

In a lost age...

Power is balanced among four great Nations:

Water, Earth, Fire, Air.

An order made up of men and women lead each nation. These masters possess the ability to manipulate their native element. They call themselves Waterbenders, Earthbenders, Firebenders, and Airbenders.

The most powerful bender in the world is the Avatar, the spirit of the planet incarnate. He alone masters all four elements and maintains world order.

Disaster Strikes...

...when the current Avatar dies. Taking advantage of the opportunity, the Fire Nation's leader launches a global war. His goal – eliminate the Water, Earth, and Air Nations so that the Fire Nation may rule for eternity.

100 Years Later, the Avatar returns...

With the Fire Nation on the brink of global domination, a young girl and her brother living on the South Pole make an amazing discovery: Enclosed within an iceberg for 100 years, a 12-year old Airbender has miraculously survived. Waking up hungry for food and adventure, the boy reveals himself as the Avatar. But will this irresponsible kid accept his destiny in time to save the world?

What is the Avatar?

The Avatar is the incarnation of the Spirit of the Planet in human form.

There is only one Avatar, who reincarnates himself through the centuries. Each time the Avatar dies it is reborn into the next nation. This successive cycle mirrors the order of the seasons:

Water Tribes – winter

Earth Kingdom – spring

Fire Nation – summer

Air Nomads – autumn

The cycle provides a natural balance between the elements. This way, no single nation can grow stronger than another.

Upon the death of an Avatar, Bending masters from the successive nation conduct a search to find the child reincarnate. (The successor is expected to show signs of continuity with the one who died, such as being born within a week of the death.) These Benders carefully train the new Avatar to prepare him for his high position. First, he becomes proficient with his native element. Then, when the Avatar reaches maturity, he travels the world and studies with Masters from the other three Bending disciplines. Upon completion of his training, the Avatar possesses sole control of all four elements.

And so, the nations work to nurture the Avatar, whose responsibility it is to keep Water, Earth, Fire, and Air in harmony with each other and the world.

WHO STARTS THE WAR?

When a young, fearsome Firebender named Fire Lord Sozin ascends to the Fire Nation throne, only one person possesses the strength to oppose his rule – Avatar Roku, a Fire Nation native. Many times during his reign, Fire Lord Sozin attempts to expand his empire, but the elder Avatar Roku always prevents his tyranny.

Fire Lord Sozin's only chance to achieve supremacy comes on the heels of Avatar Roku's death. Before the succeeding Avatar reaches maturity and challenges his action, Sozin secretly builds a massive armada of ironclad ships strong enough to overpower any nation's Benders and trains a fierce army of Firebenders, foot soldiers, and assassins. For twelve years, the Water, Earth, and Air Nations live oblivious of Sozin's hidden army. Consequently, when the Fire Nation begins its assault, they are defenseless.

Fire Lord Sozin strategizes to kill off the Air Nomads before the next Avatar grows to maturity. Strengthened by a passing comet's natural energy, the Fire Nation simultaneously attacks the Water, Earth, and Air Nations. Within one summer, Sozin's Army wipes out the peaceful Air Nomads. Vainly assuming that the Avatar's body lies among the casualties, Sozin expands his invasion of the valiant Water Tribes and Earth Kingdom; his devastation disrupts the natural cycle, ruins the delicate balance of the elements, and makes the Avatar's future reincarnation impossible.

Sozin envisions a world where Fire exists as the dominant element and no nation or energy challenges the Fire Lord's rule. Though he wages war for decades, Sozin dies before he sees this vision realized. Despite his death, he succeeds by inspiring greed for world domination among his descendants who continue to carry his torch and strengthen the Fire Nation's hold on the world.

AANG

Aang is the hero and spirit of the show. He's the last Airbender and the only known survivor of the Air Nomads. His destiny is to learn the art of the Avatar and defeat the Fire Lord of the Fire Nation. But rather than save the world, Aang searches for adventure. He wants a life full of fun experiences, not heavy responsibilities.

Aang's desires are as simple as the animals he loves. He eats when he's hungry and he sleeps when he's tired. But his greater goal in life is to find his people. He desperately hopes that they are still alive, living in seclusion somewhere in the world. The arrow on Aang's head is a constant reminder that he may be the last survivor of the Air Nomads.

Aang's love of animals defines him as a vegetarian. His favorite things are his giant bison, Appa, and his pet winged-lemur, Momo. Aang spends hours picking bugs out of Appa's hair and chasing Momo through the woods. His greatest joy in life comes from riding the backs of exotic animals that he discovers along his journey. Aang doesn't hesitate taking a two-day detour if there's a chance to ride the elusive giant snow leopard.

Aang doesn't want others to regard him as a mythical figure. He's never shy when meeting new people, animals, plants, and even rocks. But whenever he goes to a new place, Aang is always the focus of people's attention because he is the Avatar. Some treat him like a god while others look upon him with scorn. Aang would rather they treat him like a normal kid.

Aang lives in the moment. He doesn't plan ahead and he doesn't live with a sense of urgency. That's why he takes the most roundabout path to get to a goal. This is a constant frustration for Katara and Sokka who want to get to the North Pole as quickly as possible. Aang's sidetracking usually puts them in danger and always seems like a disaster. Aang doesn't realize it at the time, but these detours provide the challenges that teach the trio how to succeed.

Aang is someone who ‘goes with the flow.’ He’s not easily rattled, but the world that he wakes up to is vastly different than he remembers. He’s saddened that lush forests are now scorched stumps and that islands he once visited now lie under the rising oceans. Although affected by the changing world, Aang nevertheless envisions a bright future. Where others only see destruction, he sees the potential for beauty. Where others see an enemy, he sees a potential friend.

Even Aang’s ‘serious’ reactions are inadvertently funny. When the group stops on an island with burnt vegetation, Katara and Sokka see that the Fire Nation’s grip on the world is growing stronger and fear that time is running out. Aang is equally upset, but more so because the furry inchworm that once lived in a birch tree is gone. Aang hopes the inchworm found a nicer tree to call home.

