

Read the article “Flying Toys.” Then answer Numbers 1 through 10.

Flying Toys

Kites might be the oldest toys around. They have been used for thousands of years. But for much of their history, kites were not toys at all.

The first kites probably came from China. Early stories tell of a man named Han Hsin. Han Hsin was a general. He wanted to overthrow a cruel emperor. Han Hsin had only a few soldiers. They needed a clever way to accomplish their goals. According to legend, Han Hsin and his men used a kite.

Han Hsin flew the kite from his base camp. The kite made its way over the emperor’s palace. Once it was there, Han Hsin marked the string. Later, he measured the string. This told him how long a tunnel was needed to get inside the palace. Han Hsin’s men dug by night. Finally, they were able to sneak into the emperor’s palace.

Another story says Han Hsin used the kite in a different way. He strapped himself to a sturdy kite late one night. Then Han Hsin’s men flew the kite over the emperor’s palace. The emperor’s soldiers saw the strange object in the sky. Then they heard a booming voice. The voice told them to leave the palace and go home to their families. The soldiers were frightened and left immediately. The next day, Han Hsin and his troops easily took over the palace.

There are Japanese kite tales as well. One story tells of a samurai warrior and his son. The samurai broke one of the emperor’s laws.



The samurai was punished. He and his son were sent to a tiny island. But the father thought his son deserved a normal life. He built a large kite and strapped his son to it. He then flew his son safely back to the mainland.

In Japan, kites were a part of the beliefs and customs of the people. Kites flew at planting time. They were thought to bring a plentiful harvest. They flew at a child's birth. Long life, happiness, and fortune were said to depend on them. Japanese kites were decorative. They were colorful and had fantastic shapes. Many looked like birds, dragons, or fish.

Today in Japan, kites help celebrate the New Year. They represent thanks for the past year and hope for the next. On May 5th, kites fly on *Kodomo-no hi*, or Children's Day. Tube-shaped kites called kite socks are flown. They are designed to look like carp, a kind of fish. The carp stands for courage and strength. Kite socks weren't used just by the Japanese, however. Nearly 2,000 years ago, this kind of kite was used by the Romans. They used the kite socks as army banners.

Kites have a scientific history, too. In 1749, Alexander Wilson of Scotland used them in an interesting way. Wilson attached thermometers to a series of kites. He then flew the kites on a single line. Each kite flew at a different height, or altitude. Wilson's thermometers recorded the temperature at different altitudes.

In the United States in 1752, Benjamin Franklin used a kite for his famous experiments with lightning. He had been experimenting with kites for a long time. As a boy, he once rigged a kite to pull himself across a small pond.

A hundred years later, a kite made a bridge across Niagara Falls possible. Even later, experiments with kites helped scientists improve air travel.

Today, most kites are used for relaxation and pleasure. All you need is a large, open area like a beach, a kite, and a steady breeze.

NAME _____

Date _____

- 1** Read this sentence from the story.

Then they heard a booming voice.

What does the word *booming* mean in the sentence?

- A. whispering
- B. thundering
- C. singing
- D. questioning

- 2** Which of the following was probably the birthplace of the kite?

- A. Japan
- B. Scotland
- C. China
- D. Rome

- 3** Which of these is a FACT in the article?

- A. The carp is a courageous fish.
- B. The first kites were probably beautiful.
- C. No toy is as much fun as a kite.
- D. Kites have been used for science.

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- 4 Read this sentence from the story.
- They were thought to bring a plentiful harvest.

What does the word *plentiful* mean in the sentence?

- A. peaceful
- B. abundant
- C. faraway
- D. graceful

5 Describe the tale of how the Japanese samurai helped his son to live a normal life. Use information and details provided in the story to help you write your answer.

NAME _____

Date _____

- 6** How are kites mostly used in modern Japan?
- A. to test the air temperature
 - B. for relaxation and pleasure
 - C. to mark certain holidays
 - D. for improving farming
- 7** What does the carp stand for, or symbolize, in Japan?
- A. happiness
 - B. fortune
 - C. courage
 - D. discovery
- 8** Which of the following statements could lead you to conclude that Han Hsin was small?
- A. He was able to crawl in a tunnel.
 - B. He was able to fly on a kite.
 - C. He was able to build his own kite.
 - D. He was able to lead a small army.
- 9** Why did Alexander Wilson fly several kites on one string?
- A. to see if Benjamin Franklin's experiments worked
 - B. to test the possibility of traveling by train
 - C. to see if the kites could form a bridge
 - D. to test the temperature at different heights

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Date _____

- 10

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