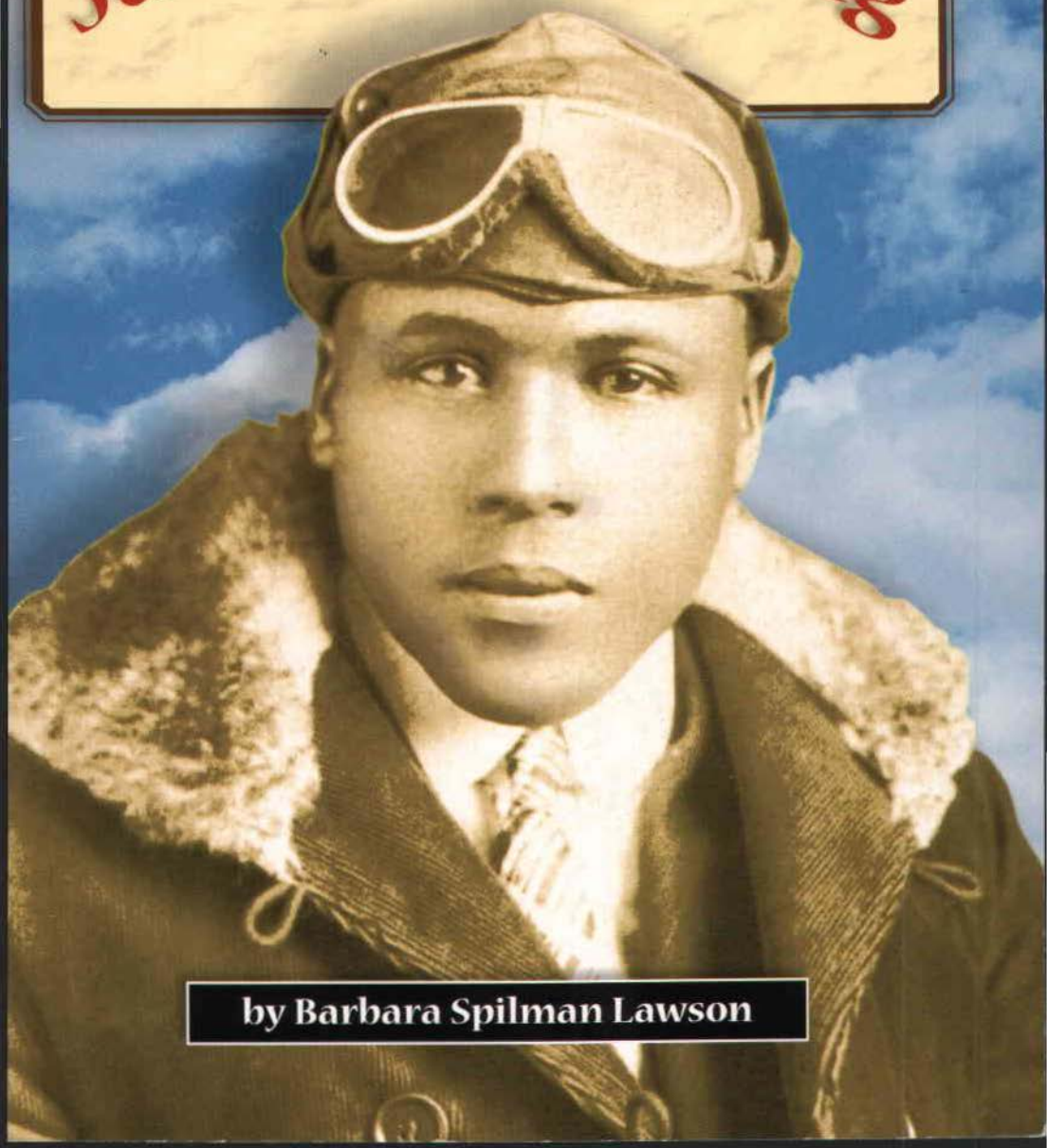


Biography

**Against the Wind:
James H. Banning**



by Barbara Spilman Lawson

Read to Find Out

James Banning overcame hardship to become a pilot. How do you think the author feels about this?

