

History's Mysteries:

Research, Discuss and Solve Some of
History's Biggest Puzzles



Who Killed Bessie Coleman, Avatrix?

<https://bit.ly/histmyst>

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Dear Agent.

Congratulations, If you're reading this you have been chosen for the most prestigious of assignments, to work for the Historical Secret Agents! (HSA)

As an HSA member, you will have access to highly secretive information covering thousands of years of human history. Each mission will task you with studying the past carefully to find new solutions to old problems! This is not an easy job and each mission will place you into difficult situations.

For each mission you will have to be resourceful and come up with an effective plan to change - or protect - history for the better!

To say this is an important job is a severe understatement. As the quote says above, understanding our past is essential for the preservation and improvement of our history.

Sincerely,

T. J. Burns

General T.J. Burns, Director HSA

"THOSE WHO FAIL TO LEARN FROM HISTORY ARE CONDEMNED TO REPEAT IT"

Bessie Coleman



Before You Read

1. What is Bessie Coleman wearing in the picture? Why?
2. What could she be thinking about?
3. Could she be in danger? Why?
4. When were you in danger?

Vocabulary Definitions

Write the letter of the definition next to the matching word.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1. aviatrix (n.) ____ | a. badly made or done |
| 2. shoddy (adj.) ____ | b. rigid thinking |
| 3. small-mindedness (n.) ____ | c. poor, depressed |
| 4. to found (v.) ____ | d. to continue |
| 5. daredevil (n.) ____ | e. to start or begin |
| 6. shortcut (n.) ____ | f. a risk-taker |
| 7. run-down (adj.) ____ | g. a female pilot |
| 8. downtrodden (adj.) ____ | h. a quicker way to get somewhere |
| 9. perpetuate (v.) ____ | i. worn out |
| 10. stereotypes (n.) ____ | j. oversimplified images of a group of people |
| 11. dismantle (v.) ____ | k. break down |
| 12. backers (n.) ____ | l. financial supporters |
| 13. sabotage (v.) ____ | m. deliberately destroy |

Answers at the end of the book

Vocabulary Questions

Discuss with a partner.

1. What can you do to improve a shoddy building?
2. Why is it exciting to be a daredevil?
3. Which stereotypes about your culture are true?

Your Briefing

499 words - 1010-1200L

Place: Jacksonville, Florida

Time: May 1, 1926

On May 1, 1926, 34-year-old aviatrix Bessie Coleman was riding behind William D. Wills, who was her mechanic, publicity agent and friend, when the badly maintained, shoddy aircraft took an unexpected dive. Bessie was ejected from the plane and fell 2000 feet. She died instantly. Wills went down with the plane which exploded on impact; he did not survive. Later, investigators checked the burned wreckage and found an out-of-place wrench stuck in the controls of the engine.

Bessie Coleman's death deprived the world of an ambitious, adventurous, generous spirit dedicated to aviation. Although women had been flying planes since the beginning of the 19th century, flight instructors were all men. Unfortunately, those men had a narrow view of who they would accept as a potential pilot. Bessie, of mixed racial heritage, did not allow other people's *small-mindedness* to interfere with her reaching her goals. She found sponsors among the African American business community in Chicago, learned French, and moved to France to attend flight school. When she returned to the US, after earning an international pilot's license, Bessie reached out to women of color, both African Americans and Native Americans, with a sense of adventure who wanted to learn to fly. Her dream was *to found* a school for young black aviators.

In order to prove herself and draw more attention to her abilities as a pilot, Bessie performed *daredevil* stunts. In 1923, she broke a leg and three ribs when her plane crashed in Los Angeles, California. After spending three months in the hospital, she needed to raise money to buy a new plane to replace the one destroyed in the crash. After 18 months she was back in the air. Her skills included figure eights, loops, and near-ground dips. Her shows also featured other

Black pilots and Black parachutists. She toured the country spreading a message of racial equality. If an airshow refused to allow blacks to attend, Bessie wouldn't fly. Although she was admired by blacks and whites alike, some journalists criticized her style and personality.



A Curtiss JN-4 biplane, the same kind that Bessie Coleman flew.

