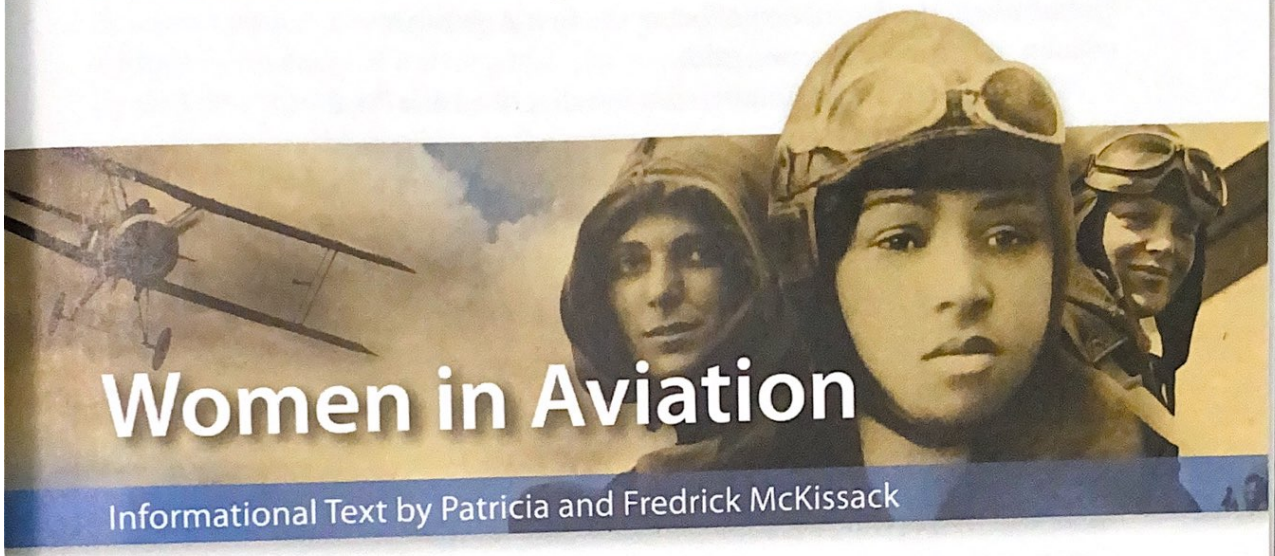
HISTORY VIDEO

Background *In the early 1900s, flying in "aeroplanes"—fixed-winged, self-propelled flying machines—was a bold undertaking. Male pilots were dashing heroes. However, female aviators—especially African American women—had to struggle for acceptance.* **Patricia and Fredrick McKissack** (b. 1944; b. 1939) *have written over 100 biographies and nonfiction books, most focusing on the achievements of African Americans.*



Women in Aviation

Informational Text by Patricia and Fredrick McKissack

SETTING A PURPOSE As you read, pay attention to the details that describe what it was like for a woman to become a pilot during this period. What obstacles did each pilot face? Write down any questions you may have while reading.

American aviation was from its very beginnings marred with sexist and racist assumptions. It was taken for granted that women were generally inferior to men and that white men were superior to all others. Flying, it was said, required a level of skill and courage that women and blacks lacked. Yet despite these prevailing prejudices, the dream and the desire to fly stayed alive among women and African-Americans.

The story of women in aviation actually goes back to the time of the hot-air balloons. A number of women in Europe and America gained fame for their skill and daring. Sophie Blanchard made her first solo balloon flight in 1805. She grew in fame and was eventually named official aeronaut of the empire by Napoleon. By 1834, at least twenty women in Europe were piloting their own balloons.

Though she did not fly, Katherine Wright was a major supporter of her brothers' efforts. Orville so appreciated his sister's help that he said, "When the world speaks of the Wrights, it must include my sister. . . . She inspired much of our effort."

Although Raymonde de la Roche of France was the first woman in the world to earn her pilot's license, Harriet Quimby held the distinction of being the first American woman to become a licensed pilot.

On August 1, 1911, Quimby, who was described as a "real beauty" with "haunting blue-green eyes," strolled off the field after passing her pilot's test easily. To the male reporters who **inundated** her with questions, Quimby fired back answers with self-confidence. Walking past a group of women who had come to witness the historic event, Quimby was overheard to quip with a smile and a wink: "Flying is easier than voting." (The Woman's Suffrage Amendment wasn't passed until 1920.)

inundate (ĭn´ŭn-dāt´) *v.* To *inundate* is to give a huge amount of something.

