



Lesson 16 – Reading Comprehension: Balloon Mail



Picture Caption:

All mail carried in the first air-mail flight had the words “Balloon Jupiter 1858” written on the front.

Balloon Mail

Believe it or not, the first air-mail letter was carried by a hot-air balloon. In 1859, a Lafayette, Indiana postmaster handed a locked bag of 123 letters to John Wise, pilot of the balloon, Jupiter. Wise wanted to set a record for the longest balloon flight while he delivered mail to New York City on August 17th.

Unfortunately, he should have chosen better weather for his flight. Wise ascended in his balloon to find only a small wind and it was blowing southwest not east. After traveling only 30 miles in five hours he admitted defeat and landed. The mail was then placed on a train to New York City, but the US Postal Service still counts his flight as the first air-mail service in the United States.

A few weeks later, using a different balloon, Wise did set the first long distance record of 809 miles, even though he crashed just short of New York City. He carried mail again, but since he lost all the mail in the crash the postal service decided that balloon-mail was not very reliable. Wise gave up the idea of being a flying mailman and flew observation balloons during the Civil War for the Union Army.

(Adapted from an article which appeared in the Smithsonian magazine, July 2006)



Name: _____

Balloon Mail

Comprehension Check

1. Circle the best meaning for **ascending** in this sentence:

Wise ascended in his balloon.

- a) inflated
- b) floated
- c) went up

Word Bank

east west sun
wind flight first

Fill in the Blank

- 2. Hot air balloons are powered by the _____.
- 3. John Wise's first flight failed because he flew _____ instead of _____.
- 4. The postal service counted Wise's August 17th _____ as the _____ airmail service in the United States.

Short Answer

- 5. Why did Wise admit that his first flight was a failure?

- 6. Why didn't the postal service start sending all the mail by hot-air balloons?

- 7. How was mail carried in the 1800's? _____
- 8. Would you have wanted to be John Wise's co-pilot in 1859? Why or Why not?



Answers

Balloon Mail

Comprehension Check

1. Circle the best meaning for **ascending** in this sentence:

Wise ascended in his balloon.

- a. inflated
- b. floated
- c. went up

Word Bank

east west sun
wind flight first

Fill in the Blank

- 2. Hot air balloons are powered by the **WIND**.
- 3. John Wise's first flight failed because he flew **EAST** instead of **WEST**.
- 4. The postal service counted Wise's August 17th **FLIGHT** as the **FIRST** airmail service in the United States.

Short Answer

- 5. Why did Wise admit that his first flight was a failure? **Traveled only 30 miles in 5 hours/wind was blowing wrong way.**
- 6. Why didn't the postal service start sending all the mail by hot-air balloons? **They decided that balloon mail was not very reliable.**
- 7. How was mail carried in the 1800's? **By Train**
- 8. Would you have wanted to be John Wise's co-pilot in 1859? Why or Why not? _____