

5F

Reading

'Why?' 'Because it's there!'

I can understand a text about ballooning.

Revision: Student's Book page 59

- 1 Complete the sentences with an intensifying adverb formed from one of the two words in brackets.
- 1 Reading the book, I was struck by how lethal high-altitude ballooning can be. (compel / force)
 - 2 The Eiger is so difficult to climb because of its steep rock faces. (tantalise / ferocious)
 - 3 We were close to the summit when we had to turn back. (tantalise / force)

- 2 Read the text quickly, ignoring the gaps. What is its main purpose?

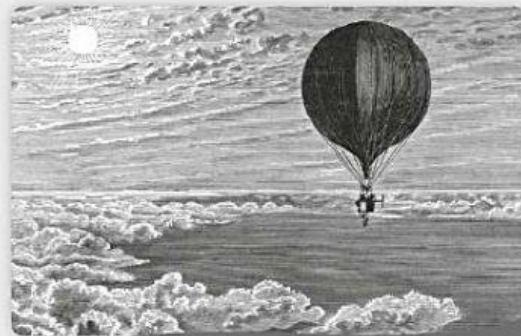
- A To give an introduction to the history of ballooning.
B To review a recent book.
C To explain the events of a ballooning accident.

Reading Strategy

In gapped text tasks, you sometimes have to choose carefully between two paragraphs and decide which is the most logical to fill the particular gap. Look for words and phrases which indicate the logical development of the text, e.g. adverbs of time and reason, words that express contrast, pronouns that point forwards or backwards to nouns, paraphrasing of vocabulary, repetition of names or ideas and the use of verb tenses.

- 3 Read the Reading Strategy. Then read the text and match the missing paragraphs A–E with the gaps 1–4. There is one extra paragraph which you do not need.

- A As the balloon lost air, it descended. Glaisher came round, and calmly started taking readings again. After landing in a field, the two men walked seven miles to the nearest pub – no doubt still feeling the effects of acute hypoxia.
- B They were alarmingly unprepared for the journey, and took off wearing light tweed jackets. Ascending quickly, they took readings and made entries in a log book.
- C It turns out that the history of early ballooning is one of daring, ingenuity and often breathtaking stupidity. As I read the book, I was forcibly struck by how fairly ordinary people had taken extraordinary risks – in the name of science, exploration or plain one-upmanship.
- D The history of scientific exploration is full of unlikely heroes, and also of rogues who wish to profit from the work and reputations of others. Sometimes, the people who achieved the most received scant recognition.
- E By now, they were shivering uncontrollably and gasping for air. Frostbite was setting in on their exposed hands and faces. The men could no longer see well enough to read their instruments. Then Glaisher blacked out.



Falling Upwards

In the weeks before my one-and-only balloon flight in 2017, a friend gave me Richard Holmes's seminal work about the history of ballooning, *Falling Upwards: How we took to the Air*. Holmes's beautifully written account takes readers from the early balloon flights of the 1780s to the first successful round-the-world attempt in 1999.

The book contains a wealth of such extraordinary tales, but my personal favourite is that of scientists Coxwell and Glaisher's near-fatal flight in 1862. The two men proposed to take measurements of temperature, pressure and humidity at different altitudes. They took off on 5 September, intending to reach the upper atmosphere. Even Coxwell – an experienced balloonist – was completely ignorant about the dangers they faced.

After nineteen minutes aloft, the pair had reached an altitude of two miles, and the temperature was dropping fast. At four miles, hypoxia – a lack of oxygen in the blood – was taking its toll. They could hardly function well enough to write in their log. But amazingly, they kept going to their planned altitude of five and a half miles.

Holmes's breathtaking account of what happens next reveals the desperate courage of a man facing death. With Glaisher unconscious, Coxwell perilously climbed out of the basket and up the rigging even though he was about to black out. Unable to use his hands, he pulled himself up by the elbows, opening the gas valve with his teeth.

Like many people in Holmes's inspiring book, Coxwell and Glaisher illustrate the naivety of early aerial pioneers. These men may have stepped out into the unknown blissfully unaware of the risks, but having read the book, I was acutely aware of them when I finally stepped into a basket. I was also comically overdressed!