

Create a Detailed Storyboard for a Documentary on Aviation History

Activity Type: HTML

Grade Level: 6–8

An RIF Guide for Educators

Objective: Students will explore both primary and secondary sources to gather information to draft a documentary storyboard.

Content Connections: Literacy, History

Standards:

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6–8.1:** Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6–8.2:** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6–8.3:** Identify key steps in a text’s description of a process related to history/social studies (e.g., how a bill becomes a law, how interest rates are raised or lowered).

Summary: In this HTML Activity, students will search through several digital archive collections of documents from the Wright brothers. They will also read through two print biographical accounts of the Wright brothers and their achievements. This research is intended to help students identify and focus on a small but significant event in the history of aeronautics and aviation that they can then explore in the form of a 5-minute documentary. They will have to look to additional online and print histories to further learn about their intended focus. Finally, students will use a free online storyboard maker to create a documentary film storyboard with numerous images and a complete script.

Before the Activity

Explore the Wilbur and Orville Wright Papers Teacher Page:

The [Teachers Page to The Wilbur and Orville Wright Papers at the Library of Congress](#) provides standards alignment information, links to the [Collection Highlights](#) page, the collection [Finding Aid](#), and a list of additional [Related Resources](#).

Explore the following online resources:

This activity requires students learn to read and understand primary documents. There are a number of great online tutorials available for students and educators to refine their primary source reading skills. Here is a short selection:

- [How to Read a Primary Source \(The University of Iowa\)](#): This short webpage is largely directed to students and provides a number of useful tips for examining primary sources.
- [Four Read: Learning to Read Primary Documents \(Teaching History National History Education Clearinghouse\)](#): This teacher-directed web tutorial explains a number of reading strategies that students might use when evaluating primary sources.
- [Using Primary Sources \(Library of Congress\)](#): This teacher-directed website covers a number of useful tips encouraging student analysis of primary sources.
- [Guide to Reading Primary Sources \(Office of Learning Resources\)](#): This short guide provides students with a workable definition of primary sources and some useful tips on exploring primary sources.

Explore the Readings: Students will be using the following readings and documents to complete this project.

Books:

- Quentin Reynolds, *The Wright Brothers: Pioneers of American Aviation* (New York: Random House, 1950).
 - In this biographical account of the Wrights, Reynolds uses the methods of storytelling to craft a biographical account of the Wrights' efforts to put the first powered, manned aircraft in the air. Reynolds ends the story with their success in North Carolina. This book is useful for exploring the early life of the Wrights, especially the details of their childhood and early efforts.
- Russell Freedman, *The Wright Brothers: How They Invented the Airplane* (New York: Holiday House, 1991).
 - In this work of history, Freedman explores the lives and interests of the Wright brothers from an early age through the beginnings of the age of flight. This book is a general history of the Wrights, but it is most useful for exploring the efforts of the Wrights in the years after their early successes.

Archival Sources:

The [Wilbur and Orville Wright Papers collection](#) at the Library of Congress includes some 10,121 text items and nearly 5,000 digital images. Here are a few selections that may prove useful for this activity:

- [Scrapbooks, 1902-1914](#)
 - The Wright brothers created a number of scrapbooks over the years. These scrapbooks include newspaper clippings and other items documenting important events in the evolution of flight.
- [Diaries and Notebooks 1900-1919](#)
 - The Wright brothers carefully documented their efforts to both achieve human-controlled powered flight and to promote this method of transportation as feasible and practicable. These diaries and notebooks are the records of their efforts.
- [General Correspondence, 1899-1949](#)
 - The Wright brothers drafted a great number of letters and memos intended to explain their processes to others. At these two links are 3 years of correspondence created and circulated among the Wright brothers and their family and friends.

During the Activity

Warming Up:

Direct students to complete the Warming Up activity. Circulate around the different student groups or pairs to observe their discussions. Be sure to prompt these groups to consider other ideas and other points of view. Those having the most robust discussions may not need much support, but many groups will inevitably struggle to have productive discussions. Prioritize helping these groups. Prompt them with documentary ideas. Ask them if they have seen X or Y.

Getting Started:

The Getting Started section of the Student Edition is intended to encourage students to think about how the larger story of the Wright brothers is actually a collection of smaller stories. Each of these stories has narrative components. There are historical actors, tensions, challenges, failures, a climax, and a conclusion.

To complete this activity, the students will need to find these smaller stories and describe them. This will require scanning the larger history of aviation. This will mean starting their research with secondary sources, particularly those by Reynolds and Freedman. Be sure to make this clear to them as they read through the Getting Started section. Understanding the value of research will be essential for guaranteeing success in this activity.

Readings:

Students may read the suggested readings on their own or in pairs of small groups. For students who may need support understanding the readings' key ideas, use the suggested comprehension questions below.