As difficult as it was for women to become pilots in significant numbers, it was doubly hard for African-Americans, especially black women. That's why Bessie Coleman, the first African-American to earn her pilot's license, is such an exciting and important figure in aviation.

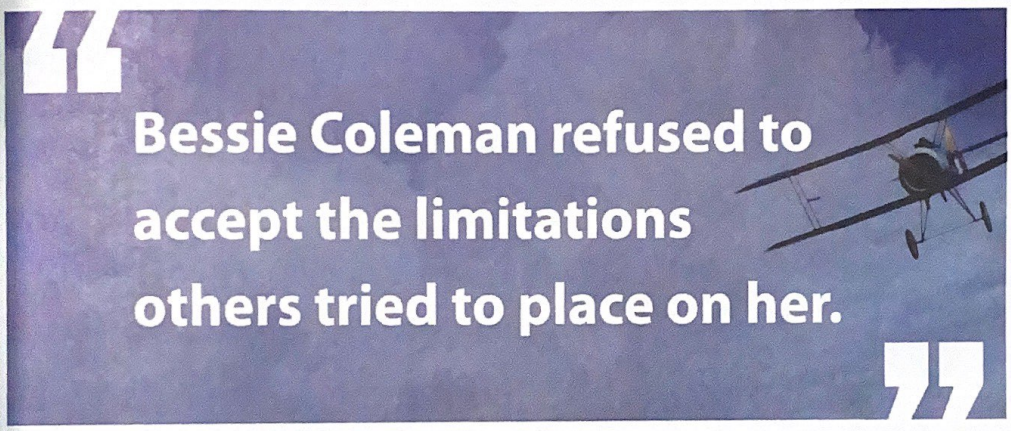
Bessie Coleman was born in 1893 in Atlanta, Texas, the twelfth of thirteen children. Her mother, who had been a slave, valued education and encouraged all of her children to attend school in order to better themselves. The encouragement paid off, because Coleman graduated from high school, a feat not too many black women were able to accomplish in the early 1900s.

Bessie Coleman refused to accept the limitations others tried to place on her. She attended an Oklahoma college for one semester but ran out of money. Accepting the offer of one of her brothers to come live with him and his family in Chicago, Coleman found a job as a manicurist. She fully intended to return to school after saving enough money. But she never did. While in Chicago she learned about flying and made a new set of goals for herself. She wanted to be a pilot.

Coleman learned about flying from reading newspaper accounts of air battles during World War I. She tried to find a school that would accept her as a trainee. But no American instructor or flying school was willing to teach her.

When the war ended, a friend, Robert S. Abbott, the founder of the *Chicago Defender*, one of the most popular black-owned and -operated newspapers in the country, suggested that Coleman go to France, where racial prejudice was not as **restrictive** as it was in America. Even though the United States was the birthplace of flight, it was slower than other countries to develop an organized aviation program. European leaders immediately saw the commercial and military advantages of a strong national aviation program. Bessie knew from her reading that both French and German aircraft were among the best in the world.

restrictive (rĭ-strĭk´tĭv) *adj.* When something is *restrictive*, it is limiting in some way.



Coleman had also read about Eugene Jacques Bullard, the well-decorated[1] and highly honored native of Georgia who had become the first African-American to fly an airplane in combat as a member of the French Lafayette Flying Corps during World War I. Other blacks had gone to Europe to get their training, too. Coleman realized that if she were ever going to get a chance to fly, she, too, would have to go to France. But she didn't have any money to get there, and besides, she couldn't speak a word of French.

For almost two years, Coleman worked part-time as a manicurist and as a server in a Chicago chili parlor and saved every penny to finance her trip to France. Meanwhile she learned to speak French, so when the time came, she'd be able to understand her instructors.

[1] **well-decorated:** term used to describe a person in the military who has received many awards.

Aviator Bessie Coleman posed for this photograph in 1920.

In 1921, Coleman made it to France, where she found an instructor who was one of Tony Fokker's chief pilots. Fokker, the famous aircraft manufacturer, said Coleman was a "natural talent." On June 15, 1921, Coleman made history by becoming the first black woman to earn her wings, thus joining the ranks of the handful of American women fliers.

Returning to the United States determined to start a
90 flying school where other African-American pilots could be trained, Coleman looked for ways to finance her dream. There were very few jobs in the aviation industry for women or blacks. She soon learned that there was little or no support for a black woman who wanted to start a flying school. To call attention to aviation and to encourage other women and African-Americans to take part in the new and growing field,

Coleman gave flying **exhibitions** and lectured on aviation. She thrilled audiences with daredevil maneuvers, just as Quimby had done before her.

exhibition (ĕk´sə-bĭsh´ən) *n.* An *exhibition* is an organized presentation or show.

