

Informational
Reading
Comprehension:

Discovering Kites

- 1 For generations, children and adults alike have enjoyed the simple delight of flying a kite on a windy day—the rush of air, the gentle tug from the string, the sight of colorful fabric lifting into the sky. However, kites were not always the bright and whimsical toys we think of today.
- 2 Kites actually started out as instruments of war. The first known kites were flown in China around 3,000 years ago and were used by the Chinese military to send signals, spy on enemies, and deliver urgent messages. Kites were also used to measure long distances. One general flew a kite above a town to measure how far his army would have to tunnel underground to sneak under the city walls. With this information, his troops were able to surprise their enemy.
- 3 The first kites were practical, not necessarily pretty. But during the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE), people started using lighter materials like silk, bamboo, and decorative paper to make kites. A new focus was put on the appearance of the kites, and they became things of beauty. By the 1300s, making kites had emerged as an art form, and kites were decorated with colorful pictures of birds, flower blossoms, and calligraphy. Kites were flown for enjoyment and for celebration of the Chinese New Year. As the years went on, kites became increasingly more colorful and elaborate. Some artists added whistles so the kites could make charming sounds as they danced among the clouds. New kite shapes emerged, including insects like dragonflies and centipedes, and mythical creatures like dragons.
- 4 Over time, the tradition of kite flying spread to other areas of the world. It grew in popularity across much of Southeast Asia and North Africa before spreading to Europe and the Americas. When thirteenth-century explorer Marco Polo returned home to Italy, he brought back many stories, including ones about kites, from his travels across Asia. At the same time, goods and ideas from the East were making their way to Europe via the Silk Road, a vast network of trading routes. Polo's stories and the growing influence of

Asian culture helped popularize kites across Europe. From there, knowledge of kites crossed the Atlantic with travelers headed to the Americas.



- 5 Since then, kites have become more than just entrancing pieces of flying art. They have played a meaningful role in discoveries. Perhaps the best known use of a kite was in an experiment described by Benjamin Franklin in 1752. Franklin hoped to prove the connection between lightning and electricity. He hypothesized that if he attached a metal key to the string of a kite and flew it during a thunderstorm, the electricity in the air would travel down the wet kite string to the key, producing an electric shock. This experiment eventually led Franklin to invent the lightning rod. Another important use of kites was by the Wright brothers in the early 1900s; they used kites to test their ideas about flight. Their early experiments with kites helped them create the world's first successful airplane.
- 6 For hundreds of years, kites have played a significant role in human exploration and artistic expression. Even now, kites are still an important part of religious and cultural celebrations, and they are featured in dozens of festivals around the world. Additionally, the planes and rockets that allow us to travel the globe have all **descended** from the humble kite. Despite their changing appearance and uses through the ages, kites hold a valued place in human history.

Answer the following questions about “Discovering Kites.”

1. Which of the following quotes from the text best illustrates the main idea of this passage?

- a. “For generations, children and adults alike have enjoyed the simple delight of flying a kite on a windy day...”
- b. “For hundreds of years, kites have played a significant role in human exploration and artistic expression.”
- c. “As the years went on, kites became increasingly more colorful and elaborate.”
- d. “Polo’s stories and the growing influence of Asian culture helped popularize kites across Europe.”

2. According to the text, what are some different ways that kites have been used since they were first invented?

3. How has the appearance of kites changed over time? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.

4a. What is the organizing structure of this text?

- a. chronological b. compare-and-contrast
- c. problem-solution d. cause-and-effect

4b. How does that structure support the main idea of the passage?

5. Which of the following phrases would make the best heading for paragraph 5?

- a. A Delightful Pastime b. Flying Art
- c. Experimenting with Kites d. Traveling Kites

6. Read this sentence from the passage.

“Since then, kites have become more than just entrancing pieces of flying art.”

Without changing the meaning of the sentence, what is another word that could be substituted for entrancing?

- a. attractive b. adventurous
- c. common d. practical

7. Which sentence uses the same meaning of descended as it is used in paragraph 6?

- a. The ladies have **descended** from their bedchambers and are ready to go to the ball.
- b. Many scientific names have **descended** from Latin or Greek words.
- c. The crowds have **descended** into chaos as rowdy football fans celebrate their team’s win.
- d. Dozens of journalists have **descended** on the home of the recent lottery winner.

8. Write a brief and objective summary of the text. Include the main idea and key supporting details.
