

Best Practices

NEW EDITION

in Reading

Level
H



Build Comprehension!
Develop Critical Thinking!

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Bessie's Show

In the early 1900s, just seeing an airplane was a new and wondrous experience. Imagine the excitement of watching a pilot, nicknamed Brave Bessie, perform daring stunts with one of these marvelous new machines!

Recognize Genre

Literature is classified by genre (ZHON-ruh), or type of writing. "Bessie's Show" is a story of **historical fiction**. Historical fiction stories are made up, but authors include facts about the time period. A character may be based on a real person, but many of the details are made up.



Think about another historical fiction story that you have read. Write the setting (when and where it takes place) and who the characters are.

Setting: _____

Characters: _____

Connect to the Topic

Think about a time that you have seen stunt flying at an aerial show, on television, or in the movies. Describe what the airplanes can do.

Preview and Predict

Reread the introduction to "Bessie's Show." Look at the illustrations throughout the story. Predict why the pilot is nicknamed Brave Bessie.

STRATEGIES

- MAKE INFERENCES
- MAKE CONNECTIONS
- UNDERSTAND GENRE
- VISUALIZE

Bessie's Show

MAKE INFERENCES

Authors don't always tell you everything. Use the details in a story and what you know to make an inference.

I think people called her Brave Bessie because she performed daring stunts.

Why would the people in the crowd show expressions of relief?

“Ah-choo!” a young boy sneezed as a strong gust of wind kicked up some dust. He stood in a cow pasture, **mesmerized** by the plane buzzing overhead. The small Curtiss Jenny plane, which people described as little more than a bunch of parts flying in formation, performed graceful figure eights over an amazed crowd. “Look at Brave Bessie go!” the boy exclaimed to no one in particular.

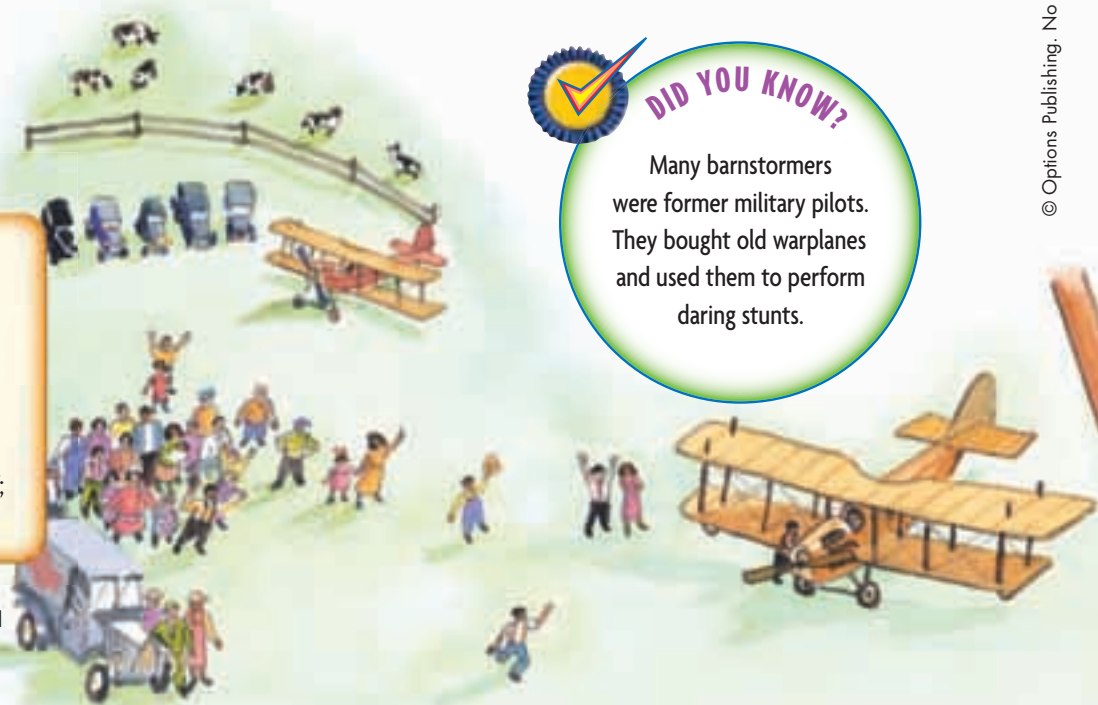
In the cockpit of the plane, the **aviator**, Bessie Coleman, laughed in delight as she straightened the plane. The young woman was doing exactly what she had always wanted to do. She was making her living as a **barnstormer**, which was quite unusual for an African American woman in the 1920s.