Along with racism, Coleman encountered the burden of sexism, but she made believers out of those who doubted her skill. "The color of my skin," she said, "[was] a drawback at first. . . . I was a curiosity, but soon the public discovered I could really fly. Then they came to see *Brave Bessie*, as they called me."

The strict rules and regulations that govern aviation today didn't exist during the first three decades of flying. For example, it wasn't uncommon for aviators to ignore safety belts and fly without parachutes. One of these simple safety **precautions** might have saved the lives of both Harriet Quimby and Bessie Coleman.

precaution (prĭ-kô´shən) *n.* A *precaution* is an action taken to avoid possible danger.

On a July morning in 1912, Quimby, and a passenger named William P. Willard, set out to break an over-water speed record. When Quimby climbed to five thousand feet, the French-made Blériot monoplane[2] suddenly nosed down. Both Quimby and Willard were thrown from the plane and plunged to their deaths in the Boston Harbor.

The *New York Sun* used the opportunity to speak out against women fliers:

> Miss Quimby is the fifth woman in the world killed while operating an aeroplane (three were students) and their number thus far is five too many. The sport is not one for which women are physically qualified. As a rule they lack strength and presence of mind and the courage to excel as aviators. It is essentially a man's sport and pastime.

Fourteen years later, Bessie Coleman died in a similar accident. With almost enough savings to start her school, Coleman agreed to do an air show in Florida on May Day for the Negro Welfare League of Jacksonville. At 7:30 P.M. the night before, Coleman, accompanied by her publicity agent, William Wills, took her plane up for a test flight. When she reached an altitude of about five thousand feet, her plane flipped over. Coleman was thrown from the plane and

[2] **monoplane:** an airplane with only one pair of wings.

plunged to her death April 30, 1926. Wills died seconds later when the plane crashed.

Once again critics used the tragedy to assert that neither women nor blacks were mentally or physically able to be good pilots. "Women are often penalized by publicity for their every
140 mishap," said Amelia Earhart, the most famous female pilot in aviation history. "The result is that such emphasis sometimes directly affects [a woman's] chances for a flying job," Earhart continued. "I had one manufacturer tell me that he couldn't risk hiring women pilots because of the way accidents, even minor ones, became headlines in the newspapers."

Although Bessie Coleman died tragically, her plans to open a flight training school for blacks were continued by those she had inspired.

COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION What obstacles did Quimby, Coleman, and other early female pilots face that their male counterparts did not face? In a group, share ideas about what motivated these women to achieve in spite of difficulties.

Determine Author's Purpose

7.RI.2.6

An **author's purpose** is the reason the author wrote a particular work. Usually an author writes for one or more purposes, as shown in this chart:

Author's Purpose	Examples of Written Works
To inform or explain	encyclopedia entries, informational articles, how-to articles, biographies, and other factual, real-world examples
To persuade	editorials, opinion essays and blogs, advertisements, and other works in which the author shares an opinion and tries to persuade readers to agree
To entertain	stories, novels, plays, essays, and literary works that engage the reader with qualities such as humor, suspense, and intriguing details
To express thoughts or feelings	poems, personal essays, journals and other texts in which the author shares insights, emotions, and descriptions

To determine an author's purpose in informational texts, examine the facts and quotations. An author may have a main purpose for writing, as well as other purposes. For example, "Women in Aviation" provides facts, so it is written mainly to inform. But the authors have other purposes, too, revealed by their word choices and their examples.

Cite Evidence and Draw Conclusions

7.RI.1.1

When you **draw conclusions,** you make judgments or take a position on a topic. To support conclusions, readers cite **textual evidence**—information from the text in the form of facts and details. To draw conclusions in an informational text, follow these steps:

- Look for statements in the text that support your conclusion.
- Consider your own experience and knowledge about the topic.
- Make a judgment based on evidence and your own knowledge.

Informational texts contain details readers can use as textual evidence. For example, here's a quote from "Women in Aviation" that describes Katherine Wright, the sister of famous aviators Orville and Wilbur Wright:

> **"When the world speaks of the Wrights, it must include my sister. . . . She inspired much of our effort."**

Katherine Wright wasn't a pilot. However, based on this text, what conclusion can you draw about her contribution to the Wright brothers' achievements?

eBook *Annotate It!*

7.RI.1.1, 7.RI.1.3, 7.RI.2.6, 7.W.1.2, 7.W.2.6, 7.W.4.10

Analyzing the Text

Cite Text Evidence Support your responses with evidence from the text.

