

Bird Man

Winging It

Who?! Felix Baumgartner, 34, is not Superman. He's a stuntman from Austria, a country in Europe. In July of 2003, Felix made history. He became the first person to fly across the English Channel without an aircraft. The English Channel is a body of water that separates England from France.

"I felt like a bird," he said.

First, Felix rode in an airplane to 30,000 feet over the coast of England. That is higher than Mount Everest, the world's highest peak. Then he jumped out.

Felix wore a special suit. He had gliding wings strapped to his back. The wings helped him ride the wind while dropping through the clouds. He also carried oxygen with him to help him breathe. The air that high up is very thin.

Felix took 14 minutes to glide 21 miles across the English Channel. He flew as fast as 217 miles per hour.

When Felix got close to the ground in France, he used a parachute to make a safe landing.

"It's exactly 100 years ago that the Wright brothers were doing the first flight with a plane," Felix said. "And now I'm here, with my little wing."

Let's face it. People are not made to fly. We don't have wings. And humans have dense bones that weigh us down. Our small shoulder muscles don't allow us to flap our arms fast enough to lift us off the ground.

Gravity always wins. That is, unless you are Jari Kuosma. He is known as the world's best sky flier. Kuosma even has a nickname.

Call him "Bird Man."

Kuosma is a sky diver in DeLand, Florida. He jumps out of planes for fun. He has designed a "wing suit" that gives him the sensation of swooping.

When he is not soaring through the air, Bird Man's wing suit looks kind of odd. There are bright red flaps hanging from both his armpits and between his legs.

After jumping, Bird Man spreads his arms and legs. The red fabric unfurls and catches air like a parachute. The wings increase his surface area and slow his drop speed. From the ground, Bird Man looks like he's floating.

Regular sky divers fall to Earth at about 120 miles per hour (mph). They can plummet 10,500 feet in about one minute.

With his special suit, Bird Man takes about three minutes to fall the same distance. He falls at slower than 40 mph. The design of his suit also allows him to "steer" somewhat.

"It's an incredible experience," Bird Man says. "You pick a spot, like a canyon between two clouds, and you fly there. You can play with your own shadow against the cloud."

(The wing suit might seem familiar to movie fans. Angelina Jolie wore one of the suits in the movie *Lara Croft Tomb Raider*.)

Humans have always dreamed of soaring like birds. But it has been a dangerous dream. Sky divers have been trying to fly with fake wings since the 1920s. From 1930 to the early 1960s, 72 out of 75 people died trying.

Bird Man's suit has an excellent safety record. But even with his suit on, Bird Man falls much too fast to make a safe landing. He pulls a ripcord and opens a parachute for a soft landing.

One day, Bird Man hopes to land with no parachute. Until then, he'll just have fun flying like a bird.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Why did Felix Baumgartner have to carry oxygen when he flew across the English Channel?

- A because he was flying in such thin air that he needed help breathing
- B because his special suit with gliding wings needed extra air to fly
- C because he was in the air for 14 minutes and he couldn't hold his breath that long
- D because he needed to breathe more deeply since he was flying across the English Channel

2. Which of the following best describes the structure of this text?

- A The author tells about the similarities and differences between the flying stunts of Felix Baumgartner and Jari Kuosma.
- B The author sets forth in detail the record-breaking flight across the English Channel of Felix Baumgartner.
- C The author describes Felix Baumgartner's flight across the English Channel, then writes about how Jari Kuosma flies when he jumps from planes.
- D The author describes Jari Kuosma's hobby as a skydiver.

3. It can be inferred from the passage that

- A most skydivers do not wear the same kinds of special suits as those worn by Felix Baumgartner and Jari Kuosma
- B most skydivers understand that skydiving is extremely risky and they try to be very careful
- C most skydivers have tried to set the record for flying across the English Channel without an aircraft
- D most skydivers fall to Earth slower than Bird Man

4. Read the following sentence: "When he is not soaring through the air, Bird Man's wing suit looks kind of odd."

As used in this sentence, **soaring** means

- A getting bigger quickly
- B hurting very badly
- C flying at a great height
- D flowing extremely rapidly

5. What would be another good title for this passage?

- A Jari's Wing Suit
- B Almost Flying
- C Gliding Across the English Channel
- D The First Flight Ever

6. Why does the author say that trying to fly like a bird is a “dangerous dream”?

7. What word would the author most likely use to describe Felix Baumgarten and Jari Kuosma?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Bird Man loves the feeling of flying _____ he jumps out of planes wearing a special suit that makes him feel like he is swooping.

- A but
- B because
- C so
- D before

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Felix Baumgartner wore a special suit with gliding wings so he could be the first person to fly across the English Channel without an aircraft.

