

Bessie Coleman



Elizabeth 'Bessie' Coleman was the first Black woman to hold a pilot licence. She is celebrated for blazing a trail for other female pilots.

Early Life

Bessie was born on 26th January 1892 in Atlanta, Texas. She was one of 13 children born to George and Susan Coleman. Bessie attended a tiny, one-room school from the age of six. When she was 18, Bessie joined Oklahoma University but she had to leave after one term because it was too expensive.



Dreaming of the skies!

In 1915, Bessie went to Burnham School of Beauty in Chicago and got a job in a barber shop. Here, she heard stories from pilots who had returned from the First World War and her passion for flying was born.

During her time at the barber shop, Bessie met Robert Abbot, the editor of the Chicago Defender newspaper. Robert told Bessie to apply to flight schools in France. Bessie went to France and learned to fly. She received her international pilot's licence on 15th June 1921.

Bessie was the first Black woman to hold a pilot's licence.

Flying Career

Bessie's next goal was to buy her own plane. Unfortunately, shortly after getting her first plane, she had an accident. The plane was badly damaged and Bessie broke her leg. However, this setback did not put her off. She continued to perform breathtaking spectacles at air shows around the country. During her flights, she would walk on the wings of the plane as well as performing other astonishing stunts, such as loop the loops and figure of eights.

Legacy

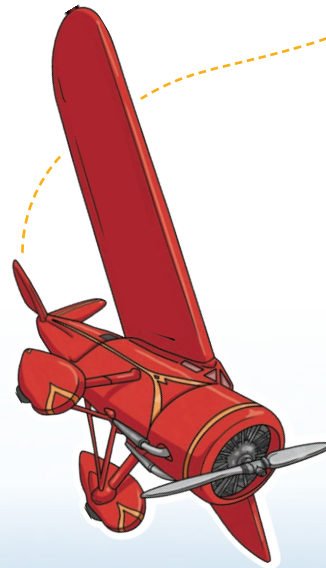
Bessie's incredible achievements have been remembered in various ways. There are lots of flying schools named after her and in 1977, the Bessie Coleman Aviation Club was founded by a group of Black female pilots. In 1995, a special stamp with Bessie's photograph on it was designed to honour her.

Bessie has inspired many women to follow their dreams in flying, driven by the strength and determination Bessie showed in her quest to become the first Black female pilot.

Did You Know...?



In 1992, Dr Mae Jemison took a photograph of Bessie with her when she became the first Black woman in space.



Questions

1. What is Bessie famous for? Tick one.

- She was the first Black pilot.
- She was the first Black female pilot.
- She was the first Black astronaut.
- She was the first female pilot.

2. Number the events from 1-4 to show the order that they happened in.

- Bessie went to Oklahoma University.
- Bessie was born.
- A stamp with Bessie's photo on it was made.
- Bessie got her pilot's licence.

3. Where did Bessie go to get her pilot's licence? Tick one.

- Texas
- France
- Chicago
- New York

4. Draw **four** lines and match each word to its synonym.

damaged

pursue

setback

astounding

amazing

problem

broken

follow

5. Find and copy one phrase that means the same as 'leading the way.'

6. Fill in the missing words.

During her flights, she would walk on the wings of the plane as well as _____
other astonishing stunts such as loop the loops and _____.

7. What effect do you think Bessie's achievements have had on female pilots today?

Answers

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- She was the first Black pilot.
- She was the first Black female pilot.**
- She was the first Black astronaut.
- She was the first female pilot.

