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# Lindbergh's Flight

## Flight Fever

When Charles Lindbergh was born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1902, Orville and Wilbur Wright were testing their glider in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. Many other men fascinated by the possibilities of flight were experimenting and testing and dreaming, too. But it was the Wright brothers who, a year later, succeeded in making the first controlled, engine-powered flight. That was just the beginning. Suddenly America and Europe had flight fever. By 1911 nonstop flights were being made between cities such as London and Paris, and from Florida to Cuba. That year newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst offered a prize of \$50,000 to the first pilot who could fly across the United States in 30 days or less. Cal Rodgers, a pilot with only two months of flying experience, tried it. He flew from New York to California, but it took him 49 days to do it with many stops and a lot of crash landings.

When World War I began in 1914, France and Germany used airplanes for the first aerial battles. In 1917, when America entered the war, military aircraft were changing the way the war was fought. It was during these years that Charles Lindbergh became fascinated with airplanes and vowed to become a pilot. He saw his first plane near Washington, D.C., in 1912 when he was 10 years old. When he enrolled in the University of Wisconsin he decided to study mechanical engineering. During his second year at the university he switched his study to aeronautics. He left before his second year was over and in 1922 went to Lincoln, Nebraska, where he enrolled in flight school. He had never been close enough to a plane to touch it, but when he took his first flight he was hooked.

When Lindbergh's instructor told him he was ready for his first solo flight, he didn't have enough money to put down to cover the cost of fixing the plane if he did something wrong. The president of the company refused to gamble on the young student's flying abilities. So, there was no solo flight!

Before his flying lessons were over he met a "barnstormer" named E.G. Bahl. A "barnstormer" was a pilot who flew his plane from one town to another, making money by taking people for short flights. A five- to 10-minute ride usually cost about \$5. Lindbergh wanted some practical flying experience, so he convinced Bahl to take him along on his next "barnstorming" trip in Nebraska. He got flying experience, that's for sure! To entertain the crowds at county fairs and town celebrations, "barnstormers" rolled their planes over in the air, made dangerous dives and did fancy flying that astounded the people on the ground. Lindbergh also learned how to "wing-walk" to attract crowds. While Bahl flew low over a town, Lindbergh would stand on one of the wing tips. It was a foolhardy thing to do, but a popular one in the 1920s. Fortunately, Lindbergh was not hurt, and when the "barnstorming" trip was over he went back to flight school in Lincoln for more training.

## Discussion

Ask students if they have ever gone to an air show. What kinds of tricks do the pilots do? Do people still "wing-walk"? Why is it not a good idea to do such fancy tricks in an airplane? Why do they think "barnstormers" did such tricks in the 1920s? Why were people so interested in the "barnstormers" and willing to pay \$5, a lot of money in those days, for a plane ride?



# Lindbergh's Flight

## Research

Have students research to discover what they can about the Red Baron, the famous World War I German pilot. After they find out about him, show them some *Peanuts* comic strips of Snoopy as the World War I Flying Ace and his experiences with the Red Baron. Check with your local public library to see if they have the book *It's a Dog's Life, Snoopy*, (published by United Feature Syndicate) which includes some comic strips on this theme.

## Flying Here and There

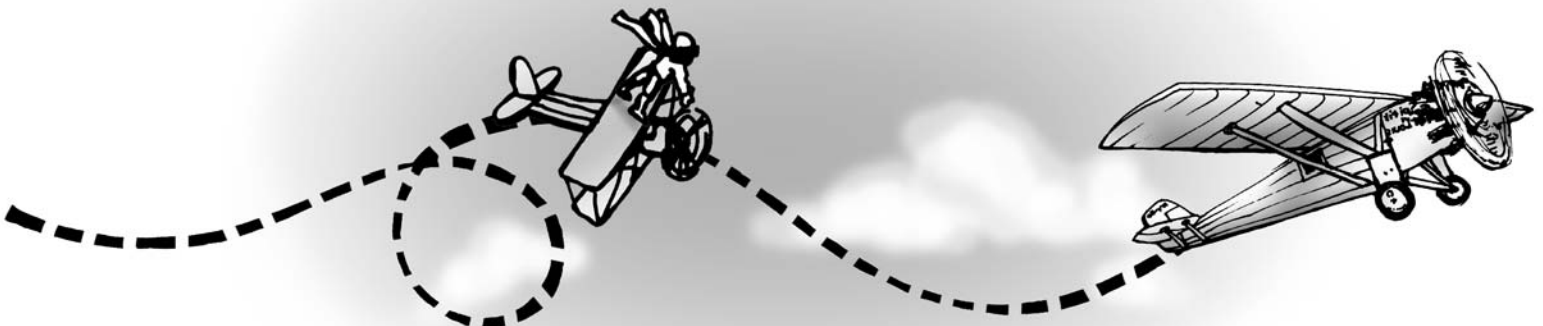
After Lindbergh finished flight school, that is when he considered he'd had enough of it, he went back to "barnstorming." Since he didn't own his own plane, he had to team up with other men. A "barnstorming" trip to Kansas and Colorado became available to him because he had recently learned how to parachute jump from a plane. He spent the summer and early fall parachuting and "wing-walking." The next spring Lindbergh had saved enough money to buy a small airplane of his own for \$500. He bought it at a government auction of "Jennies," wartime training planes. The plane was worth more like \$5000 than \$500, but World War I was over and flight training fields and posts were being shut down. Lindbergh didn't tell anybody that he had never flown a plane alone because he was confident that he could do it. When he was ready to fly his new plane off the field, he wasn't sure exactly how to do it. When his first attempt to take off failed, a pilot waiting at the field for a delivery offered to give him a few pointers. Half an hour later the pilot told Lindbergh he was ready to solo, but advised him to wait until evening to take off when the air would be smooth. That evening Lindbergh made his first solo flight in an airplane, his own air-