Aang is a trickster hero. He’s uninhibited by social constraints and constantly breaks taboos. Opposed to the status quo, Aang loves stirring up trouble in an effort to bring about change in the world and others. For example, during an Earth Kingdom’s ceremonial ‘good crop’ dance, in which custom forbids a child’s participation, Aang dances with the tribe’s elders. While he’s scolded for disrupting the sacred ritual, food miraculously falls from the sky. The elders stare in disbelief while the kids dance with joy. The tribe is forever changed because Aang shows them that sometimes the spirit of the planet listens to children when it can’t hear adults. Later, Aang rejoins Katara and Sokka and thanks them for throwing food off the flying bison just as he instructed.

Aang doesn’t make the distinction between good and evil, but believes people are either in harmony with the Spirit of the Planet or corrupted and misled. Aang avoids fighting whenever possible, using his trickster methods to teach his adversary a lesson. Rather than go head to head with a Firebender guard, he’ll use his cunning and wit to save his friends when they’re in trouble.

Aang is a trouble magnet, creating chaos wherever he goes. Often, his curiosity puts him in a mess that requires Katara and Sokka rescue him. If Aang is observing the rare, scaly-toed sloth and it goes into a log, Aang will follow it. It's likely that the log will then roll down a hill, splash into a river, and float downstream into a Firebender camp.

Because Aang is the Avatar, he has a connection with nature as well as animals. If he's lost, Aang is able to '*listen*' to the spirits of the trees, rivers, and mountains who '*tell*' him which way to go. However, in Aang's mischievousness, he often ignores nature's advice and follows his own, adventure-filled path.

Aang meditates early each morning before Katara and Sokka wake up. During meditation he aligns with his elemental powers, therefore, it's the only time of the day when Aang is quiet and focused. Since he learned this practice growing up at the Air temple, it also connects him with home. After he's done meditating, he's like a kid who ate too much sugar – super-charged and ready to take on the day.

AANG'S BACKSTORY

When Aang was two-years-old, Airbenders discovered him in a small camp. After several tests, which included the toddler identifying the staff that belonged to a previous Avatar, the masters declared that Aang was his reincarnation. The Airbender monks raised him in a temple, hidden high in the mountains. They never told Aang he was the Avatar, but Aang noticed differences from other kids at the temple. At the age of six, Aang was a better Airbender than children twice his age. By the age of ten, he outperformed even his teachers. Aang's exemplary skills permitted him to join his elders on bison herding trips. During his childhood, Aang enjoyed many travels throughout the world. And whether they were animal, vegetable, or mineral, Aang was always thrilled to meet new playmates.

According to Airbender custom, the Avatar's training must only begin at the age of sixteen. But when the monks sensed that the balance to the elements was threatened, they disregarded tradition. On Aang's twelfth birthday, the Airbender monks notified him that he was the Avatar. Aang feared the long-term responsibility; he liked his life just the way it was.

Overnight, Aang's carefree childhood was cut short. The monks forbid him to travel and confined him to the Air temple. They also intensified Aang's training, in preparation for the other Bending Arts. In order to learn Water, Earth, and Firebending, Aang first had to master Airbending. Of the 36 levels of Airbending, Aang knew 35. The last level of Airbending proved the most difficult. Aang trained for a few weeks, but hated it. It consumed all his time and still he failed. He missed his friends and the relaxed, joyful atmosphere familiar to him. Plus, Aang saw no proof that there was trouble in the world. Consequently, he didn't understand the need to train so hard for a threat that didn't exist.

So rather than face another endless day of drills, Aang stole a bison and flew away from his Avatar responsibilities forever...or so he believed. But that night, a ferocious storm overtook Aang and his bison and they crashed into an icy ocean. Instinctively, his Avatar spirit awoke, and using the power of the elements, sustained him in a sphere of ice. One day, Aang would return to face his responsibilities and save the world.

KATARA

Fourteen-year-old Katara is the heart of the show. She is a caring and passionate teenage girl. Kindness and empathy are her most endearing traits. She is always the first to stop and use her healing abilities to help someone who is sick or hurt. But her emotions overcome her when she witnesses Fire Nation injustices around the world. When outraged, her desire to rectify wrongs often overrides the trio's safety. Katara is determined to save the world, despite her limited abilities.

Katara desperately wants to live up to her potential and become a Waterbender in order to save her tribe. She possesses strong elemental power, but unlike Aang, she doesn't know how to control it. Even without formal bending instruction, Katara practices every day. She adapts the basic philosophy and stances of Airbending that Aang teaches her to Waterbending. Although it's a hit or miss process and days go by without any progress, Katara's dogged determination keeps her going. She wants to be prepared the moment she finds a master Waterbender.

Katara's mother died when she was only eight-years-old, so she was forced to grow up fast. Katara wears her mother's necklace as a reminder of her nurturing spirit. The necklace gives her strength and courage when she needs it most. Katara is very mature and responsible for her age and always plays the mediator between Aang and Sokka. She is the glue that holds them together.

SOKKA

Sokka is the brawn of the show. He's a bullheaded, sarcastic teenager who strongly believes that his way is the only way. He shows the strength and determination of a warrior, but lacks the experience and wisdom to use them effectively.

Sokka's goal in life is to reunite with his father, so that together they may exact revenge against the Fire Nation for destroying their tribe. Sokka holds his father in high esteem. His most prized possession is a boomerang that his father bequeathed him before leaving the tribe. However, the boomerang is not just a sentimental token, for it is a traditional weapon of his Water tribe. So when Aang plays with the weapon as if it were a toy, Sokka is furious.

Sokka's the kind of guy you want on your side, although he'll make you work to earn his trust. His personality is abrasive at times, but his loyalty and courage are steadfast. To Sokka, Aang needs to grow up a lot before he'll show Aang the loyalty he gives his sister. Sokka also holds grudges and has difficulty forgiving anyone who has done harm to him or his sister. He has a chip on his shoulder as big as Aang's bison.

Sokka doesn't regard his lack of bending abilities as a limitation in his life. He thinks Benders and their powers is what got the world in trouble in the first place. He believes only the skill and strength of ordinary men like himself can ultimately defeat the Fire Nation. Unlike Aang, Sokka is not in touch with his spiritual side and doesn't trust anything he can't physically see or touch. Therefore, he's practical; he prefers tools and weapons instead of Bending.