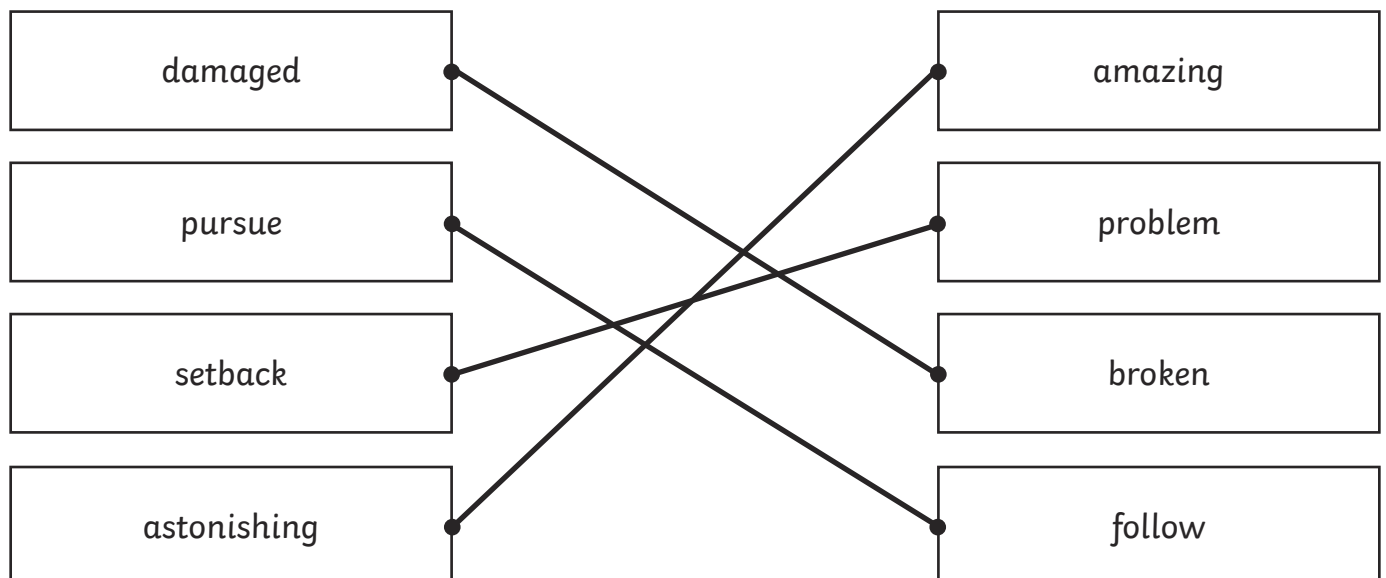
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- Texas
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4. Draw **four** lines and match each word to its synonym.



5. Find and copy one phrase that means the same as 'leading the way.'

blazing a trail

6. Fill in the missing words.

During her flights, she would walk on the wings of the plane as well as **performing** other astonishing stunts such as loop the loops and **figure of eights**.

7. What effect do you think Bessie's achievements have had on female pilots today?

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think Bessie's achievements had a very positive effect on female pilots today. Bessie is an inspiration to lots of female pilots and scientists; she paved the way for them to follow their dreams of a career in the sky.

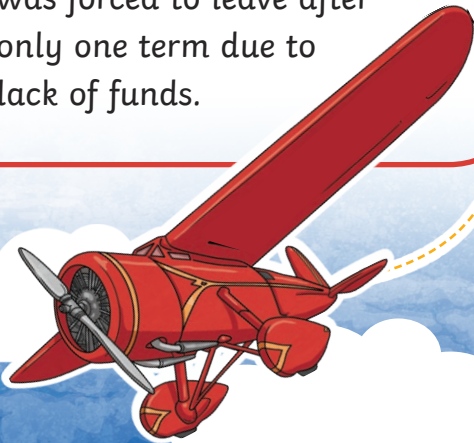
Bessie Coleman



Elizabeth 'Bessie' Coleman was the first Black woman to hold a pilot's licence. She was a **pioneer** in flight and is celebrated for blazing a trail for other female pilots.

Early Life

Bessie was born on 26th January 1892 in Atlanta, Texas. She was one of 13 children born to George and Susan Coleman. Bessie attended a tiny, one-room school from the age of six. When she was 18, Bessie joined Oklahoma University but she was forced to leave after only one term due to lack of funds.



Dreaming of the skies!

In 1915, Bessie went to Burnham School of Beauty in Chicago and took a job as a **manicurist** in a barber shop. Here she heard stories from pilots who had served during the First World War and her passion for flying was born.

During her time at the barber shop, Bessie met Robert Abbot, the editor of the Chicago Defender newspaper. Robert advised Bessie to apply to flight schools in France. Bessie secured a place at a flight school in France and received her international pilot's licence on 15th June 1921. She was the first Black woman to hold a pilot's licence.

Flying Career

Bessie's next goal was to buy her own plane. Unfortunately, shortly after getting her first plane, she had an accident during a practice flight for an air show. The plane was damaged and Bessie suffered a broken leg. However, this setback did not discourage her. She continued to perform breathtaking spectacles in borrowed planes at air shows around the country. During her shows, she would walk on the wings of a flying plane as well as performing other astonishing stunts, such as loop the loops and figure of eights. Bessie also did her bit in campaigning for equal rights for Black people. She would only perform at air shows where Black and White people were able to enter through the same gate.

Legacy

Bessie's incredible achievements have been remembered in various ways. There are flight schools named after her and the Bessie Coleman Aviation Club was founded by a group of Black female pilots in 1977. In 1995, a **commemorative** stamp was designed to honour her accomplishments.



