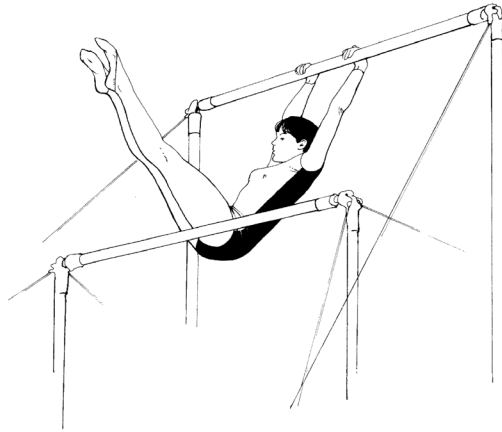


Directions: Read the story and answer the questions that follow.

## **Fear of Flying**

*by Jessica Wade*



- 1 No matter how much chalk I applied to dry them, my palms felt too sweaty to grip the bars. "It's okay, Shoshanna," my coach reassured me. But as I stared up at the uneven bars, I knew it wasn't okay. In order to compete in the county gymnastics competition in two months, I needed to start flying on those bars.
- 2 But I was too scared.
- 3 I've been doing gymnastics seriously for three years. My event, my one event, is the floor exercise. It mixes gymnastics, dancing, and acrobatics on a springy floor that helps you bounce. I can do back handsprings, back tucks, and all kinds of flips and cartwheels.
- 4 But competitive gymnasts have to be good at more than one event, so I had to master another. My choices were the vault, the balance beam, or the uneven bars. All of them meant getting off the floor and up into the air.
- 5 My coach, Ms. Lombardo, recommended the uneven bars: two wooden bars, one lower, and one higher. A gymnast swings and flips around them during a routine. You have to move hard and fast to whip from one bar to the other, or to swing into a handstand on the top bar. If you're thinking, "That sounds scary," you're completely right.
- 6 It takes a lot of strength to mount the lower bar, but I'm pretty strong. It's jumping from one bar to the other that gives me the jitters. "What if I bang my head or fall?" I demanded.
- 7 "You won't!" Ms. Lombardo sighed. "Actually, you might, but you can't let that stop you. You need to have enough confidence to commit yourself to jumping or swinging. Hesitating or holding back makes you fail."



- 8 I tried to look confident, but it wasn't very convincing, so Ms. Lombardo gave me another piece of advice. "Picture yourself moving fluidly from one bar to the other, exactly the way you think it should happen."
- 9 So I imagined myself flying from one bar to the other. Everywhere I went, it ran in my head like a movie—at breakfast, during practice, before bed, and even in my dreams. I kept adding more and more details to the scene, too. I felt the chalkiness of my hands, the freedom of letting go, hurtling through space, and then the solid *thwack* of the bar into my palms.
- 10 It didn't work, not at first. I still felt fear wash over me like a sudden summer storm whenever I prepared to leap. But as I practiced it over and over and over in my head, it started feeling more natural. Before beginning each routine, I reminded myself, "You can do it!" And when I jumped, I could picture my fingers closing around the bar a few heartbeats later.
- 11 At the competition, as I was sailing through the air, I wasn't thinking, "Arghhhhhh!" Instead, I just thought, "You can do it!" As my fingers closed around the bar, I realized that I didn't even need the reminder, because I already believed it. I knew that I could do it, and there was no more fear to fight away.

**47 In the story, the author uses the character of Ms. Lombardo to —**

- A present another point of view about Shoshanna's personality
- B entertain the reader with stories about gymnastics
- C start Shoshanna's problem and suggest a way to resolve it
- D provide technical information about the uneven bars

**48 Readers can conclude that Shoshanna is more worried about the uneven bars than the floor exercises because —**

- F Ms. Lombardo expects her to succeed in her first competition
- G on the floor she can't be hurt by falling or hitting something
- H she is not strong enough to hold on to the bars
- J she will be competing against much more experienced gymnasts

**49 Which word in this story has a root word that means "struggle against"?**

- A competitive
- B reassured
- C hesitating
- D convincing

**50 Which phrase from the story expresses a theme of this selection?**

- F "I tried to look confident, but it wasn't very convincing. . ."
- G ". . .recommended the uneven bars. . ."
- H "It didn't work, not at first."
- J "You need to have enough confidence to commit yourself. . ."

**51 Why is imagining a successful jump important to the story?**

- A It takes the place of practice on the real uneven bars.
- B It gives Shoshanna enough faith to jump without holding back.
- C Shoshanna needs a lot of imagination to succeed as a gymnast.
- D It takes Shoshanna's mind off what she is doing.

**52 Which is the *best* summary of this story?**

- F Shoshanna is forced to try the uneven bars in order to become a more confident gymnast.
- G Shoshanna's coach gives her the advice she needs to master a difficult event.
- H If you picture your goal in your mind over and over, eventually success will become natural to you.
- J A gymnast faces her fears about a new event and gains the confidence she needs to succeed.

**53 Shoshanna must master the uneven bars because —**

- A competitive gymnasts must be good at more than one event
- B the county gymnastics competition is only two months away
- C hesitating or holding back makes you fail
- D all of her event choices call for getting up into the air

**54 In paragraph 9, the author mentions the feeling of "chalkiness" of her hands to help the reader imagine —**

- F how they are shaking
- G how tightly she is holding the bar
- H how dusty and sticky they are
- J how easily her fingers may break



**55 Which phrase is a simile expressed in the passage?**

- A “. . .too sweaty to grip the bars.”
- B “. . .jumping from one bar to the other that gives me the jitters.”
- C “But as I practiced it over and over and over in my head. . .”
- D “. . .fear wash over me like a sudden summer storm. . .”

