

HOT-AIR BALLOON RACE

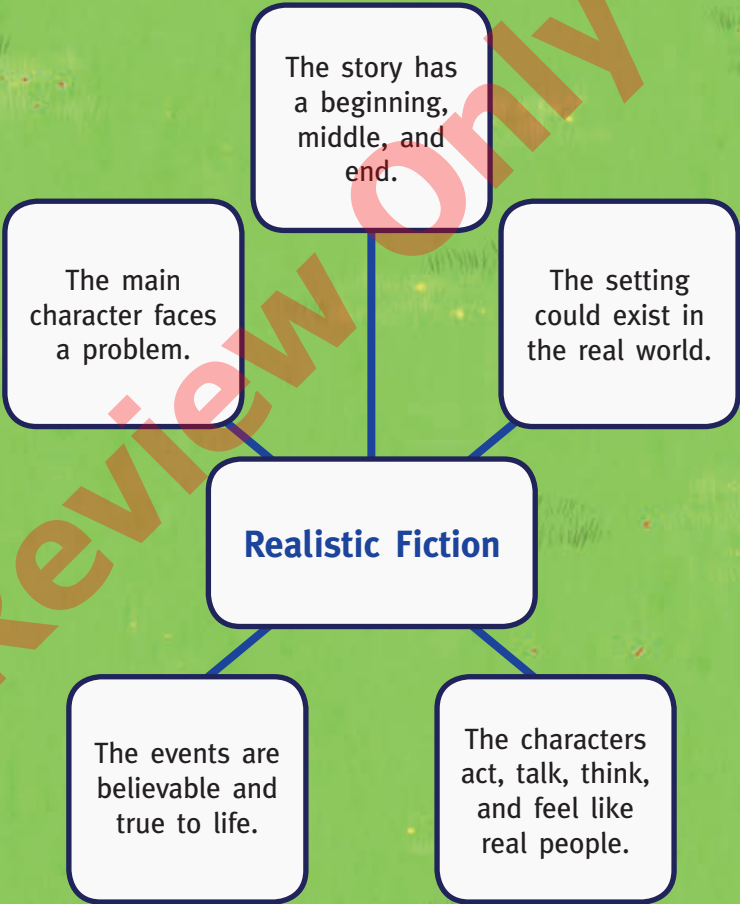


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Race-Time Jitters

The sun was just starting to rise. Kai felt butterflies in her stomach. It was the morning of the Eyes to the Sky Balloon Festival ... and the big race.

“It’s a beautiful day to fly a balloon!” said her dad. They were standing next to their 55-foot-wide bright blue hot-air balloon.

Kai and her dad had flown a hot-air balloon together many times. He had started teaching her when she was 4 years old. Kai’s father ran a hot-air balloon business with his friend Mr. B.

“You say that every time we fly, Dad,” responded Kai with a smile.

Kai and her dad had never been in a hot-air balloon competition. Kai wasn’t quite sure what to expect, but she was ready.

Kai checked her backpack once more and made sure she had everything ready for the flight. Kai even packed her good luck charm, a cat key chain. The cat looked like her cat, Cookie.



As her dad prepared the balloon, Kai glanced around to check out the competition. There were two other balloon teams in the race. She noticed that she was the youngest team member.

Kai figured it was time to go through her preflight checklist, so she grabbed her clipboard. First, she took out her wind monitor and measured the wind speed.

“Wind speed is 4 miles per hour,” she said.

“Wind direction?” asked her dad.

Kai held up her wind monitor again. “North-northwest,” she replied.

“We’ll need to follow the wind patterns closely today,” said her dad.



The sound of a megaphone filled the quiet morning air. “Attention, everyone” echoed from the megaphone. The man speaking was standing in the back of a pickup truck.

“A reminder of the rules,” he said. “Three teams will depart from here. Each team will fly four miles north to the festival site. There is a giant X in a field—you can’t miss it,” he said with a chuckle. “Whichever team tosses its beanbag closest to the center of the X wins!”



Kai listened closely and grew more nervous. At least their third teammate, Mr. B, was at the festival. He would help guide them and report any changes in weather. Kai grabbed the walkie-talkie to check in with him.

“Mr. B, Mr. B ... it’s Kai. Come in, Mr. B,” Kai shouted into the radio.

“Roger, Kai. It’s Mr. B,” he replied.

“We are clear to launch the balloons. The wind is calm and there’s no fog,” Kai reported. “What’s the weather like there?”



“It’s raining lightly,” Mr. B’s voice crackled through the radio. “But no chance of a thunderstorm.”

Kai was disappointed about the rain, but she knew there wasn’t anything she could do about the weather.

“And the wind?” asked Kai.

“Light gusts of wind. But it should be calmer in the air,” added Mr. B.





“C’mon, Kai, we need to get ready. The race is about to start,” Kai’s dad yelled.

A small crowd of people gathered to watch the balloons launch.

Kai took a deep breath and climbed into the basket of the hot-air balloon. The crowd started clapping. Everyone was eager to see the giant, colorful balloons take off.