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.

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.

**Spy**

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

The pigeons have probably saved many soldiers’ lives. They might even save your life in the future! The idea to use pigeons in wars was first thought of in 1837.

**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.

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.

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!
Bird Brains at Work
by Anita N. Amin

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 during wartime? Why or why not?
   ____________________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________________
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
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 to taking photos
7. camera g. something that causes illness or death
1. What did Genghis Kahn use pigeons for 800 years ago?  
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   c. **He used pigeons to carry messages.**  
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3. Please log in or register to download the printable version of this worksheet.

4. Do you think our country's military still uses carrier pigeons during wartime? Why or why not?  
   **No, they probably do not use pigeons today because we have satellite technology and unmanned drone spy planes.**
Match each vocabulary word on the left with its definition on the right.

b 1. life jacket  a. person who rescues people who are in danger of drowning

e 2. military  b. wearable device that helps a

g 4. poisonous  d. process in which citizens vote for a government official

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