Books:

- Russell Freedman, *The Wright Brothers: How They Invented the Airplane* (New York: Holiday House, 1991).
 - What happened to cause the crash at Fort Myer that killed Thomas Selfridge? *The propeller hit one of the bracing wires and caused the plane to fall from the sky.*
 - Where was the first international air race held? *It was held in Reims, France.*
 - Where and when did the Wrights establish their own company to manufacture Wright Flyers? *In 1909, the Wrights established their own airplane company in Dayton, OH.*
 - What did Wilbur die from in 1912? *Typhoid fever*
- Quentin Reynolds, *The Wright Brothers: Pioneers of American Aviation* (New York: Random House, 1950).
 - What did the Wright brothers do with their wagon? *They went around town collecting junk people threw out.*
 - What made Wilbur terribly sick as a child? *He was hit with a hockey stick, and it knocked out several of his teeth.*
 - What type of business did the Wrights start in Dayton? *They started a bicycle company.*
 - Where did Wilbur learn about the work of Otto Lilienthal? *He read about him in one of his bicycle magazines.*

Archival Sources:

- [Scrapbooks, 1902-1914](#)
 - Find the March 11, 1906 *St. Louis Republic* article on the "Secret of Aerial Flight," and answer the following questions:
 - Which country was interested in the Wright Flyer? *France*
 - What was the great problem that "remained to be solved" when this article was written? *Control*
- [Diaries and Notebooks 1900-1919](#)
 - Find the following entry and draft a transcription of the diary entry. Orville's diary, November 9, 1903: *Spent most of the day working on engine and magneto, which after much trouble were gotten into shape for running. The vibration at high speed is not at all disagreeable.*
- [General Correspondence, 1899-1949](#)
 - Find the following item and draft a short summary of the content. Letter to the Editor of *Century Magazine*, December 26, 1903: *This is a letter from Wilbur, stating that the Wrights would not like to share images, but would be able to help with the article on their efforts.*

Activity: Create a Detailed Storyboard for a Documentary on Aviation History:

The documentary storyboard activity can be completed independently or in groups. Consider the abilities of the students when determining which approach to take.

The best way to direct student progress on this activity is to carefully curate student progress on the following few steps described in the student edition.

Content Research: Students will need to conduct broad and extensive research into the history of aviation and aeronautics. The best place to begin their research is by reading the largely biographical accounts of the Wrights in the Reynolds and Freedman books. But this research will only be the first step. Students will need to supplement this initial research with further research into the element of aeronautic and aviation history they have decided to zero in on. Consider exposing students to these print and online resources to encourage further research and understanding:

Print:

- McCullough, D. (2015). *The Wright brothers* (First Simon & Schuster hardcover ed.). New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Tise, L. (2009). *Conquering the sky: The secret flights of the Wright brothers at Kitty Hawk* (1st ed.). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tobin, J. (2003). *To conquer the air: The Wright Brothers and the great race for flight*. New York; London: Free Press.

Online:

- [“Wright Brothers Biography,” Encyclopedia of World Biography](#)
- [“Wright brothers,” Encyclopaedia Britannica](#)
- [“An Unusual Childhood,” wright-brothers.org](#)

Students will keep careful notes on what they find while doing their research using their own copies of the [Research Note Taker](#).

Determine Your Focus: The goal of the research is to discover and collect details on a small but significant event, interaction, or technological development. This will be the focus of the storyboarded documentary. There are several requirements for this focus. Here are some:

- It must be rich enough in details to justify a short documentary.
- It must be focused enough to be adequately covered in 5 minutes.
- It should have a clear beginning, climax, and conclusion.
- It should include historical characters who face challenges and either overcome them or fail to overcome them.

Image Research: Documentaries are effective at presenting history because of the way they supplement traditional historical narratives with the tools of filmmaking. This means that they use stimulating and informative visuals to move the historical narrative forward. For this reason, selecting interesting and relevant visuals for the documentaries is an important part of the research for this documentary.

You can help students with this aspect of the documentary research by showing them how to do image research. Most students will be familiar with using search engines to search for images, and this can be a useful tool. But helping students find acceptable, relevant, and usable images in this way may require some assistance.

Consider introducing students to these other image databases:

- [Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Online Catalog](#)
- [Zorger Public Domain Image Search](#)
- [Flickr Image Search](#)

Storyboarding and Scriptwriting: The storyboarding process will require students to familiarize themselves with the online software [ThePlot](#). The software is not difficult, but it does require some time to learn and understand

how it works. Consider taking some time to create your own storyboards to learn this software for yourself. This will help you better instruct students. You might even consider creating a presentation for the students.

Creating an Account at ThePlot Storyboard Creator: To use the free storyboard creator at ThePlot, each student will need to create a free account. Here are the three simple steps you can follow to help them create this account:

First: Click on “Create Free Storyboard” in the upper-right-hand corner of the [page](#).

Second: When the “Create Your Free Account” screen comes up, enter the student’s name, email address, and a suitable password to proceed.

Third: Click “Login.”

Important Note: If you are concerned about students sharing their own information, you might consider creating a few free accounts yourself, and then handing out the login information to the students.

After the Activity

Elaborate: Consider having students use video cameras or cell phones to actually create their storyboarded documentaries. If the students are enthusiastic about this, you might consider holding a short film festival in the school.

Reflect: Consider assigning some or all of the following reflection prompts as the basis of a short essay or to start a class discussion:

How did creating the documentary storyboard help you better understand the history of aviation and aeronautics? In what ways were the primary documents helpful in exploring the intricate details of the history of aviation and aeronautics? In what ways do you believe the documentary proved to be a more effective presentation method than other methods, like print publishing or creating a website? In what ways was it less effective?