1. **Cite Evidence** Based on the first sentence in "Women in Aviation," what do you think the author's purpose might be? Which words or phrases indicate this purpose?
2. **Interpret** Reread lines 26–33. What impression do the authors create of Harriet Quimby by using facts and quotations?
3. **Draw Conclusions** Reread lines 69–82. What conclusion can you draw about Bessie Coleman's personality, based on the information in these paragraphs? Fill out a chart to show how you came to your conclusion. Use chart headings like these:

Textual Evidence	My Experience	Conclusion

4. **Compare** In what ways were Harriet Quimby and Bessie Coleman probably most alike? Explain.
5. **Analyze** You've learned that authors may have more than one purpose in mind for a text. For "Woman in Aviation," it's clear that the authors' main purpose is to inform. What secondary purpose do you think is evident in the text?
6. **Evaluate** What do you think is the most important idea the authors want to convey about the efforts of women aviators in the early 20th century? Support your view with evidence from "Women in Aviation."

PERFORMANCE TASK

my WriteSmart

Writing Activity: Report Do further research on one of the figures from "Women in Aviation." Then present your research in the form of a report.

- Use text, online, and digital resources such as encyclopedias, web searches, and other texts to find facts and details.
- Include details about the pilot's achievements and their importance.
- Be sure to include additional quotes either directly from or about the aviator you chose.

Critical Vocabulary

7.L.3.4a, 7.L.3.5c

inundate **restrictive** **exhibition** **precaution**

Practice and Apply Which of the two situations best matches the meaning of the vocabulary word? Explain your choice.

1. **inundate**
   - **a.** More than 400 customers call the hot line one morning.
   - **b.** One or two visitors come to a museum.
2. **restrictive**
   - **a.** The gate to the park is locked at six o'clock.
   - **b.** The gate to the park has a rusty lock.
3. **exhibition**
   - **a.** A crowd gathered at a store advertising a one-day sale.
   - **b.** The crowd watched a holiday cooking demonstration.
4. **precaution**
   - **a.** The state lets voters send in their ballots before Election Day.
   - **b.** The state requires motorcyclists to wear safety helmets.

Vocabulary Strategy: Connotations and Denotations

A word's **denotation** is its literal dictionary meaning. A word's **connotation** comes from the ideas and feelings associated with the word. The authors of "Women in Aviation" chose words based on connotation and denotation.

> **On August 1, 1911, Quimby, who was described as a "real beauty" with "haunting blue-green eyes," strolled off the field after passing her pilot's test easily.**

Notice how the specific word choice of *strolled* suggests an easy, confident way of walking. This paints a picture of an accomplished young pilot. Words can have a positive or a negative connotation. The context of a phrase, sentence, or paragraph can help you determine the connotation of a word.

Practice and Apply For each item that follows, choose the word you think better expresses the meaning of the sentence. Use a print or online dictionary to help you with unfamiliar words. Then write the reason for your choice.

1. Bessie Coleman refused to give up. She was (**stubborn, determined**).
2. Early pilots performed stunts. The pilots were (**daring, reckless**).
3. Women had barriers. Yet female pilots (**followed, pursued**) their dreams.
4. Coleman died as a pioneer. Her efforts (**inspired, helped**) future generations.

Language Conventions: Subordinate Clauses

Think of clauses as building blocks for sentences. A sentence is an **independent clause** because it can stand alone and express a complete thought. A **subordinate clause** cannot stand alone in a sentence because it is subordinate to, or dependent on, a main clause. Subordinate clauses are also called **dependent clauses.**

Subordinate Clause	Independent Clause
Because it's stormy,	the flight is delayed.
When the skies are clear,	we'll take off.

You can recognize a subordinate clause because it begins with a **subordinating conjunction.** Common subordinating conjunctions are *after, although, as, because, before, even though, if, since, so that, though, unless, until, when, where,* and *while.*

The subordinating conjunction *even though* introduces the subordinating clause in this sentence from "Women in Aviation":

> **Even though the United States was the birthplace of flight, it was slower than other countries to develop an organized aviation program.**

When you write, be careful not to confuse a subordinate clause with a complete sentence; a subordinate clause cannot stand alone. A subordinate clause can appear anywhere in a sentence. If you position it before the independent clause, set it off with a comma.

Practice and Apply Write a complete sentence, using each of these subordinate clauses. You can review the text of "Women in Aviation" for details to include.

1. because flying was a new and exciting sport
2. until aviation was regulated
3. when World War I ended
4. although Bessie Coleman died tragically