Coleman had more training than most pilots of her day. She was daring and capable, but her lack of money may have caused her to take shortcuts with safety. Since planes were expensive, her planes were usually older, run-down, and worn-out. She may not have had the time nor money for proper mechanical maintenance.

Furthermore, her desire to be the best, most popular flyer may have caused her to take unnecessary risks, such as flying without her seat belt in an open cockpit plane. At the same time, Bessie Coleman's fearlessness extended to her politics. Scheduled to star in a movie, she quit rather than play a poor, downtrodden woman. She refused to perpetuate racial stereotypes that she wanted to dismantle even though the film company was black-owned. Putting her beliefs above profits may have led Bessie to anger some of her backers or others who felt threatened by Bessie's popularity. But would someone resort to sabotage? Was Bessie murdered?

Your Mission

Determine the true cause of Bessie Coleman's accident and prevent her death.

Bessie Coleman History Quiz

1. Bessie Coleman died when she was:
 - a. hit by a plane
 - b. thrown out of a plane
 - c. killed in a plane
 - d. killed by flying debris
2. Bessie Coleman is famous because she:
 - a. started a school for Black aviators
 - b. built unusual airplanes for rich people
 - c. entertained by doing stunts
 - d. was a movie star
3. Why did Bessie Coleman go to France?
 - a. to take flying lessons
 - b. to learn French
 - c. to work as a pilot
 - d. to travel in Europe
4. What is NOT listed as one of her accomplishments?
 - a. speaking French
 - b. surviving a plane crash
 - c. directing a movie
 - d. speaking to crowds
5. Many people looked up to Bessie Coleman
 - a. true
 - b. false

Discussion Questions

1. How would you save Bessie Coleman from crashing? What would you tell her? Remember she is fearless, so you have to have a good argument for anything you propose.
 - a. To help you create a good argument, look at "Supplement 9: Logic and Logical Fallacies" to first practice creating bad arguments to try to keep Coleman from flying.
2. Do you think the plane crash was mechanical failure, pilot failure, or sabotage?
3. What other plane crashes have you heard about? What happened?
4. How do you think people survive plane crashes?
 - a. What are some points that are important to remember?
 - b. Discuss with a partner or in a small group.

Projects

1. **Be a Part of History to Complete the Mission:** Write a 1-page report to Bessie Coleman to persuade her to be more careful. Choose to write from the position of a mechanic, a safety advisor, another pilot who admires Bessie, or someone who is jealous of Bessie. How would the report of someone who is jealous of Bessie be different than someone who sincerely wants Bessie to succeed?
2. Make a list of all of the problems facing Bessie on the day of her death. What changes do you need her to make? How can you convince her to make those changes? What tone should you use? What style of delivery: lecture, Q and A, scientific approach or conversational would be the most effective?
3. Research flight. How do airplanes fly? How have they changed over the years? What is the most important change? Write 1 page. (Here's a video that can start your research: www.grc.nasa.gov/www/k-12/UEET/StudentSite/dynamicsofflight.html)
4. Amelia Earhart and Beryl Markham are both historical females who piloted planes. Research their background and prepare a presentation for a small group or your class. Or choose Beverley Bass, the first woman to become a captain at American Airlines.
5. Does your city have an aviation museum? Research and report back to the class. Would it be worthwhile to go visit.
6. Interview your classmates or friends and family. Afterward, compare their answers. How are they the same or different? What do you think about the results?

Interview Question: : Why do you think most airplanes crash?		
Name	Answer	Reason
Catherine	Pilot error	Pilots are human. They can become overwhelmed and make mistakes.

References

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40 units include an investigation of mysteries, some well-known, others obscure, such as:

- What happened to the colony of Roanoke Island?
- Who wrote Shakespeare's plays?
- Was there a way to keep Korea unified?
- Do aliens make crop circles or are they hoaxes?
- Was Genghis Khan a bloodthirsty barbarian or a wise and just ruler?
- Who robbed the Isabelle Stewart Museum?
- Who killed Tupac? Or is he still alive?
- What caused the hysteria around the Salem Witch trials?



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