

Name: _____

Bird Brains at Work

By Anita N. Amin

Next time you see a pigeon flying across the sky, look at it carefully! Is it holding a can? Or a camera? Or wearing a backpack? If it's a carrier pigeon, it just might be a working bird.

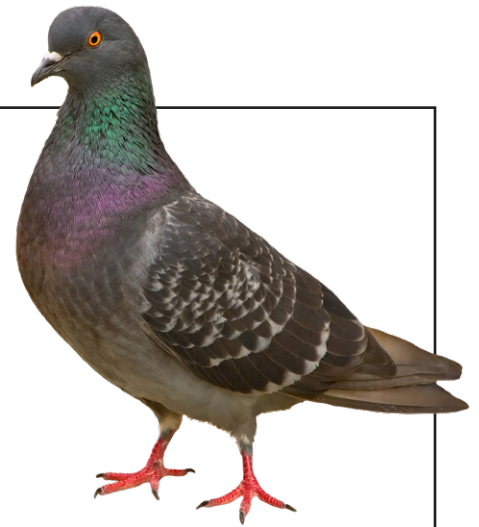
You've probably heard of working dogs that help police officers, or horses that help farmers. Did you know that carrier pigeons can be trained to help people too? What kind of jobs do these birds perform?

Mailman

Carrier pigeons can be trained to carry messages to people. The note is placed into a small skinny can. The can is tied to the pigeon's leg. Then the pigeon flies off to deliver the note.



This carrier pigeon has a small can attached to its leg, carrying a message.



Carrier pigeons are good messengers because they're fast and can fly long distances. They also have a good sense of direction. They can even reach places that people can't.

More than 800 years ago, Genghis Khan, an Asian ruler, set up pigeon post offices across his lands! As recently as 2010, Cuba used pigeons to send election results to its mountain people.

Lifeguard

From high up in the sky, specially trained pigeons can spot orange life jackets in the ocean. Sometimes it is difficult for humans to spot people lost at sea, especially when the weather is bad. However, pigeons can fly quickly over a large area of water in search of people.

Spy

Many years ago, carrier pigeons were used to help our country during wars. "Spy pigeons" had small cameras that were tied to them. As a pigeon flew over enemy land, the camera snapped photos of the land below. This would allow our military to see where the enemies were and what they were doing.

The pigeons have probably saved many soldiers' lives. These "spy" birds had a dangerous job. They had to dodge bullets, poisonous gas, and bullies like hawks.

During World Wars 1 and 2, the USA and its allies even had huge pigeon armies. Thousands of pigeons served! They were like flying soldiers. A few even received medals for their brave work.

Scientist's Helper

In 2006, a group of scientists used pigeons to study air pollution in California. Special backpacks with miniature cellphones were strapped onto pigeons. As the pigeons flew, machines in the backpacks tested to see what gases were in the air. The cell phones sent information about the air to the scientists.



Pigeons were often used in war, by wearing cameras to spy on enemies.

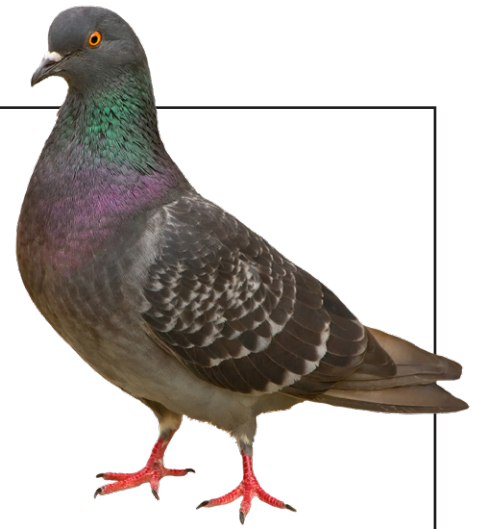
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So next time you see a pigeon, stop and watch it closely. What might look like an ordinary bird to most people, might actually be a hard-working mail carrier, a scientist, a lifeguard, or even a spy!