Sokka's biggest flaw is his ego. From the moment the kids leave the South Pole, Sokka appoints himself leader of the group. The self-imposed responsibility goes to his head and Sokka deludes himself into thinking he's a full-fledged warrior, despite his limited experience and skills. This delusion drives Sokka to make unwise choices. Instead of

circumnavigating the threat of Firebenders, Sokka will foolishly confront them head on because he thinks a great warrior would never act cowardly.

Sokka is a sourpuss who constantly undercuts Katara and Aang's genuine emotions by making wise cracks. But Sokka's negative karma always results in his displeasure, from losing his pants in an escape to having the bison's itchy hair all over his body. Aang, along with the audience, gets to laugh at Sokka's expense.

PRINCE ZUKO

Zuko is an incredibly focused, teenage Firebender who bullies and intimidates everyone around him. He is obsessed by only one desire – to capture the Avatar.

Prince Zuko is the oldest son of Fire Lord Ozai, ruler of the Fire Nation, and the great-grandson of Fire Lord Sozin, who conceived the war. He is the rightful heir to the Fire Lord's throne, but when Prince Zuko is 14, he speaks out against his father and the Fire Nation's conquest. To teach his insubordinate son a lesson, Fire Lord Ozai forces his son to fight him in an Agni-Kai – a traditional Firebender duel. The Fire Lord makes an example of his son in front of his royal army and leaves him with a prominent burn scar across his face. The message is clear. Regardless of bloodline, anyone who opposes the Fire Lord's power will meet a terrible fate.

Not content with physical punishment, Fire Lord Ozai strips the Prince of his birthright to the throne and banishes him from his homeland. His father tells Zuko the only way he will allow him to return is with the Avatar, dead or alive.

The next morning, accompanied by a small royal escort, Prince Zuko sails away on an old ironclad ship. For three distraught years, he travels the world in pursuit of a hopeless goal. But Zuko's life changes when he learns of the Avatar's miraculous survival. He vows to capture the Avatar, even if he dies trying, in order to restore his honor.

Zuko's relationship with his father is complicated. Zuko simultaneously hates him and longs for his approval. Like the Fire Lord, Zuko demands obedience from his servants. Though Zuko denies any similarities to his father, he is not above dropping Fire Lord Ozai's name to get out of trouble. Periodically, Zuko honors his father with battlefield trophies like enslaved Earth Kingdom soldiers and the head of a giant sea monster. But Fire Lord Ozai rejects Zuko's offerings as mere trinkets. Zuko also constructs great metal statues in his father's likeness, but this only infuriates Ozai more. The Fire Lord

accuses Zuko of wasting valuable metal and manpower normally reserved for shipbuilding.

Zuko is especially sensitive about his appearance. His scar is a constant reminder of his father's scorn and he's secretive about the nature of its origin. The more people know about his banishment, the less they'll fear him and do what he wants. Zuko's servants know not to stare at his scar too long or they might get one of their own.

Each day, Zuko studies Firebending with his Uncle, the Fire Lord's brother. Zuko is a powerful Firebender for his age and he's eager to develop his skills. But Zuko doesn't know that Uncle is under strict orders from the Fire Lord to teach his son incorrect Firebending. It's the Fire Lord's insurance that his son's powers will never surpass his own.

Zuko's greatest weaknesses are his arrogance and impatience. He believes Firebending is the most dominant art and can never be bested by Water, Earth, or Airbending. When defeated by an opposing bender, Zuko blames his henchmen or Uncle, never himself. Zuko's teenage overconfidence makes him believe he's invincible. Zuko charges into conflict impulsively and without precaution. Over the course of time, Zuko realizes power is not in the bending, but in the person who uses it.

UNCLE IROH

Uncle Iroh is Zuko's retirement-age guardian. He has reached that point in his life where he's not much interested in great adventures. Instead, he spends his days trying to find peace and quiet through meditation, calligraphy, and drinking tea. But Zuko always interrupts him just as he's about to reach a moment of Zen. Uncle is the main source of humor on Zuko's ship, his deadpan delivery providing a great contrast to Zuko's intensity and brashness. In short, he is a man of leisure who would rather be spending his golden years playing golf or walking the beach, not traveling the world with his overzealous nephew.

MOMO

Momo is a winged-lemur – a fictional hybrid of the spotted bat and the black and white lemur. Like all winged-lemurs, Momo is incredibly intelligent and trainable. Opposable thumbs on his hands and feet allow him to perform many human tasks. However, Momo neither talks nor acts like a human.

While the kids fly on the bison, Aang sends Momo ahead to scout for food on nearby islands. If Momo returns to the bison with fruit or nuts, the kids land. In addition, Momo's incredible sense of hearing and smell alert Aang to danger from miles away.

While Momo has many useful qualities, he also causes a lot of trouble. Like any animal, Momo is driven by instinct, regardless of the human needs around him. If food is available, Momo will eat it, even if it's been carefully rationed. And rather than quietly hide from Firebender danger like the kids, Momo will screech in fear.

Aang loves to play with Momo and Katara loves to pet him. Sokka is the only one wary of the bizarre flying creature. To Sokka, Momo is a creepy bug-eyed animal that seems to know too much. Momo senses this, and if he's not playing with Aang, he's enjoyably bothering Sokka.

To Aang, Momo is a symbol of hope that his people are still alive. Shortly after leaving the South Pole with Katara and Sokka, Aang stops at an Airbender temple, but it is abandoned. Aang fears he may never find his people, but then he discovers Momo in a temple chamber. The winged-lemur was once a favorite pet of the Air Nomad's children and Aang's spirit is rejuvenated when he discovers this living relic from his lost people. Momo immediately takes to Aang as if he was his master in a past life. Aang adopts him, and from that moment on, devotes a large part of his attention and energy to training and playing with Momo.

CHARACTER RELATIONSHIPS

The relationship between **Aang** and **Katara** is the emotional heart of the show.

From the moment Aang wakes up in Katara's arm, he is smitten. However, each time Aang displays affection towards Katara, disaster erupts. If Aang takes Katara on private glider flight past a waterfall, they get soaked; and Aang's gifts of flowers cause Katara to sneeze for days. Katara appreciates Aang's gestures, but is not interested in romance. She dotes on him more like a kid she baby-sits rather than a potential love interest. Whatever the reason, Aang loves Katara's attention.

