

Approach: Station  
 Focus: Comprehension  
 Resources: None

Year: 4 &amp; 8

## Questions / instructions:

This story has three parts. Read Part 1 and answer the questions for that part. Then read Part 2 and answer its questions. Then do the same for the third part. Do as much as you can.

## Part 1

In the outback, you often have to use planes to get to places. This is because it takes far too long to go by car. Also the roads are dirt and very bumpy. Being in a car on these roads is not much fun at all, even for a short trip. But the planes that you fly in are very small and often there can be problems.

Some years ago, I was asked to visit a school, way out in the desert. As it was close to holiday time, my son Michael wanted to come too. If we were to drive, it would take about eleven hours. There would be little to see but sand dunes. Eleven hours of looking at nothing but sand dunes sounded very boring. So the school thought they would send us by plane. No one else would be on the plane, just us. We would go out on Monday and fly back on Thursday. Even in a plane, the trip was going to take about four hours each way.

So early on Monday morning, we turned up at the airport. We could see our little plane but it didn't seem to be ready for us. Two men were working very hard on something inside it. One of the men saw us and came over to where we were standing.

"Sorry, but we've got problems with the radio. Can you sit and wait? It shouldn't take more than half an hour to fix," he said.

So we sat in the sunshine and waited. When it was fixed, the pilot came over to meet us. "My name is Ian. I'm sorry for the delay but we can get underway now."

Michael and I stored our things in the back of the plane and strapped ourselves in. The pilot climbed in but his door wouldn't shut properly. "We'll just go round to the hangar and get the mechanic to fix it."

My son and I looked at each other. We hadn't even taken off and the trip wasn't going well. "When was this plane last serviced?" I asked.

"Last week, it had a full check-up. After every hundred hours of flying, a plane has to be carefully checked. They should have fixed everything then. I don't know why we seem to be having these little problems this morning. But this is a very safe plane, so don't worry."

Answer these questions on Part 1.

Circle the letter alongside the best answer.

1. Why do people prefer to fly around the outback?

- a. Flying by air is cheap.
- b. It takes too long to drive.
- c. The view looks great from the air.
- d. There were no roads to drive on.

% responses  
y4 y8

b 76 94

2. What was the country like?

- a. There were lots of sand dunes.
- b. It was mostly farming country.
- c. It was hot and flat.
- d. It was dirty and bumpy.

a 54 69

3. How long did Michael and his mother plan to stay in the town?

- a. 4 hours
- b. 3 days
- c. 1 week
- d. 11 days

b 47 79

4. Why were Michael and his mother worried?

- a. The radio didn't work.
- b. They were late taking off.
- c. The plane had lots of problems.
- d. They had never flown before.

c 50 76

5. Why did the pilot apologise?

- a. He did not service the plane.
- b. He couldn't shut Michael's door.
- c. There were no other passengers.
- d. They were late taking off.

d 41 73

6. Would you have wanted to go on this plane? Why? (Write an answer in your own words.)

*good justification  
 (yes – regular checkups and care to fix faults)  
 (no – plane seems jinxed because of all the faults)*

29 53

Part 2

We continued to look at each other worriedly, but there was nothing we could do. We had to visit the school and there was really no alternative but to fly there. When the door was repaired, we taxied down the runway and took off without any further trouble. Maybe the rest of our flight would be uneventful?

When you fly in a small plane, you fly at a low altitude and you never have to share your window with anyone else. Usually this means you get beautiful views. But flying over sand dunes is like driving through them. They are all very similar and the view soon becomes repetitive. Having been awake since very early that morning, we were soon enticed into sleep.

What we weren't aware of as we slumbered was that there had been another malfunction of equipment. These days when you fly, the pilot has a global positioning receiver (GPS) for determining where he or she is at any time. It works by sending a signal to four satellites circling the earth. Information from each satellite is sent back to the receiver. It then converts

this into accurate estimates of the plane's longitude, latitude and altitude. Unfortunately for us, our pilot had forgotten to put new batteries into his GPS, so it stopped working about an hour into the trip. Now, the plane does provide data on the altitude, but without the GPS the pilot had to do some complicated calculations and use an accurate map to determine where we were. Ian had to do this so that we kept to the correct course. The town that we were going to was very small with an estimated population of less than a hundred people, surrounded only by sand dunes. If our pilot was unable to accurately compute our velocity and direction then it was unlikely that we would ever spot it from the sky. On such a long trip there was a shortage of fuel if we had to spend too much time searching for the town.

Completely oblivious to Ian's dilemma, Michael and I slept on until we were awoken by the plane wheeling in a symmetrical arc over the township. In the outback, planes circle the community so that they know that it has arrived.

