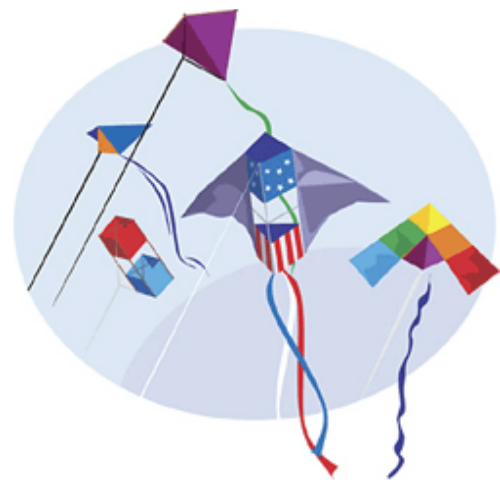


The History of Kites

The flying of kites began 3000 years ago in China. Ancient Chinese people would use bamboo and silk, two products readily available, to make the kites. They were often used during religious celebrations. Their beauty and essence quickly led to the emergence of kites flying across Asia, Europe and eventually in western civilizations. Many of these early kite flyers used them to do scientific experiments. Perhaps the most famous is Benjamin Franklin who used a kite to test electricity in the atmosphere. Alexander Graham Bell also used kites as a way to carry out complicated science experiments.



The first kites flown in the 1890's were used to send weather instruments into the atmosphere. These were called box kites and were commonly used to measure things like barometric pressure, wind speed and velocity, temperature and humidity. Kites had a major influence on modern day meteorology, which is the study and prediction of weather.

By 1900, many people were already designing kites that would allow humans to fly. These kites were called cellular kites and were designed in layers in order to be able to lift heavier weights into the air. Lawrence Hargrave was a pioneer in the cellular kite field and was attempting to design one that would allow man to soar through the air using the power of only kites. This is how modern day gliders were invented.

In 1903, a kite designed by Samuel Franklin Cody enabled a boat to be pulled across the English Channel using only the power of the kite and the wind. Kites were also used during the 19th and 20th centuries by military operations as a way to lift up personnel so that they could watch their enemies from above the ground and report back to base. In World War II, kites were used as targets.

Interestingly, the Wright Brothers experimented with kites first before developing the first airplane. They realized that by altering the four lines usually attached to a kite they were able to mimic the mobility of a birds wings. Unlike other kite pioneers, the Wright Brothers were interested in developing kites that could be steered, rather than free float with the air speed and velocity. Eventually, this is how they were able to make the first manned flight using everything that they had learned from kites.

Modern day kite flying is more of a hobby than a science. While a small child can fly a kite in the back yard, there are many people who dedicate their lives to building unique and sturdy kites that are not just useful, but beautiful as well. Many people use them today to fish and there are many festivals and sporting events associated with kite flying.

Name _____ Date _____

The History of Kites – Quiz

1. What did Benjamin Franklin use a kite to test
 - a. Static
 - b. Electricity
 - c. Wind speed
 - d. Barometric pressure

2. What force of energy is used to make kites move
 - a. Wind
 - b. Electricity
 - c. Gravity
 - d. Temperature

3. Who led the progress in the “cellular kite” field?
 - a. Benjamin Franklin
 - b. Samuel Franklin Cody
 - c. Wright Brothers
 - d. Lawrence Hargrave

4. What were early box kites used to measure?
 - a. Temperature
 - b. Barometric pressure
 - c. Wind speed
 - d. Wind velocity
 - e. All of the above

5. What did the Wright Brothers design their kites after?
 - a. airplanes
 - b. bird’s wings
 - c. tree leaves
 - d. sails

6. What word would best describe how kites were used during 19th & 20th century military operations?
 - a. weaponry
 - b. targets
 - c. surveillance
 - d. protection

Name _____ Date _____

The History of Kites – Free Response Quiz

- 1. How do you think kites helped the Wright Brothers to design an airplane?**
- 2. Kites originated in China 3000 years ago, how do you imagine the trend of kite flying was able to travel across continents and into the United States?**
- 3. What is the best part about flying a kit? What is the most difficult part?**
- 4. In order to have a successful kite-flying day, what would you need the weather to be like?**
- 5. Was it smart for the military to use kites as a way to move soldiers over an enemy area in order to see what was going on? Why or why not?**
- 6. Why do you think that early scientists used kites? Think of their resources.**
- 7. What is it about kite flying that makes it a fun sport?**
- 8. Draw a quick sketch that would be your ideal kite design.**

The History of Kites – Answer Key

- 1. b**
- 2. a**
- 3. d**
- 4. e**
- 5. b**
- 6. c**