Because Aang is destined to save the world, Katara considers it her duty to protect and nurture him. Knowing Aang is prone to attracting danger, Katara attempts to pacify his curiosity by keeping him focused on the task at hand, but she is usually unsuccessful. However, Katara's devotion to Aang persists despite his frequent blunders. She wants Aang to grow up big and strong so he can fight the Fire Nation. If he doesn't get enough rest, Katara takes up his chores so he can sleep longer and during meals, Katara serves Aang more food than herself. He cherishes her dedication to him, but it fails to inspire responsibility in him. Aang feels badly when he disappoints Katara, but at the same time, wonders if her patience with him would differ if he were not the Avatar.

Aang loves to make Katara laugh by singing silly songs or playing pranks on Sokka. If Aang gets Katara to relax for a moment and forget the cooking, planning, and practicing that consumes her life, he considers it a personal victory. Although his distractions frustrate her, Katara is grateful that Aang is in her life. While acting as the connection to the childhood she lost when her mother died, Aang also gives Katara hope of a bright future, for herself and the world. Regardless of the problems all around them, Aang makes Katara's life joyful and fun.

Aang and **Sokka** are comic rivals with clashing personalities.

Aang's irrationality confounds Sokka's logical mentality. Because Sokka takes himself so seriously, Aang likes to play jokes on him. When Sokka hunts, Aang screeches to scare animals away; While Sokka bathes in a pond, Aang steals his clothes and dresses Momo in them. To get back at him, Sokka uses Aang as his scapegoat. If Sokka forgets to set up the tent, he blames Aang for hiding it. But while Aang seems to get away with mischief, Sokka's negative karma always comes back to get him in the end. Due to their comic bickering, the group never seems to enjoy a moment of peace.

From the moment he helps free Aang from the iceberg, Sokka is wary of him. Suspicious of where he came from and how he survived, Sokka refuses to accept Aang at his word. The explanation that Aang is the Avatar doesn't impress him either, for Sokka believes the Avatar is a myth. But over time, as Aang matures and continues to improve in all four bending arts, Sokka finally begins to wonder if there is truth to the Avatar legend after all.

To Sokka, people are either good or bad. Aang believes all living creatures are inherently good. So while Sokka views all Fire Nation citizens as evil, Aang reasons that they are only misled. To Sokka, wrong doers must be punished, and therefore he doesn't understand Aang's philosophy of fighting without hurting.

But the biggest reason for Sokka's animosity is Aang's affection for his sister. Sokka is convinced that Aang takes advantage of Katara's good nature in order to get attention. He accuses Aang of exploiting Katara's belief in him without proving he's serious about becoming the Avatar. Aang thinks Sokka should mind his own business and stop being overprotective of Katara. Oftentimes, Aang tricks Sokka into going away so Aang can spend time alone with Katara.

Aang and Sokka have a lot to learn from each other. In order for Sokka to become a leader, he must incorporate Aang's non-violent wisdom into his warrior skills, realizing that in conflict, intellect and strategy outweigh brute strength. Likewise, Aang must learn that although non-conflict is noble, avoidance is sometimes more disastrous than confrontation.

Aang and **Zuko** personify the battle between good and evil. Despite Zuko's tireless efforts to destroy him, Aang doesn't hate Zuko. While Aang recognizes that the Fire Prince is a dangerous individual, the nature and origin of Zuko's evil fascinate him. Aang watches Zuko with same curiosity as he would a ferocious creature. To Zuko, Aang is only a means to regaining his honor. He doesn't see the person past the Avatar, refusing to call Aang by his real name.

Although Aang loves trouble, fighting is not in his nature, nor will he ever instigate a battle with Zuko. Aang fights only when his life, or his friend's lives are at stake. Although Aang's combat experience is limited, his Airbender training prepares him to defend against Zuko. During a fight, Aang taunts Zuko and talks trash, even when Zuko's victory appears imminent. To Zuko's amusement, Aang instructs and advises him on his Firebending form and technique, despite Aang's ignorance of the practice. However, Zuko is frustrated by Aang's boundless ability to survive. Despite Zuko's deadly efforts, Aang's cunning always helps him escape. Ironically, Zuko's confrontations ultimately supply Aang the courage and fighting experience he needs to defeat the Fire Nation.

Katara and Sokka's family bond strengthens at the death of their mother and departure of their father. Each carries the best traits of their parents. Katara is hopeful and forward-looking while Sokka exhibits the warrior's drive to make those dreams reality. Although committed to each other, like all teenage brother-sister relationships, they often irritate each other.

Katara views Sokka as overprotective and accuses him of exploiting his promise to protect her. She can't do a simple chore like pick berries without Sokka first canvassing the area for danger. Fiercely independent, Katara hates it when Sokka tells her what to do. She appreciates that her brother is looking out for her, but like most teenage girls, she wants to take care of herself. On the contrary, Sokka believes that Katara's trusting nature leads her to danger. If he were not around to protect her, she would walk into a Fire Nation trap.

They are both task-oriented, hard workers, but disagree about the best way to get the job done. Katara criticizes the way Sokka sets up the tent or builds the fire because he does it differently than her, while Sokka insists filling water sacks is quicker by hand than Katara's Waterbending method.

Though others may be fooled by Sokka's tough-guy act, Katara sees right through it. As his sister, she can best deflate his ego. If Sokka bullies Aang, she reveals an embarrassing detail from Sokka's childhood, like how he used to play with her dolls. In retaliation, Sokka tickles his little sister until she begs for mercy.

AANG, KATARA, AND SOKKA.

An interesting group dynamic results from Aang, Katara, and Sokka's distinct personalities. Katara acts as the stability between the extremes of Aang and Sokka. Katara and Aang share a natural optimism that often pairs them against Sokka's sour disposition. At other times, Katara and Sokka's practicality conflicts with Aang's free spirited nature. Although group tensions are high, whenever a dangerous threat arises

they always band together to overcome it. Each possesses individual strengths, but work best as a team.

