Birds Can Fly, Why Can’t I?

Before the Wright brothers, Wilbur and Orville, invented the airplane, people tried everything they could think of to fly like birds. Who was the first to fly? There are many stories. Who knows? Maybe some of them are true…

1500 BCE

According to legend, King Kai Kawus of Persia flew on a golden throne carried by four eagles. The king tied bits of meat to poles attached to the throne. As the hungry eagles tried to fly up to the food, they carried the throne up with them.

1500 CE

Leonardo da Vinci wasn’t just a painter and sculptor; he also invented flying machines. He designed a helicopter based on the spinning propeller principle. He also sketched parachutes and, our favourite, ornithopters with flapping wings.
1783
The Montgolfier brothers invented the hot-air balloon in France. Before thousands of onlookers, the brothers launched a balloon carrying the world’s first air passengers—a sheep, a rooster and a duck.

1896
More isn’t necessarily better—at least when it comes to wings. Octave Chanute’s Katydid, a glider with six pairs of wings, flew only about 30 metres. But one of his double-decker biplane gliders stayed in the air for 14 seconds and flew a record 109 metres.

1903
Samuel Langley, a well-known scientist, successfully flew a powered aircraft in 1896. But his flyer was only a 13.6 kilogram model. Langley later built a passenger-carrying version that was ready in 1903. The plane was catapulted from a boat twice, but dove straight into the icy water. There was no third attempt. Just nine days later, on December 17, 1903, the Wright brothers flew.

1. What is the purpose of the dates in the text?
   a. to tell where flight was first invented
   b. to describe the different flying inventions
   c. to provide background information about the inventors
   d. to show the progress in the invention of flight technology

2. When did Wilbur and Orville Wright invent the airplane?
   a. 1783
   b. 1896
   c. 1903
   d. 1930

3. How was Octave Chanute’s double-decker biplane an improvement over the *Katydid*?
   a. It could fly faster.
   b. It could fly farther.
   c. It could carry more people on board.
   d. It could stay in the air at a greater height.

4. What does the word “catapulted” mean as used in the text under “1903”?
   a. slid
   b. flown
   c. carried
   d. propelled
5 Explain how the last two sentences of the first paragraph (“Who knows? Maybe some of them are true…”) relate to the information in the text boxes. Use information from the text to support your answer.

6 Identify one characteristic that the inventors had in common and explain how it contributed to the development of flying machines. Use information from the text to support your answer.