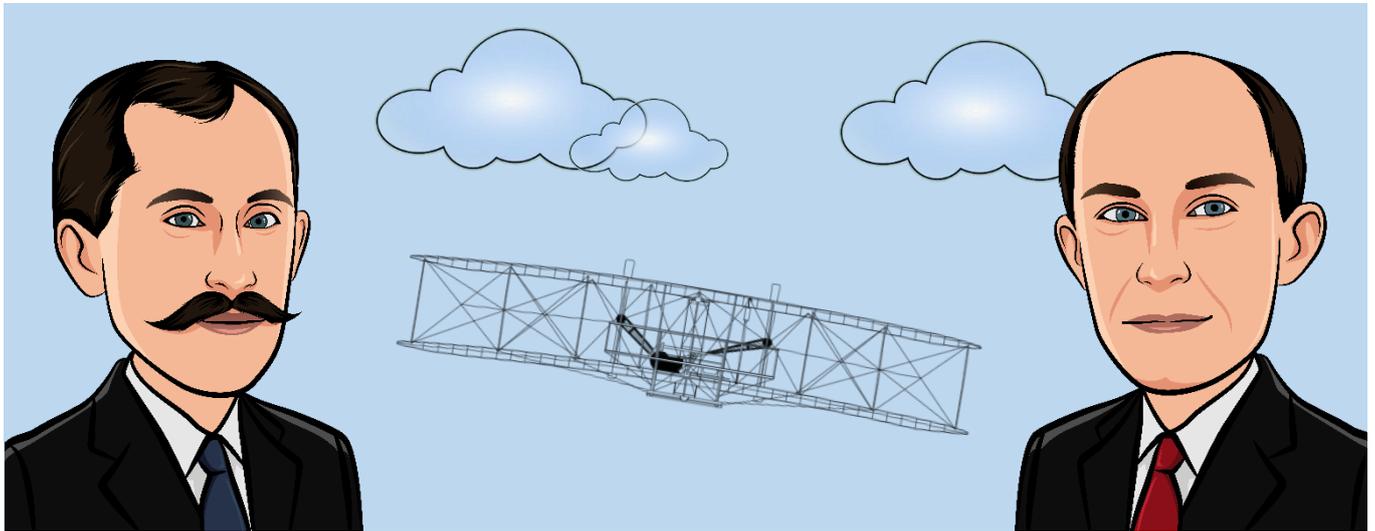


Deepening Understanding

UKS2 Non-fiction Text

The Wright Bros by Laura Curtis



Wilbur and Orville Wright were the first pioneers of aviation and their inventive genius revolutionised transportation around the world forever. In 1903, they successfully achieved the first aeroplane flight and two years later they had developed a fully-working aeroplane. So how did these two brothers rise from ordinary beginnings to becoming two of the most influential brothers in history?

Wilbur (born on 16th April 1867) and Orville (born in 19th August 1871) Wright were raised near Millville, in the state of Indiana, USA. Wilbur and Orville had three other siblings and their father - Milton - was a church bishop, who often went off preaching around the local area. On his return, he would often bring the boys toys and in 1878, he gave his sons a simple yet special gift. Wilbur and Orville were given a toy helicopter based on a design by a famous Frenchman called Alphonse Penaud. The model helicopter was basic, comprising simple materials of cork, bamboo and paper and the blades were powered by a rubber band. Fascinated, the two brothers spent many hours playing with the helicopter and this sparked a life-long love of flying.

The two boys were imaginative, curious children and grew up to be industrious young adults. Having never enjoying his academic studies, in his senior year of high school (in 1889) Orville decided to leave to start his own printing press and he was later joined by Wilbur. At this time, their mother (Susan) tragically died after a lengthy battle with



tuberculosis, however this served to strengthen the bond they had with their sister Katharine. Wilbur and Orville went on to sell a newspaper (named the West Side News) and a few years later - in 1892 - they opened a bike shop. Here they enjoyed fixing and tinkering with bicycles, and building bikes from their own designs. In 1896, they manufactured their own design.

Throughout this time, they were also studious young men. They delved into the world of science and mechanics and showed a keen interest in the work of early attempts at flight. When a German aviator called Otto Lilienthal died in a glider crash, Wilbur and Orville were spurred on to investigate the concept of flight themselves - they were convinced that human flight was possible. Determined to design a successful glider, they travelled to Kitty Hawk, in North Carolina, USA because it was well-known for its strong winds. It was the perfect location to test their early aircrafts.