SOKKA & ZUKO; KATARA & ZUKO

To Sokka, Zuko represents the evil in the world. Although Zuko isn't responsible for the destruction of the Southern Water Tribe, Sokka seeks revenge against him in the name of his people. Even so, recognizing their similar age, Sokka admires the way Zuko commands respect from his followers. And although he acts tough around Zuko, Sokka is really terrified since Firebending outmatches his warrior skills. For this very reason, Sokka looks towards Aang for assistance during confrontations with Zuko.

Despite Zuko's pursuit of Aang, Katara sees some good in him. She recognizes that although Zuko rules with intimidation, he does not commit war crimes synonymous with Firebenders. She suspects that Zuko's banishment and subsequent drive to capture Aang is a result of how he got his scar.

At first, Zuko doesn't pay any mind to Katara and Sokka, who he calls the 'Avatar's playmates.' But as soon as Zuko realizes that these friends are obstacles to his goal, he uses their loyalty to the Avatar to his advantage. Zuko knows if he captures one friend, he can use him or her as bait to trap the Avatar.

THE BENDING ARTS: Magic in the World of Avatar

The most distinct characteristic of Avatar is its unique style of power. The concept is *kung fu as magic*, embodied in the art of Bending – a Master’s physical manipulation of water, earth, fire, or air. But a Benders power cannot extend beyond his native element. Therefore, a Firebender will never control water, earth, or air. Only a fully realized Avatar possesses the ability to master all four elements.

Avatar’s powers differ greatly from Harry Potter’s magic, where a magician waves his wand and conjures seemingly unlimited power from an unknown source. In Avatar, Benders do not cast spells, wear invisibility cloaks, or shape-shift by drinking a potion. Rather, a Benders power emanates from internal *chi*, or “life-energy.” Therefore its parameters are defined by the skill, strength, and stamina of the practitioner.

Visually, Avatar’s action sequences are an adrenaline rush. Magical attacks and defenses resemble traditional kung fu maneuvers. Imagine a kung fu fight pushed to a supernatural level. In martial arts, teachers instruct that a weapon is merely an extension of the limb. Similarly, in the Bending arts, the elements act as an extension of the Master’s body movements. Therefore, when a Bender kicks or throws punches, he manipulates water, earth, fire, or air with his body. Since the elements compose the attacks and defenses in a fight, the opponents never physically contact one another.

Firebending’s aggressive, vicious, and direct moves mirror fire’s all-consuming nature. Like a predatory animal, a Firebender tracks his prey until it exposes a weakness, then charges in for the kill. The style is largely based on *Xsing Yi*, *Southern Dragon Claw*, and *Northern Shaolin*. In a fight, a Firebender makes up for his lack of defensive moves by overwhelming his opponent with a barrage of blows in a variety of shapes. A quick kick or jab produces a short-range burst of flame, whirlwind kicks generate blazing arcs, punches throw compact fireballs, and a series of spinning kicks results in rings of fire exploding outwards in all directions. When several Firebenders combine their energy and attack as one, they are able to shoot missiles of flame at long range. As a fighting

style, Firebending focuses on annihilating the opposition, much like the Fire Nation's political aim.

The proud, strong spirit of the Earth Kingdom embodies **Earthbending**, which uses the ground as a weapon against an opponent. Earthbending adapts techniques from *Northern Shaolin*, *Judo*, and *Shaolin wrestling*. Exceptionally muscular, Earthbenders use their strength to overpower opponents. To throw an enemy off balance, an Earthbender physically strikes the ground with his hands or feet, causing localized earthquakes. To dodge an attack, an Earthbender uses the earth as a catapult to buck his body high into the air, and then upon returning to the ground, he softens the earth, easing his landing. Additional moves include creating fissures as traps for enemies to fall in, and raising slabs of stone for defense and offense. An Earthbender attacks by levitating stones and then propelling them at his enemy. Earthbenders also possess the ability to 'magnetize' their limbs to stone, allowing them to scale sheer walls and cliffs. A high level maneuver reduces solid ground to quicksand, providing a pitfall for approaching enemies. Earthbending's most significant weakness is its inability to manipulate man altered metals. Firebenders exploit this weakness by smelting metal to remove its natural impurities, and then using it to construct their armor, ships, and forts.

Like the moon controlling the tides, **Waterbenders** use their *chi* to control the gravitational effect on water. In contrast to Fire and Earthbending, Waterbending's strength is its defensive capabilities. Derived from *Tai Chi*, the style utilizes similar techniques to redirect the energy from an opponent's attack and use it against him. But Waterbending's intent is to control opponents, not to harm them. The style is evolved from ancient healing practices where the healer redirects energy paths in the body to cure an ailment.

A Waterbender's control of water in liquid, solid, and gas form offers him many defensive maneuvers. He may stop an attacker by encasing his feet in ice, or escape by creating a screen of steam for cover. In a fight, a Waterbender suspends a body of water around his fighting stance, and then lashes out with water whips and powerful waves. If there's no water at the scene of a fight, a Waterbender collects all the available moisture

from the air and ground around him and concentrates it into an amount suitable to attack and defend. As a backup, a Waterbender always carries a skin of water. While reliance on a water source is a significant weakness of the style, Waterbending at its highest skill level contains the most powerful technique among all the Bending Arts. At close ranges, an expert Waterbender uses an opponent's body against them. They harness the ample amount of water within the human body to control an opponent like a puppet master. The tendencies to control rather than destroy, and to heal rather than harm, embody the humane and noble characteristics of the Water Tribes.

Airbending shares Waterbending's defensive nature and peaceful philosophies. However, it's versatility in practice and application makes Airbending the most dynamic of the Bending Arts. Largely based on *Baguazhang*, Airbending allows one person to defend against multiple attackers from different disciplines – ideal for Air Nomads traveling in foreign lands. An Airbender defends with blasts of wind, and then using a variety of wind-based counterattacks, knocks his opponent off his feet.

Airbenders are faster and more mobile than any other Benders. To confuse his enemy, an Airbender constantly circles him, rapidly changing direction to cleverly evade attacks. If an Airbender is struck, he absorbs the force by blowing his body back like a feather. While Airbenders cannot fly like Peter Pan, they use wind to enhance all of their normal movements. They can run faster by decreasing air resistance; jump higher and farther by creating wind gusts that lift them and allow them to float for a few seconds; slow a long decent by forming a wind cushion; and run up walls and trees by generating a current of wind. A high level attack involves creating a fierce air vortex that sucks in an opponent, rapidly spins him around, and then spits him back out onto the ground.

