Parachute Encyclopedia Article

Parachute

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.

Contents

Parachute Encyclopedia Article.....1

Contents.....2

Parachute.....3

Parachute

The earliest known parachute design is that of Leonardo da Vinci, who in 1485 devised what he called a "tent roof." It had rigid frame at the base on the assumption it wouldn't stay open otherwise. The canopy, over twenty feet wide, was to be made of linen.

The first jumps, however, were not made until the eighteenth century. The French physicist Louis-Sébastien Lenormand (1757-1839), used two parasols to jump from a tree in 1783. André-Jacques Garnerin (1769-1832) made the first jump from an aerial machine on October 22, 1797, when he descended from a balloon at an altitude of about 3,200 feet (976 m). He went on to make many more exhibition jumps including one from 8,000 feet (2440 m) over England in 1802.

During the nineteenth century, parachutes were only used by entertainers to thrill crowds that had grown used to balloon flights. With the invention of aircraft in the twentieth century, parachute use increased dramatically, particularly among the military. Capt. Albert Berry of the United States Army made the first successful parachute jump from an airplane in 1912. However, during most of World War I, the only personnel given parachutes were observers in balloons. Parachutes were considered impractical for pilots and were disdained by those who thought the life-saving device contradicted the fighter pilot's daredevil image.

With the advent of World War II, parachutes became an integral part of military strategy, particularly for German forces who used them for landing troops, supplying ground corps, and saving fliers who ejected from their aircraft. Since the war, parachutes have been used to recover capsules from space, slow down jet planes, and to drop food and medicine in rough terrain.

Parachute design and materials have gone through many changes. Originally made from canvas, they were later fashioned from silk. Today, they are made from nylon because it is much stronger and cheaper. The canopy is made out of many smaller panels, each of which has even smaller sections sewn in various directions for added strength. Parafoils have changed the old picture of parachutists helpless in determining where to land. Now they can use the combination parachute/sail to glide to their intended landing site. These parafoils are often prominently in the public eye, sometimes used by the military by demonstration maneuvers, or for dramatic (and not always completely successful) entrances into stadiums at major sporting events.