The Penny-farthing Bicycle

*Reading comprehension exercise - includes vocabulary building.*

The Penny-Farthing bicycle was named after the old British penny and farthing coins, one much larger than the other, so that the side view resembles a penny leading a farthing.

Mounting requires skill. One foot is placed on a peg above the back wheel. The rider grasps the handlebar and lifts himself/herself onto the seat.

In the old days unpaved roads were more common than smooth roads. The large wheel of the Penny-farthing rolled more easily over cobbles and stones making a more comfortable ride than if the front wheel were smaller.

Although easy to ride slowly the Penny-farthing was prone to accidents. Any sudden stop or collision with a pothole or rock could send the rider over the handlebars, head-first (“coming a cropper”). On long down-hills, some riders hooked their feet over the handlebars. Though this ensured good speed it gave no chance of stopping.
With their iron frames Penny-farthing bicycles were very heavy but they rarely broke down. For example, when Thomas Stevens rode around the world in the 1880s, he reported no mechanical problems in his 20 000 km journey.

In 1888 John Dunlop used air-filled tyres for his son’s tricycle. The idea caught on and Penny-farthings were made obsolete.

Today, enthusiasts ride restored Penny-farthings, and a few manufacturers build new ones.

**Talk about or Write about**

1. What does the word *resembles* (1st paragraph) mean?
2. In what ways is mounting a Penny-farthing bicycle similar to, and different from, mounting a horse?

3. Can you see and understand that the large wheel of a Penny-farthing would roll more easily over cobbles and stones than would a smaller wheel? Try to explain why.

4. The Penny-farthing was prone to accidents. What do you think *prone* means?
5. In what way(s) would ‘coming a cropper’ off a Penny-farthing be different from falling off your bike?
6. Why do you think that hooking the feet over a Penny-farthing’s handlebars while going down hill made the bicycle go faster?

7. What parts does your bike have that a Penny-farthing doesn’t?

8. The use of air-filled tyres caused Penny-farthings to become obsolete. What does *obsolete* mean?
9. What is a Penny-farthing enthusiast?

10. If you were given a Penny-farthing for a day where would you like to ride it? (*you might like to give a humorous answer to this question*)

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**Grammar: Nouns**

**Common Nouns**

A common noun is something you can put the word ‘the’ in front of, e.g. the table. Some nouns (such as table) can be seen and felt. Some can be seen, felt, smelt and tasted e.g. soup. Some can only be seen e.g. sky. Others can only be heard e.g. music.
Others may only be thought about e.g. dream.

1) Write out all the common nouns in this sentence:
Across the street is an old house with broken windows.

**Proper Nouns**

Proper nouns are names.

People have names so these (people’s names) are proper nouns e.g. Peter Smith. Cities have names so these too are proper nouns e.g. Sydney. Stories have titles and they are proper nouns as well e.g. Snow White and the Seven Dwarves. Movies have names; they are proper nouns also, e.g. Lion King.

2) Write out all the proper nouns in this sentence:
   Emma told us that she was born in London but grew up in Perth.

**Pronouns**

Pronouns are small words used in the place of common nouns or proper nouns.

The word she is a pronoun. Instead of saying Anne opened the door and then Anne walked inside we say Anne opened the door and then she walked inside.

The word it is a pronoun. Instead of saying As the table got older the table faded we say As the table got older it faded.

Some other pronouns are our, he, we, they. There are many more.

3) Write out all the pronouns in this sentence:
My brother said he will go fishing with his friend on Sunday.

4) Write 8 common nouns, 8 proper nouns and 4 pronouns that are not mentioned here. (put them in lists)