An Airbender's signature tool is his staff. Like all objects in Avatar, the staff does not possess any magical properties. However, it mechanically transforms into a small glider. To propel the glider, an Airbender controls air currents to sustain its flight over limited distances. In addition, small propeller blades extend from the top of the staff. Depending on the glider's orientation, it rockets forward or hovers vertically like a helicopter when an Airbender thrusts wind at its blades. In its untransformed state, an

Airbender uses his staff as a weapon to enhance the amount and power of his attacks and defenses.

While Airbending is the most dynamic of the Bending Arts, it lacks a deadly finishing move. This fact reflects the Taoist-like principles of the Air Nomads, which teach that all life is precious and conflict should be avoided whenever possible.

OTHER PHENOMENA

While a Master's skill level determines the range of his attacks, his elemental power never extends beyond his immediate area. Therefore, an Earthbender possesses the strength to create a tremor locally, but not an earthquake five miles away. However, a Benders powers may be influenced by the seasons and natural phenomena. Because each nation corresponds to a season, a Bender is strongest in his native land and during its season. Therefore, Waterbenders are strongest in the north and south poles, during winter; Firebenders are strongest near the equator during summer, etc.

Benders are born into each nation, according to the season. Therefore, Earthbenders are born during spring while Airbenders are born during autumn, etc. However, the number of Benders born during a season represents only a small percentage of all the children born. While benders are frequently born to parents who also posses this power, it's not uncommon for parents without powers to birth a Bender.

Because of the lengthening summers, the Fire Nation births more and more Benders, while the other nations birth fewer. Therefore, the Fire Nation's conquest means disaster for opposing Masters. Seasonal changes will become non-existent. With the world stuck in perpetual summer, Firebender numbers will grow and strengthen, while Water, Earth, and Airbender numbers will weaken and diminish until they are extinct.

In addition to the seasons, natural phenomena also influence a Bender's power. For example, the sun and comets strengthen Firebenders; the moon cycle and rain boost a Waterbender's power; Earthbenders tap into the potential energy of fault lines; and wind and storms are advantageous to Airbenders. The only thing that can rid a Firebender of his power is a total eclipse, which is short-lived and infrequent.

Seasonal and natural phenomena play an important role in Avatar's storyline as it relates to Benders. On a sunny day near the equator, the kids take lengthy detours to

avoid Firebenders. However, during cloudy, rainy weather, they travel a more risky, but direct route, relying on Aang and Katara's heightened Airbending and Waterbending powers for protection.

The Bending Arts augment the thrill of watching a kung fu sequence, while downplaying the use of weapons and violent contact. The four different styles, with their inherent strengths and weaknesses provide the possibility for numerous fight combinations. For example, a bout between an Airbender and Earthbender would differ greatly from an Airbender versus a Firebender. Furthermore, with the influence of natural phenomena on a Bender's strength, additional variables affect the outcome of battle.

MERCHANDISING

The four distinct styles offer visual variety and show the conflicting nature of the forces in our world. In addition to providing filmic dynamism, the Bending Arts present a vast opportunity for card collecting and video games.

Kung fu's ancient traditions and rich history provide numerous, colorful names of fighting moves, such as *Hands Like Clouds*, *Golden Scissors*, and *Dragon Swims in the Sea*. In a card collecting game, each card would illustrate one of these maneuvers. But instead of the static illustrations found on Yu-Gi-Oh! and Magic cards, lenticular technology allows Avatar cards to exhibit a two second animated clip of a Bender performing a Bending maneuver. An Avatar card game based on the Bending Arts requires a player to collect all of the Water, Earth, Fire, or Airbending cards to successfully play the game.

The Avatar series is easily translatable to video games. The Bending Arts lend to a multi-player fighting game like Tekken, while the epic nature and rich history of Avatar are adaptable to a variety of role playing or first-person P.O.V. video games similar to Final Fantasy, Myst, and Goldeneye. Multi-player games allow each player to assume Aang, Katara, Sokka, or Momo's role, and then journey through the Water, Earth, and Fire Nations, fighting enemies and creatures along the way. Like the series, the players have to work together in order to defeat Fire Lord Sozin and win the game.

THE SERIES

Avatar creates a new mythology as Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, and Harry Potter have successfully done the past. Although Avatar is set against the serious backdrop of war, its tone is humorous and exciting. Similarities can be made with the Indiana Jones trilogy and The Hobbit, where the serious backdrops of Nazi Germany in the former and Middle Earth in the latter do not undermine either hero's fun, thrilling adventures. In practice, Avatar's adventurous 'A' stories are balanced with humorous 'B' stories. Comedic character interactions and remarkable adventures make Avatar a place that viewers will long to visit each week.

Each episode is a 22-minute, self-contained adventure. While no episode ends in a cliffhanger, character story arcs provide the series continuity. For example, Aang begins the series childishly ignoring his responsibilities in favor of a life of adventure. But along the way, he matures into a responsible hero with power enough to defeat the Grand Dragon of the Fire Nation. Unlike most animated series where characters remain unaffected week after week, Avatar's characters learn and grow throughout the series. For example, once Aang learns a new skill or bending technique, he will carry that knowledge with him into his next adventure. Or if Katara gets hurt in one episode, she remains injured until she heals.

Avatar's storyline plays out over the course of a trilogy, divided into three seasons. The first, called Winter, follows the kids as they journey from the South Pole to the North Pole. The second, Spring, tracks the trio as they make their way through the Earth Kingdom. The series concludes during Summer, when the kids infiltrate the Fire Nation, risking their lives to save the world.

1st SEASON – WINTER

SEASON OVERVIEW

The series begins on the South Pole during winter. It is here where Katara and her brother Sokka discover an Airbender boy (Aang) and his giant bison (Appa) inside an iceberg. Although Aang denies to Katara that he is the Avatar, she soon learns the truth when a young Firebender named Prince Zuko attacks the Southern Water Tribe, looking for the Airbender. In his first act of heroism, Aang surrenders to Zuko in exchange for the tribe's safety. But with the help of Katara, Sokka and his flying bison Appa, Aang escapes Zuko's war ship. Katara and Sokka decide to help Aang get to the North Pole so that he can find a master Waterbender from whom he can learn Waterbending—the first step to becoming the Avatar.

