful in the United States?
4. What was Honda like as a boss? Would you have liked to work for him? Why or why not?
5. If you could be like Soichiro Honda in one way, which way would it be? Why?

Other Writing Activities

You may wish to have students participate in one or more of the following writing activities. Set aside time for students to share and discuss their work.

1. Using the book as a guide, have students create a journal entry from Honda's point of view about a day in his life.
2. Remind students of the slogan for the Honda Super Cub that helped change the perception of motorcycles in the United States. Have students create an advertising campaign and slogan for their favorite *non*-mechanized mode of transportation (e.g. scooter, roller skates, skateboard, etc.).
3. Talk with students about today's hybrid and electric cars. Then have students write a few questions about these new cars that they would like to ask Honda.
4. Write a brief opinion piece about how Honda might feel about hybrid and/or electric cars.

ELL Teaching Strategies

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

1. Have ELL students write or dictate questions about the book. Set aside time to help students explore these queries and discuss answers to their questions.
2. Assign each English language learner to a partner who is a strong English speaker and reader. Have the partners read the story together.
3. After the first reading, go back through the illustrations and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.

4. Teach ELL students simple phrases such as "I don't know that word." "I have a question." "Speak more slowly." "Please repeat that sentence." Encourage ELL students to use these phrases to communicate their needs while reading.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

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

Social Studies

1. Using the book and online information as their research, have students create a timeline spanning the years of Soichiro Honda's life. Above the timeline, have students record significant events in Honda's life. Then have students research other events that happened during Honda's lifetime and record them below the timeline.
2. Have each student select one of the items listed below, or an item of his or her own choosing, and find out who invented it. Then let students look into the person's life to learn about the person's personality, the struggles he or she faced when developing the item, and how the problems were overcome. Provide time for students to share what they find out with the class.

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|----------------|--------------|------------|-----------------|
| television | camera | calculator | eyeglasses |
| photocopier | refrigerator | helicopter | hot air balloon |
| microwave oven | | | |

Social Studies/Language Arts

1. Provide students with a short biography of Henry Ford. Have them write an essay comparing the lives of the two men and the cars they built.
2. Some students may be interested in researching the history of car manufacturing in Japan and the United States with a focus on the social aspects of business and how employers and employees interacted. A report or graphic may be prepared that compares and contrasts the information students find.

Math

1. In the story the author tells us that "by the late 1950s one third of Asia's motorcycles were Hondas" and that "the Honda Motor Company was making almost half of America's motorcycles." Create two pie charts for these figures. (You may also want to further break down the non-Honda sections.) Then let students research current figures about motorcycle sales in the United States (and Asia, if possible) and have students create their own pie charts illustrating the numbers.

2. Over time, the price of gasoline has risen and fallen often. Let students look online to find out the average price of gas in your state over a period of months or years. Then have students look up gas prices in other states or countries over the same time period. The results can then be recorded on a line graph for comparison.

Science

1. The following activity may be varied according to the age of your students. Provide students with an illustration of a car piston. The illustration may simply show the piston, cylinder, and piston ring, or it may be more complex and include the connecting rod, valves, crankshaft, etc. Explain to students that small explosions inside the cylinder cause machines to move. After your discussion, have students work in groups to recreate the image and label each part.
2. If possible, arrange a field trip to a local garage or mechanic's shop so students can be shown firsthand the machinery inside a car and how the parts work together.

Art

Have students draw pictures or create models of their own dream car or motorcycle.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Weston is the author of several adult books, and the idea for this book about Soichiro Honda grew out of the research Weston did for his book *Giants of Japan: The Lives of Japan's Greatest Men and Women*. A former attorney, journalist, and *Jeopardy!* contestant, Weston is now a full-time writer. He lives in Armonk, New York.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Katie Yamasaki is a fine artist, muralist, and teaching artist in the New York City public schools. Having grown up among the "car culture" of Detroit, Yamasaki felt an immediate connection to this story. Her research led her to Japan to visit Honda plants and corporate headquarters, as well as Honda's hometown and other places important in his life. Yamasaki lives in Brooklyn, New York. To learn more about Yamasaki, visit her at katieyamasaki.com.

Book Information

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RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Learn more about ***Honda*** at:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/357/hc/honda_the_boy_who_dreamed_of_cars

BookTalk with Mark Weston and Katie Yamasaki:

http://www.leeandlow.com/p/honda_booktalk.mhtml

Order Information

On the Web:

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/ordering.mhtml> (general order information)

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/357/hc/honda_the_boy_who_dreamed_of_cars
(secure on-line ordering)

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