Next, Bessie decided to attempt a stall. “Stalls always impress audiences,” she thought. She positioned the plane directly over the crowd and turned off the engine. She imagined the collective gasp of the spectators as they heard the engine go silent, causing the plane to glide at only 45 miles per hour.

Bessie was low enough to detect expressions of relief as she restarted the engine. A blast of exhaust fumes hit her nostrils and a splat of oil sprayed out as she **coaxed** her Jenny to reach its top speed of 75 miles per hour.

aviator (AY-vee-ay-tuhr) a pilot
barnstormer (BARN-storm-uhr) in aviation's early days, a person who did stunt flying and gave short airplane rides
coaxed (KOHKST) gently increased the speed of
mesmerized (MEZ-muh-rized) in awe of; unable to look away

DID YOU KNOW?
 Many barnstormers were former military pilots. They bought old warplanes and used them to perform daring stunts.



Brave Bessie entertained her admirers with more figure eights, barrel rolls, and dives. Then she prepared for the grand finale, which included a new feat. She had recently spiced up her show with parachute jumps to maintain the interest of her audiences.

Bessie examined the herd of cattle at the far end of the pasture. An advantage of flying over farmland was being able to use cows as weathervanes since the animals turn their tails to the wind. After checking the wind direction, she increased the altitude of the plane. "Ready?" she yelled over the engine's buzz to Eliza Dilworth, who was crammed into the miniature plane with her.

Eliza climbed out of the cockpit and cautiously crept to a large, canvas bag which was tied to the wing with a rope. The bag contained the parachute that would transport her to the ground. The woman **donned** the parachute, sat down on the wing, and jumped. "Snap!" went the rope that had secured the package to the wing. Eliza's parachute **billowed** open and floated her downward as the crowd stared in amazement.

The pilot watched with satisfaction and then circled back over the field, **scouting** for a suitable landing location. She decreased her speed, knowing the importance of coming in very slowly because the Jenny had no brakes.

MAKE CONNECTIONS

You'll understand more of what you read if you connect it with what you already know.

I've seen people jump from airplanes in movies. They start with parachutes on.

How was Eliza's parachute jump different from jumps today?

UNDERSTAND GENRE

(historical fiction)
Write one detail that indicates the story takes place in the past.

THINK CRITICALLY

Bessie and Eliza don't have typical jobs. Why do you think they chose to do these jobs?

billowed (BIL-ohd) swelled out
donned (DOND) put on
scouting (SKOWT-ing) observing carefully in order to obtain information



VISUALIZE

Use descriptions in a story to help you visualize expressions on a character's face.

Reread the first paragraph. Which details help you imagine the boy's expressions?

What does this tell you about his feelings?

The plane chugged safely to a stop. The boy who had been watching Bessie with **rapt** attention was the first to approach when she jumped out of the plane. His eyes sparkled upon seeing the woman in her aviator outfit. He could not contain his excitement as he blurted out, "I have to learn how to do that! It's the most exciting thing I have ever seen!"

Bessie smiled kindly and replied, "My dream is to start a flight school, but you are a bit too young to take lessons just yet. In the meantime, would you like to go for a ride?" Bessie expected the boy to agree eagerly, but instead he looked very disappointed.

"I don't have the five dollars," he said **dejectedly**, pointing to the poster advertising the fee for rides.

"What if I take you up for free and you pay me back when you become a famous aviator?" she offered with a twinkle in her eyes.

The boy's face broke into a huge grin as he said, "I'll be right back after I tell my dad where I'm going."

"Watch out," Bessie called after him, laughing. "Once flying is in your blood, it's almost impossible to get it out."



THINK CRITICALLY

Many people would envy Bessie Coleman's career as a barnstormer. Why do you think she thought it was important to start a flight school?

dejectedly (dee-JEK-tid-lee) in a depressed way

rapt (RAPT) completely absorbed