Of course, Aang isn't in any rush to take on his Avatar responsibilities, so the kids stop many fun and exciting villages and cities on the way. The first stop is at Aang's childhood home, the Airbender Temple. There, Aang makes first contact with Avatar Roku – Aang's previous incarnation and a mentor who will help him on his Avatar journey. He also befriends a winged lemur- once a traditional Airbender pet. To Aang, Momo is a sign of hope that, somewhere in the world, his people are still alive.

As word spreads around the world that the Avatar has returned, the kids act more cautiously, sometimes disguising Aang. And with Zuko on their trail, the longer they stay in one place, the more likely it is that he will find them. The kids begin to learn whom they can trust—and whom they can't.

Aang's search for an Avatar mentor leads him to the Spirit World. During the Winter Solstice, Aang crosses over into the Spirit World and makes contact again with his previous incarnation, Avatar Roku. Roku reveals to Aang that a powerful comet is passing over the Earth at the end of this summer—and that the Fire Lord and his troops will harness this power to win the war. Aang now faces the daunting task of not only mastering the four elements but doing so before the end of the summer.

With time running short, Aang buckles down and begins to learn Waterbending alongside Katara. But Aang is unfocused and undisciplined and would rather play than practice. When Katara discovers an ancient scroll with the Waterbending lyrics (moves) illustrated on it, she believes that they have found a quick and easy way of learning Waterbending without having to find a master in the North Pole. However, after a series of mishaps, she realizes that you can't learn from a 'book', but that you need the wisdom and guidance of a teacher.

Their journey North reaches a crisis point when Katara and Sokka learn Aang's secret -- Fearing his Avatar responsibility, he ran away from the Air Temple; and that this irresponsible act led to Aang being encased in ice for 100 years. Katara is furious with Aang; she believes that if Aang had not run away, then the war never would have started and her mother would still be alive. In an effort to prove to Katara that he's now taking his Avatar responsibilities seriously, Aang tries Firebending before he's ready and accidentally burns Katara's hands. Aang feels guilty and vows never to Firebend again.

Meanwhile, Sokka is fed up with Aang's irresponsibility and thinks that Aang doesn't have what it takes to become the Avatar. Sokka believes it's up to warriors like him to put an end to this war. When he finds evidence of the men of his tribe he sets off to find them, ultimately joining a small unit of Earth Nation warriors. After tasting his first real battle, Sokka's romantic ideal of the warrior life is shattered. However, he begins to learn that his true destiny is as a leader. Meanwhile, Aang and Katara reconcile and Katara learns about her healing abilities – a skill closely associated with Waterbending. Aang promises to Katara that he will not make the same mistake twice-- He won't run away from his responsibility and commits to getting to the North Pole.

With Zuko close on their trail, the kids finally arrive at the North Pole and find a master Waterbender to teach Aang. But because of the Northern Water tribe's sexist culture, the master refuses to apprentice Katara— and her life long dream of becoming a Waterbender is in jeopardy. Aang exhaustingly trains with the old Waterbender who proves to be a tough disciplinarian. Because Waterbending doesn't come to him easily,

Aang and the old Waterbender get frustrated with each other and abandon the lessons. The old Waterbender considers the unfocused Aang “impossible to teach.” When Katara finds out Aang’s lessons have stopped, she confronts the teacher and demands that he teach Aang – the future of the world is at stake. When the old Waterbender refuses, she challenges him to a fight and demonstrates her Waterbending abilities. The old man not only accepts Aang back as his student, but her as well.

Winter culminates in a Fire Navy assault against the Northern Water Tribe. Led by Zuko’s nemesis, Commander Zhao, the Fire Navy surrounds the North Pole with dozens of ships, intent on capturing the Avatar before he learns Waterbending. After a dramatic fight with Zuko, in which Aang spares Zuko’s life, Aang joins the tribe for a decisive battle. With Katara and the old Waterbender’s help, Aang creates a water tornado that drives the ships into the ice, immobilizing them. The remaining ships retreat. Collectively, Sokka, Katara and Aang’s heroism save the Northern Water Tribe.

The battle nearly kills the old Waterbender. On his deathbed, he tells Katara that she alone possesses the knowledge to complete Aang’s Waterbending training. With his newfound determination, Aang decides to continue into the Earth Kingdom and learn Earthbending. Instead of returning to the South Pole to save her tribe, Katara leaves with Aang to teach him Waterbending, knowing that without the Avatar no nation will survive another year. Sokka also resolves to continue the mission, vowing to protect them using his new warrior skills. But will Katara really transform the undisciplined Aang into the one person powerful enough to stop the world’s most destructive force?

2nd SEASON – SPRING

SEASON OVERVIEW

Throughout the spring, Aang, Katara, Sokka, and Momo journey through the unfamiliar Earth Kingdom mainland, a vast continent full of natural wonders and fantastical creatures. Zuko, Prince Azul, and the rogue Earthbender continue their separate pursuits, each hoping to capture the Avatar and win Fire Lord Ozai's favor.

Aang's search for an Earthbender leads him to Toph, a young, blind, Earthbender whose arrogance equals his powers. Katara is immediately drawn to his confidence and sparks fly between the two teenagers. Aang's jealousy of Toph causes him to compete for Katara's attention. Aang trains more seriously, hoping to impress her. Sokka also disapproves of his sister's relationship with Toph. He doesn't trust the Earthbender and believes Katara's attraction results from her sympathy for his blindness. In addition, Sokka resents Toph for taking away from him the group's leadership position. For the first time, Sokka and Aang agree absolutely; they both want Toph out of Katara's life. Without intending to, they begin to adopt each other's traits in order to bring Toph's huge ego down to size.

Early in the season, Zuko captures Aang's bison alive and gives it to his father as a gift. Unable to fly, the group relies on Katara's Waterbending to propel their raft down the Earth Kingdom's many rivers. They travel south toward the Earth Kingdom's last stronghold in the capital city. There, they meet the Emperor, a proud man who refuses to give in to the Fire Nation. When he meets Aang, the Emperor imparts his covert plan to invade the Fire Nation so that the Avatar may help his men in battle. The Emperor makes Aang promise not to reveal the mission to anyone.

