Name: _____ Date: _____

Flying Too High

Reading level 8 (4th grade) · 725 words

A famous inventor named Daedalus once lived in Athens. People said he made the saw and the drill. His statues looked so lifelike that they seemed ready to walk away. When King Minos of Crete asked for his help, Daedalus packed his tools and took his young son Icarus across the sea.

On Crete, the king asked Daedalus to build a maze under his palace. It had so many twisting halls that no one could find the way out. Daedalus built it, and it was a wonder. But when the work was done, Minos would not let him leave. He did not want the secret of the maze to travel.

So Daedalus and Icarus lived in a high tower by the sea. Guards stood at the door. Every ship was searched before it left the harbor. Day after day, Daedalus gazed at the waves and thought of home. Icarus grew restless. "We are stuck," he sighed. "The king owns every road and every wave."

A gull glided past the window, and Daedalus watched it go. For the first time in weeks, he smiled. "The king may own the water," he said slowly, "but he cannot own the sky." From that moment, his clever mind was busy.

All week he gathered feathers from the shore and the rocks. He laid them in rows, from short to long. He tied the long ones together with thread. Then he fixed the short ones at the ends with wax from a candle. Last, he bent each row into a curve.

Icarus wanted to help, though he was more of a nuisance. He chased feathers that the breeze blew across the room. He poked the wax with his thumb. Daedalus laughed and shooed him out. After many nights, two pairs of wings were ready.

Before sunrise, Daedalus strapped the wings to the boy's shoulders. His fingers shook a little. "Listen to me, Icarus," he said. "Fly in the middle of the sky. Too low, and the sea will soak your feathers. Too high, and the sun's heat will soften the wax. Follow me, and do not show off." Icarus nodded, but he was staring up at the sky.

Daedalus stepped off the window ledge and dropped for a moment. A gust of wind lifted him, and he rose. Icarus leaped after him, and the tower shrank below. Far below, a fisherman stopped mending his nets and stared. He had never seen anything like it in his whole life.

At first, Icarus flew close behind his father. He copied every flap and every glide. But the air was so cool and bright, and the feeling was so wonderful, that soon he forgot the rules. He looped and swooped and dived, and then he began to climb.

Higher and higher he flew. The sea looked like a blue cloth, and the islands were pebbles. "Icarus!" cried Daedalus. "Come down!" But the wind took his voice away, and the sun grew bigger and hotter. Icarus did not feel the warm drops trickling off his wings.

The wax was soft now. A feather slipped loose, then another, then a whole puff of them, drifting away like snow. Icarus flapped hard, but his wings were bare, and the air slid right through them. He began to drop toward the sea, calling for his father.

Daedalus folded his wings and dived. He found Icarus floating among the feathers, wet and frightened but awake. He pulled him up by the arm. But now his own wings were soaked. They were too heavy to fly. The two of them slid into the water, and Daedalus kept his son's face above the waves.

Just when Daedalus was growing tired, a little boat came bumping across the waves. It was rowed by the fisherman, who had seen them fly. He pulled them aboard. They lay in the bottom of the boat, coughing and shivering. "I am sorry," Icarus whispered. "I thought I could touch the sun."

Daedalus hugged him tight. "I once thought I knew everything too," he said. The boatman landed them on a little island. They rested there while their bruises healed. Later the island was named Icaria, and people still call the water around it the Icarian Sea. Daedalus made no more wings. Over his workshop door, he nailed the last few feathers, to help him remember.

Questions

1. Why could Daedalus and Icarus not leave the island?

A. They had no food
B. The king would not let them go
C. The sea was frozen

2. How did Daedalus make the wings?

A. He tied and waxed feathers into rows
B. He cut them from cloth
C. He bought them from a bird

3. What was Daedalus's rule?

A. Fly as high as you can
B. Fly only at night
C. Fly in the middle of the sky

4. Why did Icarus forget the rules?

A. Flying felt so wonderful
B. He could not hear his father
C. He wanted to go home

5. Icarus was restless. What does "restless" mean?

A. Very sleepy
B. Not able to sit still
C. Very happy

6. What does the story show?

A. Rules can keep us safe even when we are having fun
B. Flying is always dangerous
C. Fishermen are brave

Words to know

inventor: a maker
restless: fidgety
nuisance: a pest
soaked: very wet
lifelike: looking real

Answer key: Flying Too High

1. B. The king would not let them go
2. A. He tied and waxed feathers into rows
3. C. Fly in the middle of the sky
4. A. Flying felt so wonderful
5. B. Not able to sit still
6. A. Rules can keep us safe even when we are having fun