Photo credits

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**The total word count is based on words in the running text and headings only. Numerals and words in captions, labels, diagrams, charts, and sidebars are not included.

STRATEGIES & SKILLS AT A GLANCE Comprehension

- Strategy: Monitor Comprehension
- Skill: Evaluate Author's Perspective

Vocabulary

- applauded, assured, glider, headlines, hoisting, unstable, wingspan

Vocabulary Strategy

- Word Parts: Inflected Ending

CONTENT-AREA VOCABULARY

Words related to airplanes and flying
(see *glossary*)

CONTENT STANDARDS

Social Studies

- History

Word count: 2,029**

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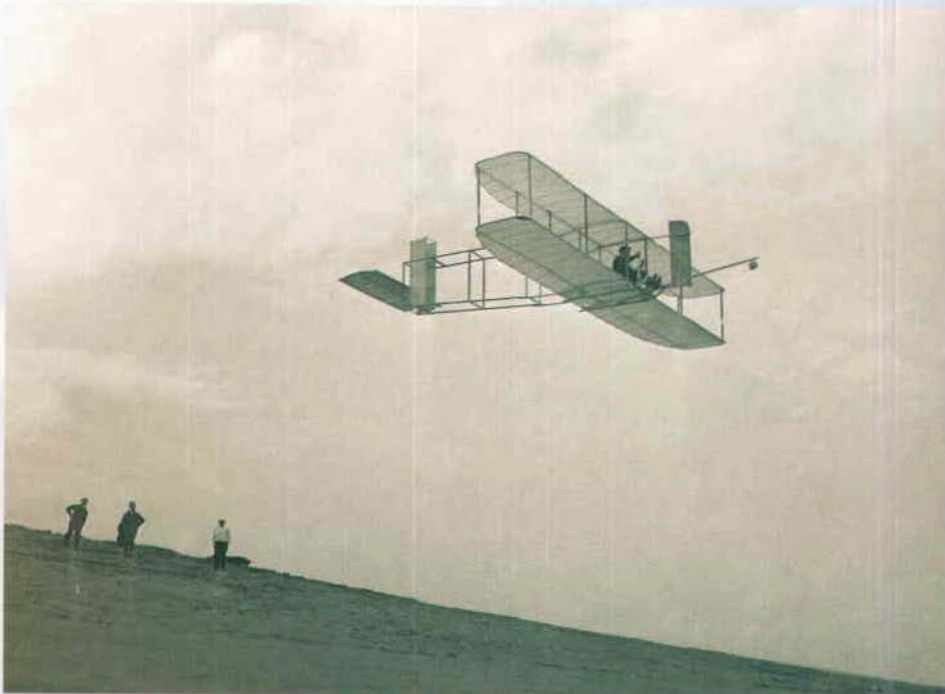
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Introduction



In the late 1800s, people in Europe and the United States began to design and build aircrafts. In Germany in 1891, Otto Lilienthal (LIL-yuhn-tahl) built a glider that could coast through the air without using an engine. Lilienthal was the first man to fly and land safely. But he didn't fly very far.



🕒 In 1903 the Wright Brothers made powered flight possible.



🔗 As flying became more popular, greater numbers of people wanted to become pilots.

In 1903 Wilbur and Orville Wright built an airplane with an engine. They became the first people to fly a power-driven aircraft safely. Flight became safer and more popular after the Wright Brothers' first flight. Many people dreamed of becoming pilots. James Banning was one of them.

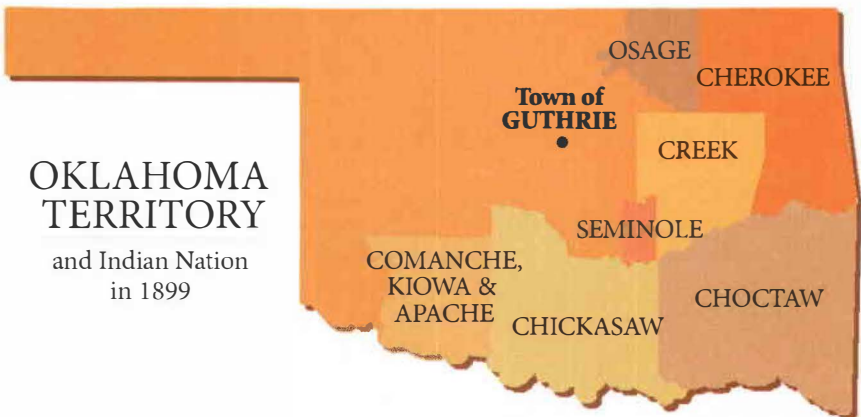
Banning knew that learning to fly was not going to be easy for him because of racial **segregation**. Blacks and whites usually attended separate schools, ate in separate restaurants, and drank from separate water fountains. There were many people who did not think African Americans should have the opportunity to be pilots. But James Banning was determined.

