

Cartooning of the Age of Flight

Activity Type: Hands-On Activity

Grade Level: 6–8

A RIF Guide for Educators

Before we read, let's look at it.

Objective: Students will assume the role of an early 20th-century editorial cartoonist and create an editorial cartoon on some aspect of the pioneering age of aviation.

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 law, how interest rates are raised or lowered).

Summary: In this Hands-on Activity, students assume the role of an editorial cartoonist from the early 20th century. They will review two dozen editorial cartoons published between the years 1903 and 1914. Then, they will create their own editorial cartoon to explore a specific historical era. Additionally, they will write an analysis of their own cartoon, explaining the intended historical context and interpreting the ad for readers.

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

Books:

- Russell Freedman, *The Wright Brothers: How They Invented the Airplane* (New York: Holiday House, 1991).

Archival Sources:

Scrapbooks: January 1902–December 1908

- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05001/?sp=14>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05001/?sp=56>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05001/?sp=76>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05001/?sp=86>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05001/?sp=87>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05001/?sp=89>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05001/?sp=97>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05001/?sp=133>

- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05001/?sp=160>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05001/?sp=213>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05001/?sp=214>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05001/?sp=219>

Scrapbooks: January 1909–December 1909

- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05002/?sp=37>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05002/?sp=84>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05002/?sp=101>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05002/?sp=126>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05002/?sp=198>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05002/?sp=273>

Scrapbooks: January 1910–December 1913

- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05004/?sp=6>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05004/?sp=53>

Scrapbooks: December 1910–March 1914

- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05005/?sp=3>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05005/?sp=4>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05005/?sp=45>
- <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mwright.05005/?sp=80>

During the Activity

Warming Up:

Direct students to complete the Warming Up activity. Consider converting the activity into a classroom discussion, and collecting the student responses on the board for students to read. If possible, post additional Internet memes for the students to evaluate and discuss. Find Internet memes with specific cultural contexts that the students will be familiar with, and ask them to analyze each meme and identify the context of each.

Getting Started:

Have students read the Getting Started section of the Student Edition. After students read, lead the class in a brief discussion of the use of editorial cartoons. Before introducing this topic to students, review the links in the Student Edition and linked here:

- [A Brief History of Political Cartoons](#)
- [The Norman Rockwell Museum, Cartooning: Political](#)
- [Liza Donnelly, "Editorial Cartooning, Then and Now," Medium](#)

Select a handful of examples to discuss. You will want to discuss how these cartoons function within specific historical contexts, and how they use imagery (iconography) to send messages that the public understands within that context.

As students get started, direct them to the following Library of Congress (LOC) tools:

- [Searching the Library of Congress](#): This tutorial walks students through the process of searching the Library of Congress's many sources.
- [Primary Source Analysis Tool](#): This tutorial introduces students to primary sources and provide them tools for reading and analyzing them.

Readings:

Students may read the suggested readings on their own or in pairs of small groups. For students who may need support with 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).
 - When did the Wrights complete their first circle in the air? *September 20, 1904*
 - What contracts did the Wright brothers secure in 1908? *They secured a contract with the U.S. Signal Corp and with a French company.*
 - What happened to Thomas Selfridge on September 17, 1908? *He became the first person killed in the crash of a powered airplane.*
 - What year did Wilbur and Orville establish their own company to manufacture Wright Flyers in Dayton? *1909*
 - What year did Wilbur Wright die? *1912*

Archival Sources:

- [Scrapbooks: January 1902-December 1908](#)
- [Scrapbooks: January-December 1909](#)
- [Scrapbooks: January 1910-December 1913](#)

- [Scrapbooks: December 1910-March 1914](#)

Activity: Drawing an Editorial Cartoon:

As students begin the activity, remind them to review many of the sample cartoons in the scrapbooks linked above. If you feel as though students are struggling to understand this activity and what is expected of them, you might consider selecting three or four cartoons for students to analyze using this [Cartoon Analysis Sheet](#).

Guide students through the following steps:

1. Determine the historical context. In this step, students will select a time period for their cartoon. Encourage them to be as specific as possible.
2. Research the competition. This step will be especially useful for those who have not completed the cartoon analysis activity identified above.
3. Draft your cartoon. Remember that most students will not have strong artistic skills. Encourage these students to focus on using imagery and symbolism to convey their message.
4. Summarize your cartoon. Remind students that this short explanation of their cartoon should serve as a roadmap for those interested in understanding the meaning of the cartoon and its historical context.

After the Activity

Elaborate: Consider having students exchange their cartoons with a partner or as a class. Then, students should draft an analysis of another's cartoon. In this analysis, they should identify the historical context and explain the cartoon, its features, and captions. Once these analyses are written, the respective artists should evaluate the analyses and provide their feedback.

Reflect: Consider the following reflection prompts to use for a class discussion:

- How are early 20th-century editorial cartoons different from cartoons produced today?
- Why are editorial cartoons a more effective medium than just text?
- In what ways are editorial cartoons a less effective medium for conveying complex ideas?
- What did you learn about editorial cartooning in this activity?