plane. Everything went fine, and a week later he flew to Minnesota by himself. To gain a little more experience, he took the indirect route to Minnesota, by way of Texas! He landed in fields most evenings and was always able to get some paying passengers to help pay his traveling expenses. It was Lindbergh's first "barnstorming" trip on his own. Later in the summer he flew more "barnstorming" trips through Minnesota, Iowa and Wisconsin. His mother flew with him for a 10-day "barnstorming" trip through southern Minnesota. Later he continued to "barnstorm" throughout much of the south.

In March 1924, Lindbergh was accepted as a cadet in the Army Air Service Training School with 103 other students. The training was so difficult, by the end of the year only 18 students were left to receive their wings. After graduation Lindbergh went back to "barnstorming" while he waited to find out if a job offer he had received was going to work out. It did, and on April 15, 1926, he began flying airmail between St. Louis and Chicago.

## "You Are There" Creative Writing

Have students imagine they live in the 1920s and an airplane lands in a field near where they live on a "barnstorming" tour. What do they do? Run out to see the plane and meet the pilot? Watch the pilot fly the plane in tricky maneuvers? Watch a "wing-walker" stand on the plane's wing? Buy a ride on the plane? Challenge them to write about the experience as if they were there, including descriptions of the plane and pilot and their feelings about it all. Encourage them to include how it looked, felt, sounded and smelled. When students have finished their writing, have them read their imaginary experiences aloud.



# Lindbergh's Flight

## The Mail Must Go Through

The United States Post Office Department began regularly scheduled airmail service in 1918, though unauthorized mail deliveries over short distances by plane had been carried out several years before. The first airmail route was between New York City, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. By 1926 airmail was no longer a luxury, but a necessity. That didn't mean it was without problems, however. During the winter much of the flying had to be done at night and night flying, especially night landing, was still tricky since the planes didn't have navigation instruments to help them. Weather was also a major consideration for airmail pilots. Fog and sleet caused the most delays. Ice on the plane's wings or propeller was also a dangerous problem. Inaccurate weather reports could cause a pilot to feel it was safe to take off, then land him in bad weather conditions farther on. Lindbergh usually took off and flew as far as he could with the mail; then if he had to land because of bad weather, the mail was sent the rest of the way by train. Low fog forced Lindbergh to parachute out of his plane more than once on his mail route. During one of those jumps, his plane kept circling slowly, almost running into his parachute on the way down. Another time, he had a prickly landing on a barbed wire fence.

It was during a night flight to deliver mail in the fall of 1926 that Lindbergh first began thinking of trying to fly across the Atlantic Ocean from New York to Paris. He felt it would be fairly safe and with recent improvements made on airplanes, such as radial air-cooled motors, high lift airfoils and lightweight construction, there should be no problem. He would just need to make sure he had plenty of fuel for the trip. He knew of some wealthy men who would probably be willing to finance his trip. He later wrote in his Pulitzer Prize-winning book *The Spirit of St. Louis* what he had been thinking:

*"If one just held to the right course long enough one should arrive in Europe. The flying couldn't be more dangerous or the weather worse than the night mail in winter. With fuel enough, a pilot would never have to land in fog; if he got caught, he could simply keep on going until he found clear weather. Navigation?—over the Atlantic and at night, boring through dark and unknown skies, toward a continent I've never seen? The very thought makes me rise to contend again with the moon—sweeping over oceans and continents, looking down on farms and cities, letting the planet turn below. Why shouldn't I fly from New York to Paris? I'm almost twenty-five. I have more than four years of aviation behind me, and close to two thousands hours in the air."*

Lindbergh decided to look into the possibilities of such a trip as soon as possible.

## Parachute Practice

Cut out two of the pilot figures on page 10 for each student to color. Also provide tongue depressors that you've cut or broken in half, glue, 10" squares of white fabric or cheesecloth, thread or fishing line, large needles and scissors. You'll need adult supervision with the needles. Show students how to glue the two figures on the front and back of half a tongue depressor. Then demonstrate how to use a needle to pull thread or fishing line through the edge of the cloth at several places and tie it to make a parachute. Cut the threads or fishing line off at a suitable length; then gather them and tie them to the tongue depressor figure. Test the parachute by dropping the pilot from an elevated place or by throwing it into the air to see if the parachute will help it softly float to the ground.

Challenge students to make their own pilots and parachutes and test them. You may want to set aside a corner of the room for testing the parachutes, or take students outside for this activity.