In 1992, Dr Mae Jemison carried a photograph of Bessie with her on her first mission aboard the Space Shuttle Endeavour when she became the first Black woman in space. Mae and countless others have credited Bessie with inspiring her to pursue her career in aviation, spurred on by the strength and determination Bessie demonstrated in her quest to become the first Black female aviator.

Glossary

commemorative: Something which acts as a memorial of an event or person.

manicurist: A person who gives nail treatments professionally.

pioneer: A person who is among the first to develop a new area of knowledge or activity.

Questions

1. What were Bessie's parents called? Tick one.

- Robert and Bessie
- George and Susan
- George and Mae
- Susan and Robert

2. Number the events from 1-4 to show the order that they happened in.

- Bessie bought a plane.
- Bessie went to a tiny, one-room school.
- Bessie got her pilot's licence.
- Bessie worked in a barbershop.

3. Which of the following is **not** one of the stunts Bessie performed? Tick one.

- walking on the wings
- the upside-down wobbly nose
- figure of eights
- loop the loops

4. Draw **four** lines and match each word to its definition.

campaigning ●

discourage ●

pioneer ●

spectacle ●

● A person who is one of the first to develop a new area or activity.

● A visually impressive performance or display.

● An organised course of action to achieve a goal.

● To cause someone to lose confidence or enthusiasm.

5. Why did Bessie leave Oklahoma University?

6. Look at the section called **Legacy**.

Find and copy one word which means the same as 'in memory of'.

7. **In 1992, Dr Mae Jemison carried a photograph of Bessie with her on her first mission aboard the Space Shuttle Endeavour when she became the first Black woman in space.**

What does this passage tell you about Bessie's achievements?

8. Summarise the key facts you have learned about Bessie in 30 words or fewer.

Answers

1. What were Bessie's parents called? Tick one.

- Robert and Bessie
 George and Susan
 George and Mae
 Susan and Robert

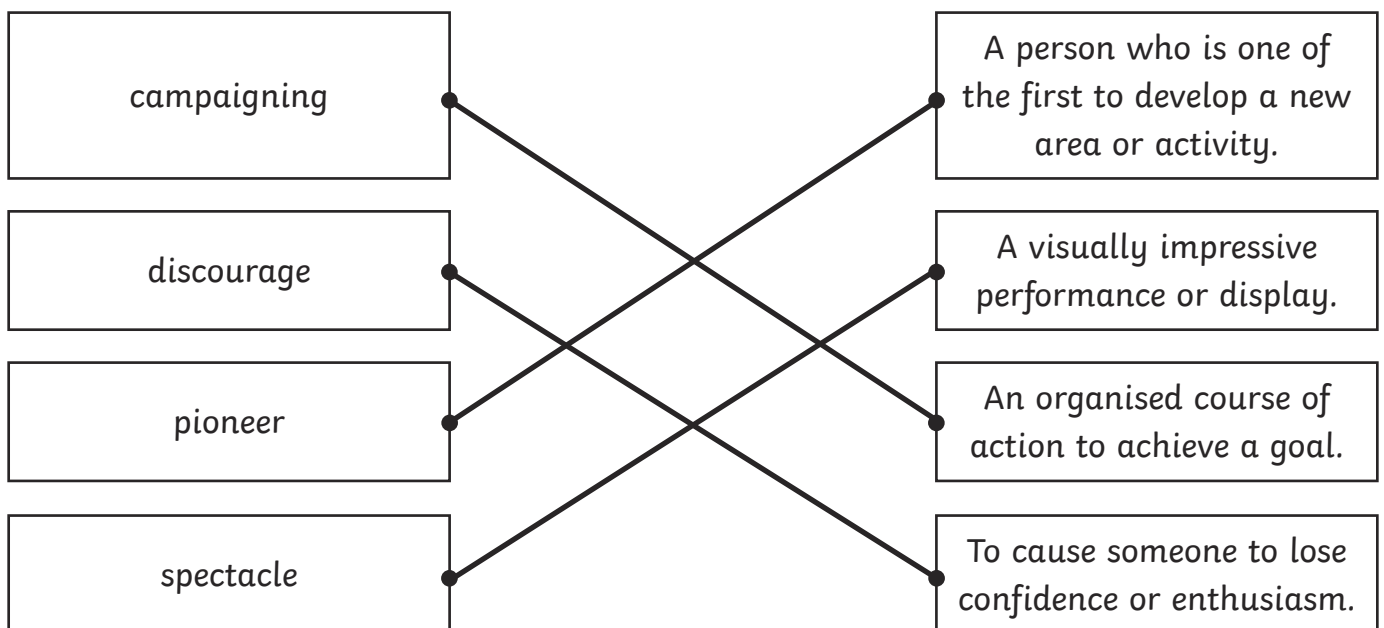
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- 4 Bessie bought a plane.
 1 Bessie went to a tiny, one-room school.
 3 Bessie got her pilot's licence.
 2 Bessie worked in a barbershop.

