*Avatar: The Last Airbender* takes place in a world that is home to humans and hybrid animals, adjacent to a parallel Spirit World. Human civilization is divided into four nations: the Water Tribes, the Earth Kingdom, the Fire Nation, and the Air Nomads. Each has a distinct society, wherein people known as "benders" have the ability to manipulate and control the [element](https://mail.andover.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=MGw42xo55x57x9bib2rLs6tD9g22B08GpSv3-xX4acQGlMszrIzUCA..&URL=https%3a%2f%2fen.wikipedia.org%2fwiki%2fClassical_element) of their nation using the physical motions of [martial arts](https://mail.andover.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=dkNx0D4H3gSCks9G1zVr34gr8gGlCKpsutz_MQSJXakGlMszrIzUCA..&URL=https%3a%2f%2fen.wikipedia.org%2fwiki%2fMartial_arts). The show's creators based each bending style on an existing [Chinese martial art](https://mail.andover.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=-zI5Mbm-IFD4EGWpo0CUU6HhbRVhdSyU-Pcp4qc-EVMGlMszrIzUCA..&URL=https%3a%2f%2fen.wikipedia.org%2fwiki%2fChinese_martial_arts), leading to clear visual and physical differences in the techniques used by Waterbenders ([tai chi](https://mail.andover.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=oaQJGk33laHpJpftNJ1KL4ZDZcMr25Dq5jd_eIlK5NwGlMszrIzUCA..&URL=https%3a%2f%2fen.wikipedia.org%2fwiki%2fTai_chi)), Earthbenders ([Hung Ga](https://mail.andover.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=DG-wNwsY90FsdHoFzPKTsbRa_sNhJAa_JGzwwSPRUr0GlMszrIzUCA..&URL=https%3a%2f%2fen.wikipedia.org%2fwiki%2fHung_Ga) [kung fu](https://mail.andover.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=nnvobRNjXfY7-Y5WieQph2VF8m33uA9uVDlxTkkW6YYGlMszrIzUCA..&URL=https%3a%2f%2fen.wikipedia.org%2fwiki%2fKung_fu)), Firebenders ([Northern Shaolin](https://mail.andover.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=AT69yFlTLdKC0sfiPrye9Vbsw-fpDbSF0YsBK2DOtF8GlMszrIzUCA..&URL=https%3a%2f%2fen.wikipedia.org%2fwiki%2fNorthern_Shaolin_(martial_art)) kung fu) and Airbenders ([Baguazhang](https://mail.andover.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=hdMrTdyIPQkGijCnC8CPRzpf0vpQygk_NeHeBWJmhBYGlMszrIzUCA..&URL=https%3a%2f%2fen.wikipedia.org%2fwiki%2fBaguazhang" \t "_blank)).[[18]](https://mail.andover.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=BCH61rFlK8noC5gEwdFhu4riuiATGH6Yihd73h6qjw0GlMszrIzUCA..&URL=https%3a%2f%2fen.wikipedia.org%2fwiki%2fAvatar%3a_The_Last_Airbender%23cite_note-avatar2.2Findex.jhtml-18) In addition to these four types of bending, there are several minor subcategories of bending within them, including but not limited to: Metalbending, Sandbending (Earth); Lightning generation and redirection (Fire) and Bloodbending, Healing, Plantbending (Water). Water. Earth. Fire. Air. Long ago, the four nations lived together in harmony. Then, everything changed when the Fire Nation attacked. Only the Avatar, master of all four elements, could stop them, but when the world needed him most, he vanished. A hundred years passed and my brother and I discovered the new Avatar, an airbender named Aang. And although his airbending skills are great, he has a lot to learn before he's ready to save anyone. But I believe Aang can save the world. At any given time, only one person in the world is capable of bending all four elements: the Avatar. When the Avatar dies, the Avatar spirit is [reincarnated](https://mail.andover.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=EHa68Ao3CSUnlK75rJKPuQm0QXNW0N_Nq7lP-Cxwti0GlMszrIzUCA..&URL=https%3a%2f%2fen.wikipedia.org%2fwiki%2fReincarnation) into the next one of the four nations in the Avatar Cycle: the Fire Nation, Air Nomads, Water Tribe, Earth Kingdom, in order. An Avatar incarnation is born male or female, and is required to master each bending art in seasonal order from the age of sixteen, starting with its native land's element (Fire: Summer, Air: Autumn, Water: Winter, Earth: Spring). Additionally, the Avatar can enter a phase known as the Avatar State: normally a [defense mechanism](https://mail.andover.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=zvsd9skjg87WOXzmDKPLrqpD_o6qP6d8-RtK94U8D0sGlMszrIzUCA..&URL=https%3a%2f%2fen.wikipedia.org%2fwiki%2fDefense_mechanism) until placed under his/her control through mental discipline, wherein the current Avatar briefly gains the knowledge and abilities of all past Avatars. If an Avatar were to be killed while in the Avatar State, the reincarnation cycle would end and the Avatar would never again be reborn.[[19]](https://mail.andover.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=HvC8PxmJDL47X-lVlszcYT6-M5CL78zg6Fx_DS2YWhAGlMszrIzUCA..&URL=https%3a%2f%2fen.wikipedia.org%2fwiki%2fAvatar%3a_The_Last_Airbender%23cite_note-19) **[Aang](https://mail.andover.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=hGtLJpIuWMFrflUKSnlYnTXPrkNA38qPdidzHll-FQUGlMszrIzUCA..&URL=https%3a%2f%2fen.wikipedia.org%2fwiki%2fAang" \t "_blank)** (voiced by [Zach Tyler Eisen](https://mail.andover.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=yyGUI2ElZ8AmCWKW4CxLgHlc9Q6gaGcZQXgsnMm8ck0GlMszrIzUCA..&URL=https%3a%2f%2fen.wikipedia.org%2fwiki%2fZach_Tyler_Eisen)) is the twelve-year-old, fun-loving, Airbending protagonist of the series. Although averse to fighting, Aang is fiercely protective of his friends. He is the current incarnation of the planet's Avatar Spirit, and is therefore required to act as arbiter among the various people. According to DiMartino and Konietzko, the arrow-like [tattoos](https://mail.andover.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=snhlH3pzyiXakwj5OCBmvNCu1RV7guIjOBsnFCgpzRIGlMszrIzUCA..&URL=https%3a%2f%2fen.wikipedia.org%2fwiki%2fTattoos) on his forehead and arms mark Aang as an Airbending master; Aang being the youngest Airbender in history to have earned them. His mentor, Monk Gyatso, was the greatest Airbender who had ever lived, according to Aang.