Dying to tell the secret, Aang uses his trickster logic to invent a series of riddles so his friends can guess their mission. As Aang leads the group further south, Katara finally solves the riddle, absolving Aang from his promise to the Emperor. By spring's end, the kids arrive at a huge, hidden camp where the Earth Kingdom forces prepare for a

counterattack against the Fire Nation. Katara and Sokka reunite with their father and other tribesman who have been working with the Earth Navy to construct giant battle ships for the invasion.

Aang, Katara, Sokka, and Toph sail with the Water Tribe on the day of Black Sun. During the total eclipse, the Firebenders lose their ability to conjure flames and the Earth Kingdom ships ambush the shores, hoping to infiltrate and begin their march on the Fire Nation capital. Sokka's father asks his son to fight with him. However, Sokka sacrifices his dream in order to stay with Aang. Sokka now believes Aang will fulfill his destiny as the Avatar and defeat Fire Lord Ozai. Sokka assumes responsibility for Aang's mission and resolves to deliver Aang safely to his final duel. As the Earth Kingdom continues its assault on the Fire Nation, the kids enter enemy territory, embarking on the final, and most dangerous leg of their journey.

3rd SEASON – SUMMER

SEASON OVERVIEW

Summer marks the impending arrival of a comet that will empower Firebenders with strength enough to decimate the Earth Army, ending the war. As the troops continue to fight toward the enemy's capital, Aang, Katara, Sokka, and Toph make their way through the Fire Nation, a hot, barren land full of active volcanoes, searching for a Fire Master willing to teach Aang Firebending.

Having traveled for several years, Prince Zuko returns to his homeland to find his people enslaved and living in poverty. Outraged that his father has committed such heinous crimes in the name of war, Zuko once again speaks out against the Fire Lord, this time vowing to take his throne and save the Fire Nation from ruin. In retaliation, Fire Lord Ozai deploys a team of his most deadly Firebenders to capture his son. Zuko grows his hair and takes refuge in a small village, living among his people for the first time in his life.

Along their journey, the kids enter the village and encounter Zuko, who asks for their help in defeating the Fire Lord. Convinced Zuko has set a trap for Aang, Sokka refuses his assistance. On the other hand, Katara perceives genuine change in Zuko and wants to use him as a guide through the Fire Nation. With no other options, Aang agrees to help Zuko in exchange for Firebending instruction. The kids cautiously accept Zuko into their group.

For weeks, they move through the country, hiding in caves and seeking refuge in villages. All the while, Zuko trains Aang in Firebending. However, Aang's fear of fire prevents him from controlling the volatile element, for he still feels guilt over burning Katara. Furthermore, once Zuko fights his Uncle, the Prince learns that his former teacher was under his father's orders to teach him incorrect Firebending. Under the tutelage of Zuko's flawed magic, Aang cannot obtain the skills needed to defeat the Fire Lord.

Aang realizes he won't master the final stage of the Avatar's magic before the comet arrives. The group decides to put off attacking Ozai until after the comet passes, but

Aang understands the dangers of waiting. By then, the Fire Lord will join his Army's frontlines and use his heightened powers to decimate the Earth Army. Facing up to his responsibility, Aang leaves his friends and sets out for Ozai's fortress where he will fight the Fire Lord, alone. Meanwhile, the Fire Lord's Firebenders catch up to Zuko and the kids and attack, capturing Zuko and Katara. Luckily, Sokka and Toph escape.

After a long journey, Aang arrives at the Fire Lord's fortress. Ozai sets a trap and hundreds of Firebenders surround Aang. With his life threatened, Aang's arrow tattoos begin to glow. His Avatar spirit awakens and uses the four elements to seal Aang inside a sphere of stone, similar to when the storm endangered his life. With Aang trapped, the Firebenders deliver Aang to Fire Lord Ozai, but even his remarkable powers can't crack Aang's protective shell.

While Earth Kingdom troops move closer to the capital, Sokka and Toph track the captured Zuko and Katara to the Fire Lord's fortress, hoping to save Katara. Nearby, Sokka and Toph discover a fleet of fully operational zeppelins preparing to take off. In the Fire Lord's eccentric menagerie, Sokka finds Aang's bison, alive. Freeing Appa, Sokka flies him into battle and hijacks a zeppelin from the air. With the zeppelin's firepower, Sokka destroys the rest of the fleet, clearing the way for the Earth forces to storm the Fire Lord's fortress.

Inside the fortress, Katara and Zuko break away from their captors and search for Aang, hoping to help him. Zuko leads them through secret passages to his father's chamber, where they encounter Zuko's brother, Prince Azul. Azul's Firebending is superior to Zuko's, but with Katara's help, they defeat the younger Prince, preventing him from helping his father battle Aang.

As the comet streaks through the sky, Ozai's power doubles, allowing him to break Aang's protective sphere. Aang emerges ready to face his destiny. For the majority of the battle, Aang uses Air, Water, and Earthbending against the Fire Lord, but Ozai holds the upper hand. However, by watching the Fire Lord fight, Aang learns Firebending. Equally

strengthened by the comet, Aang assimilates Ozai's moves into his own and uses them to defeat the master. However, staying true to his ideals, Aang does not kill Ozai. Instead, using a technique available only to the Avatar, he takes away Ozai's Firebending powers and leaves him a weak man.

As the Earth forces capture the capital city, Aang reunites with Katara, Sokka, and Momo. Aang proves to his friends that he's ready for the Avatar's responsibility.

EPILOGUE

Zuko claims the Fire Lord's throne and vows to work with the Avatar to restore the Fire Nation to its proper place in the world. Toph returns to the Earth Kingdom to work with the Emperor in rebuilding his nation. Katara and Sokka rejoin their father and sail home to save their home and rebuild the Southern Water Tribe. Aang and Momo reunite with Appa and fly off in search of the Air Nomads, whom Aang believes lives in an unexplored part of the world. As the Avatar, Aang will travel the world, helping restore balance to the Nations. In the process, he will achieve what he always wanted – a life full of adventure.