

LEVELED BOOK • O

# Karate



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# Karate



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## Focus Question

What is karate, and what does it teach people who practice it?

## Words to Know

defend

martial art

discipline

patience

dojo

respect

self-improvement

sensei

karate

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Someone who practices karate is called a *karateka*.

## What Is Karate?

Amazing strength and lightning-quick speed. **Discipline** and **respect**. These are some of the many things people gain while practicing the art of **karate**.

Karate is a **martial art** in which people who practice it use only their hands and feet. There are no weapons in karate. In fact, the word *karate* is Japanese for “empty hand.”

Nobody knows for certain how karate was invented. However, many believe it happened in the 1600s on a tiny island between China and Japan. The two nations often fought over the island. When a Japanese clan took over the island, the people who lived there were no longer allowed to have weapons. They invented karate as a way to **defend** themselves. Karate is now one of the most popular martial arts in the world.



Men practice karate in 1938 on the island where it may have been invented. Today, the island is a part of Japan.

# The Gym

Karate students train at a **dojo**, or gym. When they first enter a dojo, they must bow their heads as a sign of respect. In a karate dojo, the teacher is called a **sensei**. The sensei is an expert who has a great deal of knowledge to pass on to his or her students. Karate students learn to respect their sensei, their classmates, and the rules of the dojo.



A sensei helps students practice their moves in a dojo.



Students move up to new belts when their sensei thinks they are ready.

## Belts

Before training begins, students must wear the right clothes. In karate, everyone wears a special robe, or *gi*. Students also wear a colored belt around the waist of their gis.

As karate students continue to train, they move up in standing to different colored belts. Earning a new belt, however, isn't just about learning new moves.



Karate is much more than just a physical sport. Students are encouraged to develop their minds and spirits as well as their bodies.

Students learn discipline, respect, and **patience** while practicing karate. They can use these skills in other areas of their lives, too. The good habits students learn are just as important as the moves they practice. When a sensei sees students practicing good habits, they may just earn a new belt.

Students earn new colored belts in a certain order. One story that has been passed down tells the meaning of each color through the growth of a plant. The different colors of the karate belts represent the colors of the Sun, plant, and sky. A student grows much like a young plant. A karate student will mature and gain more knowledge as time passes.



Beginners start with a white belt. Next they earn yellow, then orange. They advance through each color until they earn the black belt.

# Learning Karate

Whoever sets out to learn karate has a long and exciting journey ahead. Karate students have to train with great discipline. In order to master karate, students move through three main steps: *kihon*, *kata*, and *kumite*.



*Kihon* means “basics,” *kata* means “form,” and *kumite* means “meeting of hands.”

## Kihon

Kihon is the basic set of moves that all karate beginners must learn first.

In kihon, students learn to breathe correctly and develop a strong posture. They also learn to do kicks, punches, stances, blocks, and thrusts. The most important thing they will learn is patience. Before moving on to the next step, students practice these moves over and over until they are perfect.



In kihon, students learn one move at a time.

## There Is a Proper Way to Breathe?

In karate, breathing from your stomach rather than your chest makes you most effective. The human body is weak while breathing in, so while performing a move, be sure to exhale and let out a big shout, or *kiai*. A forceful exhale makes your body stronger and the move more effective.





There are many different katas for students to learn.

## *Kata*

After learning kihon, students can move on to kata. A kata takes the moves from kihon and puts them into a routine. Students must imagine that they are fighting off attackers and use the moves of the kata to defend themselves. A kata is often a combination of punches, kicks, blocks, turns, and stances. In this step, they also practice their flow from one move to the next.

Many students are also asked to practice *bunkai* while learning kata. With bunkai, students break down the moves from a kata to understand why each move is useful. This teaches them to be focused. Instead of simply doing the moves, students are asked to slow down and think about them.



Bunkai also helps students learn to predict an opponent's moves.

## We're Just Dancing!

Performing a kata looks a lot like performing a dance routine. For this reason, the people from the island near Japan were able to practice karate without anyone knowing. They claimed that their karate routines weren't for self-defense. Instead, they insisted that they were just doing some harmless dancing!



Kumite is practiced as a sport and as self-defense training.

## *Kumite*

After perfecting kata through hard work and discipline, students reach kumite. In the final step, they apply everything they have learned. Students pair up and practice moves on an opponent. Kumite is the closest they get to a real fight.

# Conclusion

For centuries, students and adults around the world have learned discipline, respect, and **self-improvement** through karate. They work hard to make progress and earn new belts. People may find that the skills they learn stay with them long after leaving the dojo. Some karate students may become karate masters, but they all have a lot of fun trying to get there.



Many people who practice karate say that it is a lifelong journey of improvement. There is always something new to learn.

# Glossary

<b>defend</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to protect oneself from harm or attack (p. 5)
<b>discipline</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the ability to continue working toward a difficult goal (p. 4)
<b>dojo</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a school for training in Japanese martial arts (p. 6)
<b>self-improvement</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the act of doing better than before (p. 15)
<b>karate</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a method of self-defense in which the hands and feet are used to strike an opponent (p. 4)
<b>martial art</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	one of several sports in which students practice fighting and self-defense (p. 4)
<b>patience</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the ability to wait or deal with challenges without getting upset (p. 8)
<b>respect</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	an understanding that someone or something should be treated with honor or in a careful manner (p. 4)
<b>sensei</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a teacher or leader, often of Japanese martial arts (p. 6)

# Karate

A Reading A-Z Level O Leveled Book

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## Connections

### Writing and Art

What do you think is the most important thing people learn from practicing karate? Draw a picture and write about it.

### Social Studies

How is karate the same as dancing? How is it different? Make a Venn diagram with a partner to show your ideas.

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