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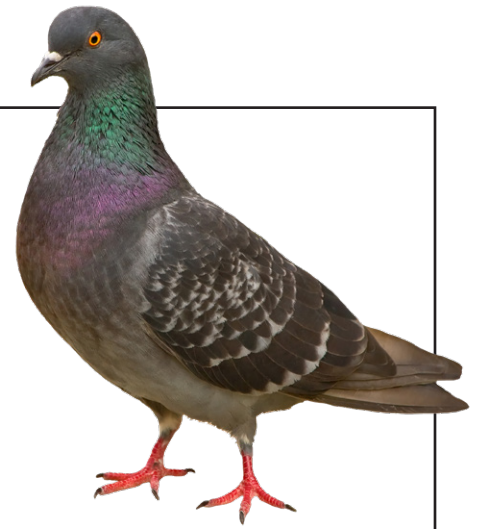
1. What did Genghis Kahn use pigeons for 800 years ago?
 - a. He used pigeons to deliver election results.
 - b. He used pigeons to find people lost at sea.
 - c. He used pigeons to carry messages.
 - d. He kept pigeons as pets.
2. What was the author's purpose for writing this article?
 - a. to share fictional stories about pigeons helping people
 - b. to teach readers about the lives of wild pigeons
 - c. to persuade readers into liking pigeons more
 - d. to teach readers about real jobs held by carrier pigeons
3. Explain how pigeons have helped our military during wartimes.

4. Do you think our country's military still uses carrier pigeons? Why or why not?

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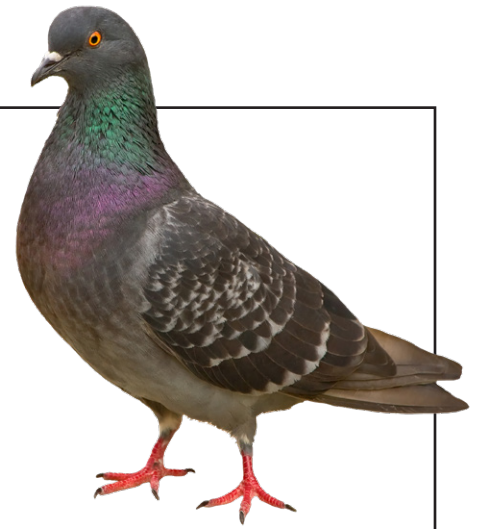
Match each vocabulary word on the left with its definition on the right.

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| 1. _____ life jacket | a. person who rescues people who are in danger of drowning |
| 2. _____ military | b. wearable device that helps a person float in water |
| 3. _____ election | c. small discs given as awards |
| 4. _____ poisonous | d. process in which citizens vote for a government official |
| 5. _____ lifeguard | e. armed forces |
| 6. _____ medals | f. machine for taking photos |
| 7. _____ camera | g. something that causes illness or death |

ANSWER KEY

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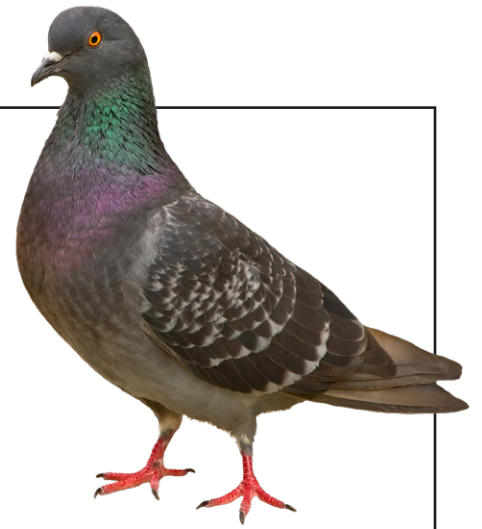
3. Explain how pigeons have helped our military during wartimes.

Cameras would be strapped to them and the pigeons would fly over enemy territory. The camera would automatically snap pictures so our military could see the enemy.

4. Do you think our country's military still uses carrier pigeons? Why or why not?

No, they probably do not use pigeons today because we have satellite technology and unmanned drone spy planes.

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1. **b.** life jacket
 2. **e.** military
 3. **d.** election
 4. **g.** poisonous
 5. **a.** lifeguard
 6. **c.** medals
 7. **f.** camera
- a. person who rescues people who are in danger of drowning
 - b. wearable device that helps a person float in water
 - c. small discs given as awards
 - d. process in which citizens vote for a government official
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 - f. machine for taking photos
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