Name_____

The History of Airships

Airships have been made famous by the Goodyear blimp at sporting events and the famous Hindenburg disaster. These unusual flight machines have quite a history.

In 1783, the Montgolfier brothers made history when they heated the air inside a balloon. The balloon was made of taffeta and was varnished with alum. They sent three animals on an eight-minute, two-mile flight across the royal palace of Versailles. This was the first flight to ever carry living creatures. Rewarded for their efforts, the brothers were recognized as nobility. To this day, standard hot-air balloons carry their name.

At the same time, others were experimenting with balloon flight. Some men in Paris used hydrogen instead of hot air for a two-hour manned flight. With the success of this and other flights, hydrogen gas became the preferred gas in airships until helium was produced on a larger scale after World War I. Steering was an ongoing problem that plagued airships. It became evident that a change in shape would be necessary to solve the dilemma. The machines also needed forward propulsion. Engines proved heavy and cumbersome. In 1884, electricity was used to power the floating balloons, but they still hadn't solved the problem of reliable steering.

Count Zeppelin observed war maneuvers in balloons during the Civil War and the Siege of Paris. He petitioned for a commission to develop steering for airships. His first airship, Luftschiff Zeppelin 1, flew in 1900. This marked the beginning of the golden age of airships.

Airships weren't golden for long. In the next 40 years, there were over 45 accidents involving airships. Over ten people died. Some airships simply exploded in midair, and others drifted and hit objects. At least one accident was due to a lightning strike that ignited the hydrogen into a massive eruption.

Airships are now primarily used for advertising, sightseeing, surveillance, and research purposes.

Text Questions

1. Which gas was used before helium to lift airships?
   a. oxygen
   b. hydrogen
   c. nitrogen
   d. carbon dioxide

2. Which is a synonym for the word *dilemma* as it is used in the third paragraph?
   a. argument
   b. difficulty
   c. danger
   d. problem

3. What was one obstacle that needed to be overcome in airship technology for them to become truly successful?
   a. lift
   b. construction materials
   c. fuel
   d. steering

4. Which of the following is <u>not</u> a common use of airships today?
   a. passenger transport
   b. surveillance
   c. research
   d. advertising

5. In your opinion, how does the development of airship technology contribute to society as a whole?

_____

_____

 ©Teacher Created Resources

LIVEWORKSHEETS