Who is D.B. Cooper?

Before Reading

- Look at the drawings above. Who do you think this man is?
- Do you think the pictures look alike?
- How does the man on the left look different from the one on the right?
- Have you ever heard of an airplane hijacking? What is it?
Portland, Oregon USA

On November 24, 1971, a well dressed man carrying a black briefcase walked into Portland International Airport and bought a one-way ticket to Seattle Washington. He told airline workers that his name was Dan Cooper. When reporters would later write about Mr. Cooper, they mistakenly called him "D.B. Cooper", a name that would become infamous in American history.

The weather was cold and stormy as D.B. Cooper boarded the airplane, sat down in his seat and waited for the short 30 minute flight to begin. It was the night before Thanksgiving, and many of the passengers on the plane were flying to Seattle to be with their families.

After the plane took off, Mr. Cooper ordered something to drink, and then passed a note to one of the flight attendants on the plane. The flight attendant quickly opened the note. It read, in capital letters:

"I HAVE A BOMB IN MY BRIEFCASE. I WILL USE IT IF NECESSARY. I WANT YOU TO SIT NEXT TO ME. YOU ARE BEING HIJACKED.

Mr. Cooper showed the flight attendant a device that looked like a bomb and gave a message for her to give the plane's pilot. He wanted $200,000 in cash and four parachutes. In return for the money and parachutes, Cooper would release all of the passengers when the plane landed in Seattle.

The pilot relayed D.B. Cooper's demands to air traffic controllers in Seattle, who then immediately called the FBI. The airline, the FBI and Seattle police wanted to keep the passengers safe, so they quickly collected the money and parachutes and brought them to the airport.

When the plane landed, the FBI exchanged the money and parachutes for all 36 passengers and one of the two flight attendants. Mr. Cooper had also
asked for a fuel truck to be brought to the plane. The FBI brought the fuel truck as well, and soon the plane was refueled and ready again for takeoff.

Now there were only four people on the plane: D.B. Cooper, the pilot, one co-pilot and one flight attendant. Cooper had new instructions for the pilot. He wanted to fly to Mexico. He wanted the pilot to fly as slowly as possible and keep the plane's altitude under 10,000 feet (about 3,000 meters).

The hijacked plane carrying D.B. Cooper was a Boeing 727. The 727 is unlike many other commercial jets because it has stairs that drop down in the rear of the plane.
The rear stairs on a Boeing 727

Before the plane took off again, Mr. Cooper ordered all of the crew into the cockpit and told them to keep the door closed, so they could not see what he was doing in the back of the plane. About 20 minutes after the plane took off toward Mexico, the pilot saw a warning light showing that the rear stairs had been opened. Two hours later, the plane was running low on fuel and the pilot decided to land in Reno, Nevada. The stairs on the plane were down when it landed, and when FBI agents stormed the plane, they saw that D.B. Cooper and all of the money were gone!

The FBI believes that D.B. Cooper jumped from the plane soon after lowering the rear stairs. At that time, the plane was flying close to the border between Washington state and Oregon. The FBI and police began looking for Mr. Cooper. "Dan Cooper" had probably used a fake name though, and no one knew who he really was, so sketches of D.B. Cooper were made from eyewitnesses who had seen him in the airport and on the plane.
So, who is D.B. Cooper? The truth is that no one knows. It has been more than 40 years since he escaped with $200,000, and the FBI continues to look for him. The FBI says that he could have died when he jumped from the plane, but no one has ever found a body. If D.B. Cooper were alive now he would probably be over 80 years old.

The drama and excitement of the D.B. Cooper case has made it world famous. Several books have been written about the hijacking, and a movie was made about it as well. Fifteen copycat hijackings also took place in the year following D.B. Cooper’s escape, but unlike Mr. Cooper, all of the other hijackers were quickly captured.

There have been over 1,000 suspects in the D.B. Cooper case over the years, and several men have even tried to admit to being D.B. Cooper! In 1980, a boy found $5,800 of the stolen money while playing near a river in southern Washington. The FBI searched the area near the money but found nothing else. It seems that the truth about what happened to D.B. Cooper and all of that money may never be known.
Vocabulary
Complete the sentences with the vocabulary words below.

suspect  copycat  well dressed  infamous
mistakenly  eyewitness  storm  commercial jet  co-pilot
relay  exchange  airline  device  hijack
board  Thanksgiving  in return for

1. The people need to ____________ the plane before it can take off.

2. The ____________ in the robbery was caught yesterday.

3. ________________es are much bigger and slower than fighter planes.

4. "______________" has the same meaning as "in ____________for".

5. The airplane was ____________ed by terrorists!

6. ______________ crimes try to repeat the success of another crime.

7. Several runners run together as a team in a ____________ race.

8. The ________________ said that the robber was tall and had dark hair.

9. Most men and women are ________________ when they go to church.

10. Some low cost ________________s make travelers pay for food now.

11. Osama Bin Laden was the most ________________ terrorist in the world.

13. A cell phone is an example of a mobile ________________.
14. _______________________ is a popular holiday in the U.S. and Canada.

15. The _____________ can do a good job flying the plane, but usually has less experience than the pilot.

16. The FBI ________________ ________________ed the wrong plane!

$5,800 of the stolen money was found in 1980

Short Answers
Try to answer each question in a full sentence.

1. Why do you think some people have "admitted" to being D.B. Cooper?

____________________________________________________________________________

2. Why did D.B. Cooper choose to hijack a Boeing 727?

____________________________________________________________________________

3. Why did the FBI agree to give D.B. Cooper what he wanted?

____________________________________________________________________________

4. Why did D.B. Cooper want the plane to fly as low and as slowly as possible?

____________________________________________________________________________

5. Why did D.B. Cooper tell the flight crew to stay in the cockpit?

____________________________________________________________________________
Discussion
1. In the story it says that fifteen “copycat” hijackings occurred the year after the D.B. Cooper hijacking. Why do you think so many of these “copycat” hijackings happened?

2. D.B. Cooper was able to use both a fake name and bring what was possibly a real bomb onto a plane. How do you think this was possible. Would someone be able to repeat this crime now? Why or why not?

3. D.B. Cooper became a kind of hero in many people's opinion after he disappeared in 1971. Why do you think this happened?

Writing
Pick one of the following to write about for homework.

1. Imagine that you are D.B. Cooper and you hijacked an airplane. Would you have done anything differently from what he did? Explain and try to give as many details as you can.

2. Write a summary of the D.B. Cooper story. Try to include the important points and leave out any information that you think is unnecessary.