Who? Felix Baumgartner

(did) What? _____

Why? _____

10. Read the vocabulary word and definition below and complete questions 10a, 10b, and 11.

Vocabulary Word: plummet (plum · met): to fall fast.

10a. Read the sentences below and underline the word **plummet**.

1. When the suitcase fell out of the helicopter, it plummeted to the ground.
2. In the Greek myth of Daedalus and Icarus, Icarus's wings fell off as he flew too close to the sun, and he plummeted into the ocean and drowned.
3. The baby bird plummeted out of the nest during the thunderstorm.
4. After the heat wave with temperatures in the 90s, the thermometer suddenly plummeted to the low 40s.
5. The satellite plummeted to earth from outer space.

10b. Circle the picture that shows something plummeting.



11. Would a feather plummet to the ground? Why or why not?

Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 700

Featured Text Structure: Descriptive – the writer explains, defines or illustrates a concept or topic

Passage Summary: This passage describes two men who “fly.” One is Felix Baumgartner, who set a record for gliding without an aircraft across the English Channel. The other is Jari Kuosma, who wears a special suit to swoop through the air as a stuntman.

1. Why did Felix Baumgartner have to carry oxygen when he flew across the English Channel?

- A because he was flying in such thin air that he needed help breathing**
- B because his special suit with gliding wings needed extra air to fly
- C because he was in the air for 14 minutes and he couldn't hold his breath that long
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5. What would be another good title for this passage?

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- C Gliding Across the English Channel
- D The First Flight Ever

6. Why does the author say that trying to fly like a bird is a “dangerous dream”?

Suggested answer: The author says that trying to fly like a bird is a “dangerous dream” because most people who have tried to do this have died. [paragraph #18]

7. What word would the author most likely use to describe Felix Baumgarten and Jari Kuosma?

Suggested answer: The author would likely describe them as adventurous/daring/brave because they both take many risks as skydivers who are trying to fly.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Bird Man loves the feeling of flying _____ he jumps out of planes wearing a special suit that makes him feel like he is swooping.

- A but
- B because
- C **so**
- D before

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Felix Baumgartner wore a special suit with gliding wings so he could be the first person to fly across the English Channel without an aircraft.

Who? Felix Baumgartner

(did) What? **wore a special suit with gliding wings**

Why? **so he could be the first person to fly across the English Channel without an aircraft**

10. ReadWorks recommends that you teach this vocabulary word to the whole class out loud using the four steps listed below.

Vocabulary Word: plummet

Step 1: Introduce the word

- a. Teacher writes the word on the board and divides it into syllables: (plum · met)
- b. Teacher says: “This word is plummet. What is the word?” [All students reply together out loud: “plummet.”]

Step 2: Provide a child-friendly definition

- a. Teacher says: “Plummet means to fall fast.”
- b. Teacher says: “In the text, the author states that skydivers can plummet 10,500 feet in one minute, and that they fall at a speed of 120 miles per hour. That’s about twice as fast as you would drive a car on a highway! So they are falling very fast when they plummet to the Earth.”
- c. Teacher says: “What is the word?” [All students reply together out loud: “plummet.”]

Step 3: Practice the word

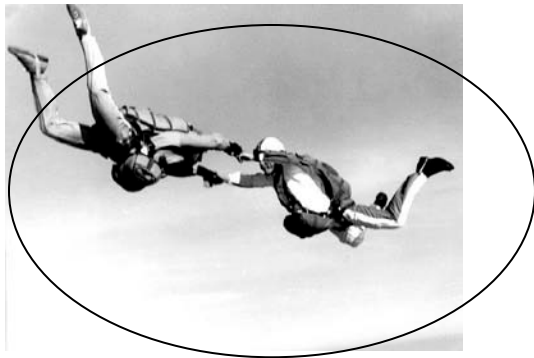
Teacher provides examples and additional opportunities to repeat the word. Read the 1st sentence out loud to your students. Begin reading it again and when you come to the vocabulary word prompt students to say the vocabulary word out loud. Then, finish reading the sentence out loud to our students.

- 10a.**
1. When the suitcase fell out of the helicopter, it plummeted to the ground.
 2. In the Greek myth of Daedalus and Icarus, Icarus's wings fell off as he flew too close to the sun, and he plummeted into the ocean and drowned.
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Step 4: Check for student understanding

This step can be completed as a whole class activity or as an independent practice.

- 10b.** Circle the picture that shows something plummeting.



- 11.** Would a feather plummet to the ground? Why or why not?

Suggested answer: Because a feather is so light, it would slowly fall to the earth, swaying as it goes along and not falling quickly.

Suggested Additional Vocabulary: coast, glide, swoop, soar, peak