The first challenge the two brothers had to overcome was to create wings that would be able to sustain an aircraft in flight. Wilbur's observations of birds confirmed his belief that for a flight to be successful a pilot was needed to control the aircraft. Following hours of study, they realised that as birds flew through the air they tilted their wings for balance and control. Wilbur and his brother were determined to recreate this so they developed 'wing-warping' (a system of pulleys and cables to control the wings) and later added a rudder. With this additional design feature and Orville's brilliant skills at mechanics, the two brothers found they had created the perfect aircraft. On 17th December 1903, the Wright brothers successfully flew the first power-driven plane. The pilot was Orville - a skilled and courageous pilot - and he flew the plane for a total of 59 seconds, at a height of 852 feet, which was an extraordinary feat in its time. Orville later quoted, "The airplane stays up because it doesn't have the time to fall."

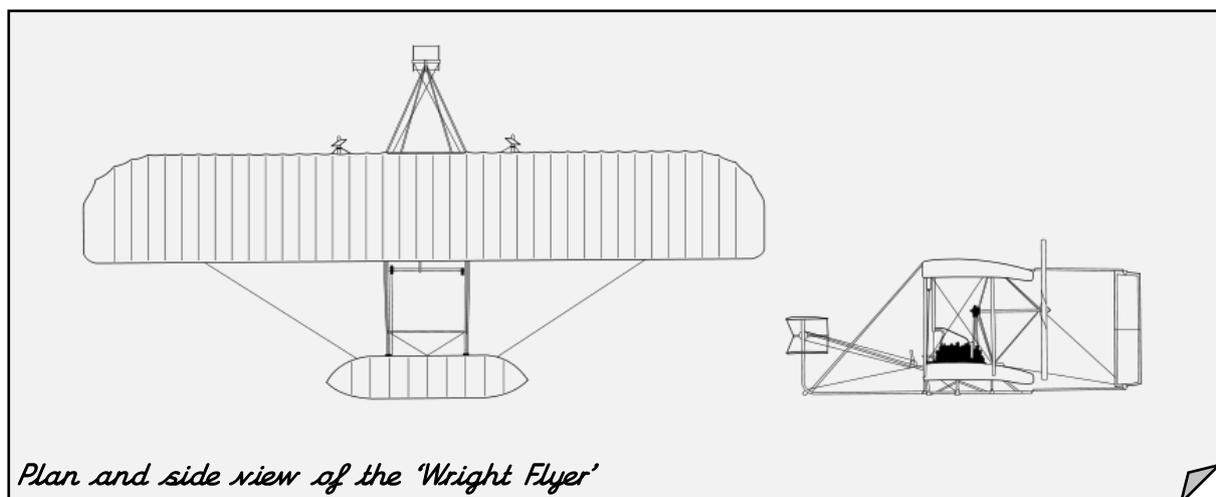
However, not everyone at first fully appreciated the magnitude of this achievement and many were skeptical. Many people simply did not believe that the two brothers had flown at all. Following a number of failed flights, the US government decided to withdraw funding. As a result, Wilbur headed for Europe, hoping to convince the public of his dream for aviation.



In France, the Wright brothers finally found the success and public belief in their ideas. Wilbur, who had travelled to Europe first in 1908, made many public flights with state officials, journalists and statesmen watching amongst the captive audience. In 1909, Orville and his sister Katharine joined Wilbur and they all became huge celebrities. It was not long before their designs were sold all across Europe and later that year they returned to the USA where they became wealthy businessmen through selling their aeroplanes. Wilbur became a popular speaker all around the world and had many links with captains of industry and world governments. Together they built a grand family home in their childhood home town of Dayton. On 25th May 1910, Orville and Wilbur took the only flight they would ever make together and it lasted for a total of just over six minutes.

Unfortunately, Wilbur did not live to enjoy the rewards of his success for long because he sadly died at the relatively young age of 45. Falling ill on a trip, he was diagnosed with typhoid fever and passed away on 30th May at his family home in Dayton, Ohio. Orville, having only really having a passion for the mechanics of flight and not the business side, decided to sell the company in 1915. He spent the next thirty years of his life dedicated to aeronautics. Orville lived to the grand age of 76, passing away in 1948.

Wilbur and Orville Wright will forever be remembered as two men whose technological dreams defined the 20th century. Regarded as the fathers of modern aviation, these two small-town businessmen truly invented a machine that changed the world of travel and communication forever.



Plan and side view of the 'Wright Flyer'