		% responses				% responses	
		y4	y8			y4	y8
Answer these questions on Part 2.							
Circle the letter alongside the best answer.							
7.	What was Ian's dilemma?						
	a. He was getting low on fuel.						
	b. He was very sleepy.						
	c. He didn't have a good map.						
	<input checked="" type="radio"/> d. He couldn't work out his position.	d	19 41				
8.	Why didn't the GPS work?						
	a. It was broken.						
	<input checked="" type="radio"/> b. Its batteries were flat.	b	55 86				
	c. The plane was too small.						
	d. The satellites stopped working.						
9.	Why were Michael and his mother not aware of the pilot's big problem?						
	a. He could not talk to them in the air.						
	b. They could tell they were on the right track.						
	c. They didn't know the town was so small.						
	<input checked="" type="radio"/> d. They were sound asleep.	d	54 80				
10.	What information could the pilot get readily, without the GPS?						
	a. How far they were from the equator.						
	b. How far they were from the International Date Line.						
	<input checked="" type="radio"/> c. How high they were above sea level.	c	15 34				
	d. How far they were from their destination.						
11.	Why did they circle the town?						
	<input checked="" type="radio"/> a. To let the people know they had arrived.	a	39 71				
	b. To make sure it was the right place.						
	c. To give the passengers a view of the place.						
	d. To give the ground crew time to get organised.						
12.	Why was finding the town so difficult? (Write an answer in your own words.)						
	a. GPS not functioning						
	b. town small and hard to spot from sky						
				included both	1	7	
				included one of above	32	60	

**Part 3**

Ian’s calculations had been absolutely perfect. However, later when we learnt about the GPS problem, we felt that maybe it had been his overwhelming relief in locating the town which had precipitated the worst adventure in our journey.

Once we knew that we had been recognised and a vehicle dispatched to greet us, Ian directed the plane towards the airstrip. The vehicle contained not only a teacher but also some of the students. The teacher related to us afterwards, that as they drove they had discussed how late the pilot was leaving the lowering of the undercarriage. With a sense of dread and bewilderment, they then realised that they would be meeting a plane crash as the release of the landing gear was never instigated. At this point, the teacher bitterly regretted her decision to bring the children.

Inside the plane, we knew nothing until we actually hit the airstrip. Then there was an almighty screeching noise with a bevy of stones splattering the windshield. We halted amazingly quickly. Ian screamed “Get out, get out!” We tore off our seat belts and threw ourselves out of the plane. Ian dragged us away from the plane explaining in breathless sobs that the friction from scraping the belly of the plane on the ground could cause the petrol tank to explode. Fortunately it didn’t but the plane was in an awful state, with a tangled mess for a propeller, and the bottom badly dented and scratched. It was miraculous that we had survived at all. If the plane had veered into the ditches on either side of the strip, we wouldn’t have been around to tell the tale. Needless to say, neither Michael nor I felt like ever boarding a plane again. Yet in three days we had too, but that was another story.

	% responses			% responses	
	y4	y8		y4	y8
Answer these questions on Part 3. Circle the letter alongside the best answer.					
13. How did Ian locate the town?					
a. He made calculations from the GPS receiver.					
b. He worked it out from the altitude.					
c. He used his radio to get help.					
d. He used his map and calculations.	d	28 64			
14. What might have led to the final adventure?					
a. Ian was relieved at finding the town.	a	31 28			
b. The undercarriage was malfunctioning.					
c. Michael and his mother woke up.					
d. The pilot was distracted by the vehicle.					
15. What were people in the vehicle talking about as the plane approached?					
a. Whether the students should have come.					
b. What they would do with the visitors.					
c. How late the plane was.					
d. Why the wheels were not lowered.	d	19 25			
16. What caused the “almighty screeching”?					
a. They slid along the stony ground.	a	33 64			
b. The petrol tank exploded.					
c. The pilot became hysterical.					
d. The vehicle careered across the landing strip.					
17. Why did the pilot scream at Michael and his mother?					
a. He was angry with them.					
b. He had to scream to be heard.					
c. He thought that there could be an explosion.			c	40	74
d. He was upset about what had happened.					
18. Why did Michael and his mother feel so hesitant about boarding another aeroplane? (Write an answer in your own words.)					
a. equipment problems					
b. pilot error					
			included both of above	0	1
			included one of above (or scared to go on another plane)	29	62
			<b>Total score:</b>		
			16–20	0	9
			12–15	13	48
			8–11	32	28
			4–7	36	13
			0–3	19	2

**Commentary:**

Thirteen percent of year 4 students and 57 percent of year 8 students had a total score of 12 or more. Year 8 students performed substantially better than year 4 students on all except two questions – questions 14 and 15.