



Bessie Coleman Lesson Plan

Queen of the Skies

Overview:

This lesson provides an overview of the world's first African American female pilot, who overcame multiple barriers (racial, gender-based, historical, socioeconomic) in order to become a celebrated aviator and daredevil performer who thrilled both Black and White audiences. It is suitable for a lesson in history class, and would make an enriching addition to courses dealing with technical or scientific fields connected with aviation.

Lesson Prompt:

Can you name any famous pilots from history? What did they achieve in flight that makes them memorable? What kind of education, training, and experience does it take to become a great pilot?

Share the prepared PowerPoint slide deck with students. Select from the list of critical thinking, discussion, and multiple-choice questions to engage students in dialogue and measure their understanding. There are short videos available to complement the discussion, and activities for students to use to enrich their understanding of Bessie Coleman's life, the early days of aviation, and the broader cultural context of racial segregation, changing gender roles, and technological advancement in America between the World Wars.

Vocabulary:

Aviatrix, Aerospace, Aeronautical, Barnstorming, Biplane, Cockpit, Daredevil, Expatriate, Lacerations, Manicurist, Parachutist, Sharecropper

Recommended Resources:

Several online videos of varying length are recommended on the Bessie Coleman lesson [Videos](#) supplement.

A number of biographies appropriate for young adult audiences are available, including *Queen Bess: Daredevil Aviator* by Doris L. Rich, with an afterword by astronaut Mae Jemison (Smithsonian Books, 1993).

The Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum hosts a good deal of material about Bessie Coleman, and on Black American contributions to aerospace overall, on its website, including:

- **Black Wings: African American Pioneer Aviators** (Overview of Early Black Aviators)
<https://airandspace.si.edu/explore-and-learn/topics/blackwings/index.cfm>
- **Bessie Coleman** (Online Exhibit on Her Life and Legacy)
<https://airandspace.si.edu/learn/highlighted-topics/womens-history/bessie-coleman>
- **Pioneers of Flight** (Material on Bessie Coleman & Bessie Coleman Aero Club)
<https://pioneersofflight.si.edu/content/bessie-coleman-aero-club>