

Name _____ Date _____

Excerpt from *The Courage to Soar: "Kites in Flight"*

Famous People and their Kites

Kites have been used by some very famous people. Leonardo da Vinci was one of these. He is best known for being an artist in Italy. But he was also a scientist. In the late 1400s, he began to study flight. At first, he studied birds. He also flew kites. From these studies, he drew some designs for flying machines. His interest in kites may have led him to study clouds and airflow.

Alexander Wilson lived in Scotland. He used kites to do experiments. In the mid-1700s, he flew a whole line of kites. The kites were all placed on one line. Next, he put thermometers all along the line. Then he flew the kites. In this way, he measured the temperature at different heights.

Most people know how Ben Franklin used a kite. He discovered electricity by flying one. In the mid-1700s, he flew a kite in a thunderstorm. He thought that lightning was a form of electricity. He was right! Lightning hit the kite and a key that was hanging from it. With the kite and key, Ben proved that lightning is electricity.

The Niagara Falls Bridge was built with the help of a boy and his kite. The bridge was built in the mid-1800s. To start, the builders had to get a line over the water. But steep cliffs, rapids,¹ and swirling winds made this very hard. Someone thought that the problem might be solved by flying a kite over the gorge.² So, a contest was held. A prize would be given to the first person to fly a kite across the Niagara Gorge. The winner was a young boy named Homan Walsh. Homan took a boat to the Canadian side. From there, he flew his kite high over the river. Then he let it go slack.³ It fell on the American side. But the string had broken. Homan had to wait eight days for the ice to clear from the river before he could go back to the American side and get his kite. He repaired the string and returned to the Canadian side. Once again, he flew his kite and it dropped to the American side. This time it was caught and tied to a tree. The builders secured the kite string. Then, they began to add heavier and heavier line. Finally, a steel cable stretched across the gorge. Now, they could begin to build the bridge. For all of his trouble, Homan received the \$5.00 prize.

¹**rapids:** part of a river where the water runs very fast

²**gorge:** a narrow valley with high, rocky walls

³**slack:** loose

- 1 Where did Leonardo da Vinci get his ideas for flying?
- A from studying clouds and airflow
 - B from studying electricity with kites
 - C from studying birds and flying kites
 - D from studying temperatures at different heights
- 2 According to the text, who discovered electricity?
- A Leonardo da Vinci
 - B Alexander Wilson
 - C Homan Walsh
 - D Ben Franklin
- 3 According to the text, which is a form of electricity?
- A lightning
 - B temperature
 - C a thermometer
 - D a thunderstorm

- 4 How did the builders of the Niagara Falls Bridge get a line over the water?
- A with a bird
 - B with a kite
 - C with a boat
 - D with a machine
- 5 Why did Homan Walsh have to wait to go back to the American side for his kite?
- A He had to wait for the ice to disappear.
 - B He had to wait for the winds to calm.
 - C He had to wait for the storm to stop.
 - D He had to wait for the boats to move.