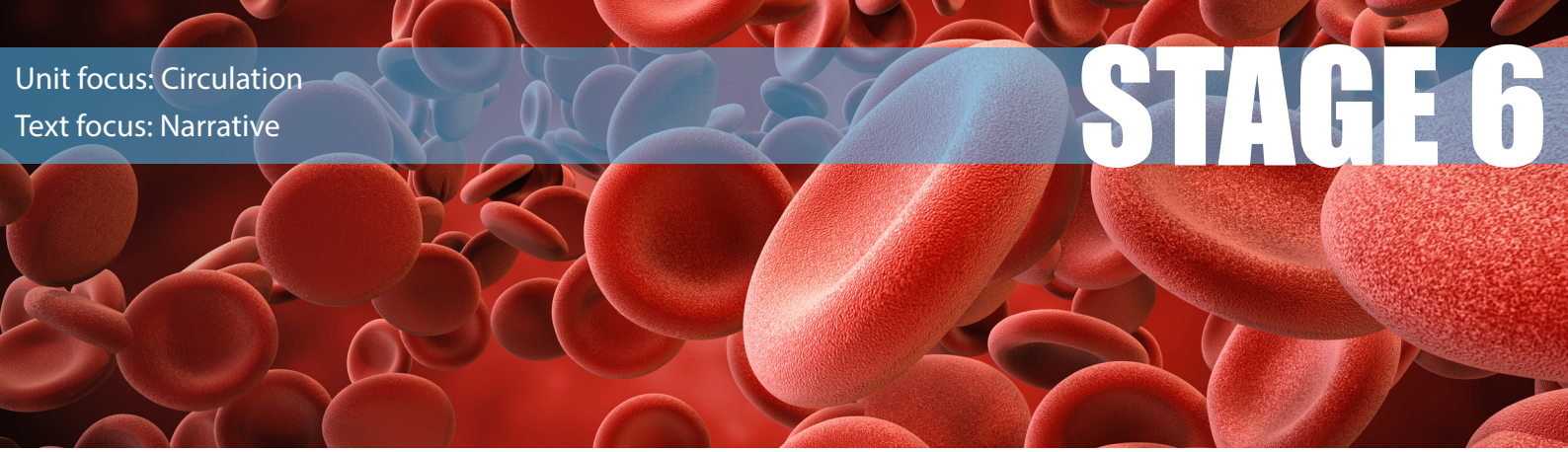

Unit focus: Circulation
Text focus: Narrative

STAGE 6

Journey of a Red Blood Cell

One pump. That's all it took to set me on my way again - one pump. There's no rest for the wicked, so they say, and there's definitely no rest for us red blood cells. Those white blood cells have it so easy, just sitting around, waiting for something to attack the body before they leap into action and save the day.

Nobody thinks to thank us red blood cells, do they? All we do is endlessly circle the body, taking oxygen here, there and everywhere. One day it's just POOF, and we're gone. Not so much as a handshake or a thank-you-very-much. 120 days, they reckon. That's how long each of us will last before we fall to bits. Don't get me wrong, I know I have one of the most important jobs in the world. It would just be nice to be recognised, that's all.

As I was saying, I was back on my way. The first stop, of course, was the lungs. The pulmonary artery was pretty quick going: after all, none of us had anything to carry yet. I floated around in the lungs for a while, picking up some good old O2 (that's oxygen to you lot) until I couldn't carry any more.

It's obviously a lot harder to carry loads of stuff with you, but us red blood cells don't let that slow us down. I nipped down the pulmonary vein, racing my mates all the way until we were squirted back into the heart. It was the left atrium, this time. That's where all oxygenated blood goes first. The walls spasm a little bit pushing us on into the left ventricle. It's easier if you just relax and let it happen, trust me!

By this point, I would have loved a rest and to put my cells up, but I couldn't. The heart never stops beating, and I was soon sent on my way again, this time through the aorta. I got a bit dizzy at this point - we were swirling all over the place, heading this way and that down one vein then another. I can't remember where I ended up this time. It might have been an organ, the eyes, the limbs: who knows?

All I know is that once I'd dropped off my oxygen, it was back up to the heart. Actually, I remember hitching a ride through the inferior vena cava, so I know I'd ended up somewhere in the lower half

of the body. By the time I reached the heart again (this time into the right atrium), I was definitely ready for a rest.

Fat chance! I had to start it all again, didn't I? I know it seems like a long journey, but I have to make it around your whole body - through the lungs and the heart and wherever I'm heading - once every minute! That's a fast pace to keep up. It's a lot easier on all of us if you look after your heart. Even if I only last for 120 days, that means I'll whiz around the inside of your body over 150,000 times!

INFERENCE FOCUS

1. What is the mood of the red blood cell in the first paragraph?
2. How does the red blood cell feel about its job? How do you know?
3. How did the cell feel after it got back to the heart from the lungs?
4. Does the red blood cell think its job is slow? How do you know?
5. Why did the cell think it had ended up in the lower half of the body?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

S	What did the red blood cell do before it hitched a ride in the inferior vena cava?
V	Find and copy a word that suggests something never stops happening.
R	Roughly how long do red blood cells last for?
R	How long does the entire journey around the body take?
R	What genre of text is this? How do you know?

Answers:

1. Grumpy, tired and resentful of the white blood cells.
2. It's happy and knows the job is important, but it wants more thanks
3. Tired. It wanted a rest
4. No, it says that it has to make such a long journey in one minute and that it's a fast pace
5. It travelled through the inferior vena cava

S: Dropped its oxygen off

V: Endlessly

R: 120 days

R: One minute

R: It is a narrative. We know this because it is told from the point of view of a red blood cell.