3. Which of the following is **not** one of the stunts Bessie performed? Tick one.

- walking on the wings
 the upside-down wobbly nose
 figure of eights
 loop the loops

4. Draw **four** lines and match each word to its definition.



5. Why did Bessie leave Oklahoma University?

It was too expensive.

Lack of funds.

6. Look at the section called **Legacy**.

Find and copy one word which means the same as 'in memory of'.

commemorative

7. **In 1992, Dr Mae Jemison carried a photograph of Bessie with her on her first mission aboard the Space Shuttle Endeavour when she became the first Black woman in space.**

What does this passage tell you about Bessie's achievements?

Pupils' own response, such as: This passage tells me that Bessie was a huge inspiration to other female scientists. It also tells me that Bessie meant so much to Mae that she wanted to honour her by taking her picture with her on her first mission into space.

8. Summarise the key facts you have learned about Bessie in 30 words or fewer.

Pupils' own responses, such as: Bessie was the first Black woman to get a pilot's licence and perform as a pilot in America. She performed amazing stunts and inspired lots of other women.

Bessie Coleman

Elizabeth 'Bessie' Coleman was the first Black woman to hold a pilot's licence. She was a pioneer in **aviation** and is celebrated for blazing a trail for the women who followed her.



Early Life

Bessie was born on 26th January 1892 in Atlanta, Texas. She was one of 13 children born to George and Susan Coleman. Bessie attended a tiny, one-room school from the age of six. At the age of 18, Bessie joined Oklahoma University; sadly, she was forced to leave after only one term due to lack of funds.

Dreaming of the skies!

In 1915, Bessie registered at Burnham School of Beauty in Chicago and took a job as a **manicurist** in a barber shop. Here she heard stories from pilots who had served during the First World War; her passion for flying was born. Her brothers would tease her, claiming she could never match the achievements of the French women they had seen flying planes. At the time, American women were not allowed to become pilots.

During her time at the barber shop, Bessie met Robert Abbot, the editor of the Chicago Defender newspaper. Robert advised Bessie to apply to flight schools in France. Bessie secured a place at the Caudron Brothers' School of Aviation in Le Crotoy, France and received her international pilot's licence on 15th June 1921; she was the first Black woman to hold a pilot's licence.

Flying Career

Bessie's next goal was to buy her own plane. Shortly after purchasing her first plane, she had an accident during a practice flight for an air show. The plane was destroyed and Bessie suffered a broken leg. However, this setback did not discourage her. She continued to perform breathtaking spectacles in borrowed planes, at air shows around the country. During her shows, she would walk on the wings of a flying plane as well as performing other astonishing stunts, such as loop the loops and figure of eights. While being most famed for her flying abilities, Bessie was also a prominent civil rights activist. Throughout her career, she would only perform at shows if the crowd was not segregated and Black and White people were allowed to enter through the same gates.

Legacy

Bessie's incredible achievements have been remembered in various ways. There are flight schools named after her and in 1977, the Bessie Coleman Aviation Club was founded by a group of Black female pilots.

Also, in 1995, a **commemorative** stamp was circulated to honour Bessie's accomplishments.



In 1992, Dr Mae Jemison carried a photograph of Bessie with her on her first mission aboard the Space Shuttle Endeavour when she became the first Black woman in space. Mae and countless others have credited Bessie with inspiring her to pursue her career in aviation, spurred on by the strength and determination Bessie demonstrated in her quest to become the first Black female aviator.

Glossary

aviation:

The flying or operating of aircraft.

manicurist:

A person who gives nail treatments and manicures professionally.

commemorative:

Something which acts as a memorial of an event or person.

Questions

1. Draw **four** lines and match each date to the correct event.

1915

1921

1892

1977

Bessie was born.

Bessie got her pilot's licence.

Bessie Coleman Aviation Club was founded.

Bessie went to Burnham Beauty School.

2. Where did Bessie have to go to get her pilot's licence? Tick one.

- Texas
- France
- Chicago
- Oklahoma

3. Look at the section called **Flying Career**.

Find and copy one word which means the same as 'amazing'.

4. Fill in the missing words.

Bessie _____ a place at the Caudron Brothers' School of Aviation in Le Crotoy, France and received her international pilot's _____ on 15th June 1921.

