Name: _____ Date: _____

A Day on the Space Station

Reading level 9 (5th grade) · 661 words

Ana is pretend, but her day is not. Everything she does is something real crews do on the International Space Station. At six in the morning, an alarm rings, and Ana opens her eyes. She is inside a sleeping bag that is hooked to a wall. Ana is one of a crew of seven people on board.

Getting dressed is the first puzzle of the day. Ana's arms and legs float out at odd angles, so even a sock is a puzzle. There is no washing machine on the station, so her clothes are made to be thrown away. She wears each set for days, then throws it away and puts on a fresh one.

After breakfast, Ana reads the Daily Summary. It is a sort of newspaper for the station, put together by the control centers on Earth. Sometimes it even has jokes and cartoons. Then she talks with the control centers, and the crew and the flight controllers go over the plan for the day, job by job. When the call ends, the real work begins.

Most of Ana's day is work. About six and a half hours go to experiments, new equipment, repairs and housekeeping. A home in space needs cleaning, just like yours. Nobody can call a plumber, so when something breaks, the crew has to fix it themselves. The station is a laboratory, a workshop and a house, all in one.

Then it is lunchtime. Ana does not just float a sandwich around, because loose food would wander off through the station. Soup and drinks come in plastic bags, and she sips them through straws. Magnets hold her knife and fork to the table. And here is a surprise. Being in space dulls the taste buds, so spicy food is a favorite.

Water is precious on the station, so almost none of it is wasted. There is no shower, so Ana washes with wet towels. The station cleans its used water and uses it again. That even includes water that has condensed out of the air in the cabin. A drop that was just floating in the air may end up in Ana's cup.

Even the toilet works differently up here. A space toilet does not use water at all. Ana holds herself to the seat with spring-loaded bars, and a fan pulls the air, and the air carries everything away. It is the opposite of a flush on Earth. Some astronauts find it hard to get used to at first.

Now comes the job nobody gets to skip. Without Earth's gravity, bones and muscles shrink and get weaker. So Ana exercises about two hours a day, on a treadmill, a bike and a weight machine called ARED. She has to strap herself to each machine. If she did not, every push would send her floating away across the room.

All day long, the station is racing around the Earth. It goes once around about every ninety

minutes. That means Ana sees the sun come up sixteen times in one day. It also goes down sixteen times. Back home, you get one sunrise and one sunset. Ana can look out the window and watch one start every hour and a half.

In the evening, the crew talks to the control centers one last time. Then Ana has free time. She might write emails home or watch a movie. Most of all, she floats in a window called the Cupola and watches the Earth turn. Astronauts say the view is never dull. Many astronauts spend their free time this way.

Lights go out, and Ana crawls back into her sleeping bag. She picked her spot with care, next to an air fan. Warm air does not rise in space, so a sleeper in a bad spot ends up in a bubble of her own breath. She gets eight and a half hours of sleep. Somewhere above your head, someone may be sleeping on a wall right now.

Questions

1. Why does Ana hook her sleeping bag to a wall?

A. So it stays put while she sleeps
B. So it can dry
C. So she can see out the window

2. Why do astronauts exercise about two hours a day?

A. Bones and muscles get weaker without gravity
B. The station is cold
C. It is a contest

3. Why does Ana strap herself to the exercise machines?

A. She would float away
B. They are slippery
C. She likes the sound

4. What does condensed mean here?

A. Turned from air to drops of water
B. Made very loud
C. Thrown away

5. How many sunrises does the crew see in one day?

A. One
B. Sixteen
C. Two hundred

Words to know

astronaut: space traveler
gravity: pulling force
treadmill: running machine
housekeeping: cleaning chores
condensed: turned to drops

Answer key: A Day on the Space Station

1. A. So it stays put while she sleeps
2. A. Bones and muscles get weaker without gravity
3. A. She would float away
4. A. Turned from air to drops of water
5. B. Sixteen