5. Who was Robert Abbot?

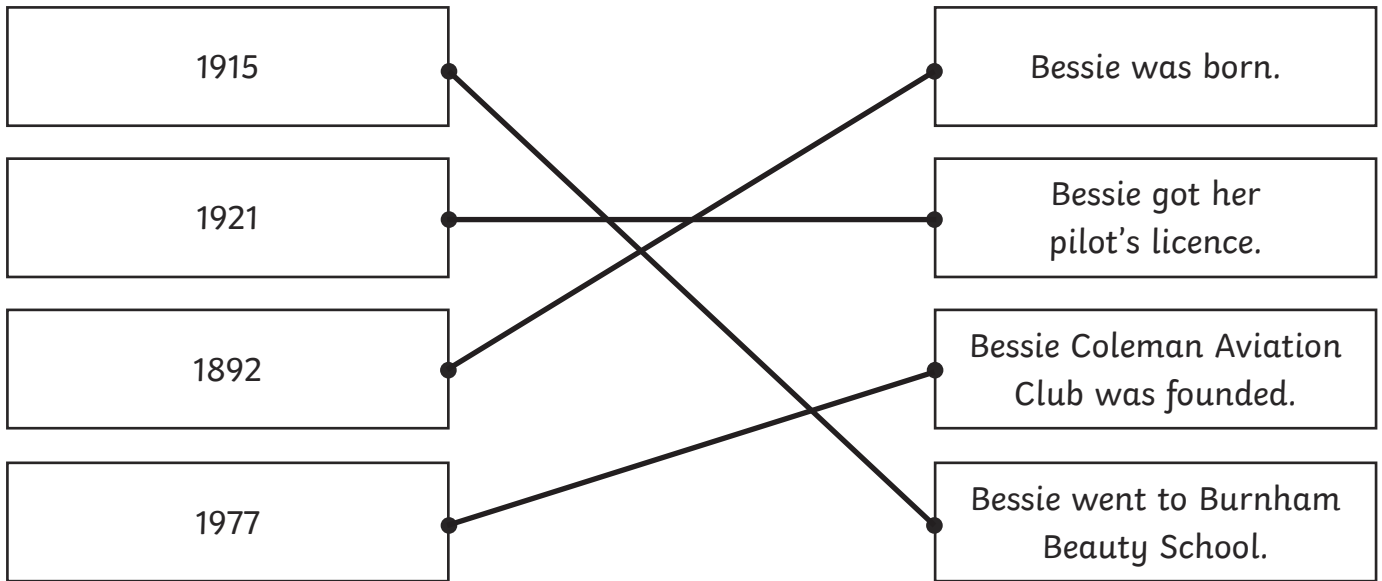
6. **In 1992, Dr Mae Jemison carried a photograph of Bessie with her on her first mission aboard the Space Shuttle Endeavour when she became the first Black woman in space.**
What does this tell you about Bessie's achievements?

7. Summarise the most important things you have learnt about Bessie in 30 words or fewer.

8. How do you think the experiences of female pilots today are different to Bessie's?

Answers

1. Draw **four** lines and match each date to the correct event.



2. Where did Bessie have to go to get her pilot's licence? Tick one.

- Texas
- France**
- Chicago
- Oklahoma

3. Look at the section called **Flying Career**.

Find and copy one word which means the same as 'amazing'.

breathtaking

astonishing

4. Fill in the missing words.

Bessie **secured** a place at the Caudron Brothers' School of Aviation in Le Crotoy, France and received her international pilot's **licence** on 15th June 1921.

5. Who was Robert Abbot?

The editor of the Chicago Defender newspaper.

6. **In 1992, Dr Mae Jemison carried a photograph of Bessie with her on her first mission aboard the Space Shuttle Endeavour when she became the first Black woman in space. What does this tell you about Bessie's achievements?**

Pupils' own responses, such as: This tells me that Bessie's achievements continue to inspire people today. Mae felt so strongly about Bessie's effect on her that she wanted to honour her by taking her photograph into space with her.

7. **Summarise the most important things you have learnt about Bessie in 30 words or fewer.**

Pupils' own responses, such as: Bessie is an inspirational Black woman who was the first to hold a pilot licence. She went to France to follow her dream and returned to perform amazing stunts at airshows.

8. **How do you think the experiences of female pilots today are different to Bessie's?**

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think Bessie's experience would be different in many ways to female pilots today. She faced lots of challenges and setbacks because she was the first woman to try to become a pilot in the USA. Today, women have more equality and opportunities to follow their dreams, even in areas like flying planes which are usually dominated by men.