Chapter 1

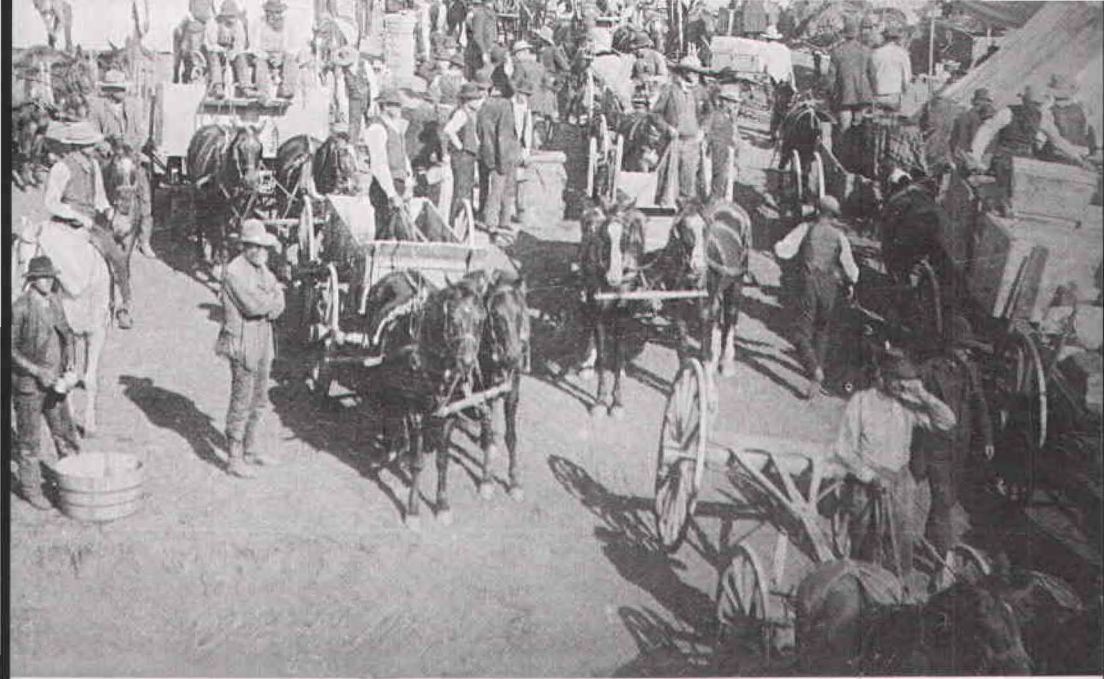
The Early Years

James Banning was born in the **territory** of Oklahoma in 1899. His parents, like many other formerly enslaved people, had moved there after the Civil War. The Homestead Act allowed them to claim 160 acres of land to farm. They hoped to have better lives far from where they had worked as captives.

There were no public schools near the Bannings' home, so the family built a school on its land. The Banning children studied there. Children from other farms also attended school on the Banning farm.



📍 In 1899 Oklahoma was a territory dotted with frontier towns, including Guthrie.



📍 After the Homestead Act was passed, James Banning's parents, like many others, made new lives for themselves.

James was a good student. He did well in math and enjoyed reading, especially books on cars and how they worked. When he wasn't in class, James liked working on the family's farm equipment. He also liked repairing the family car.

In 1916 James entered high school in the town of Guthrie. He continued working on machines. While James was in high school, World War I broke out in Europe. In 1917 the United States joined forces with many countries in a war against Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey. Many young Americans were sent overseas to fight in the war.

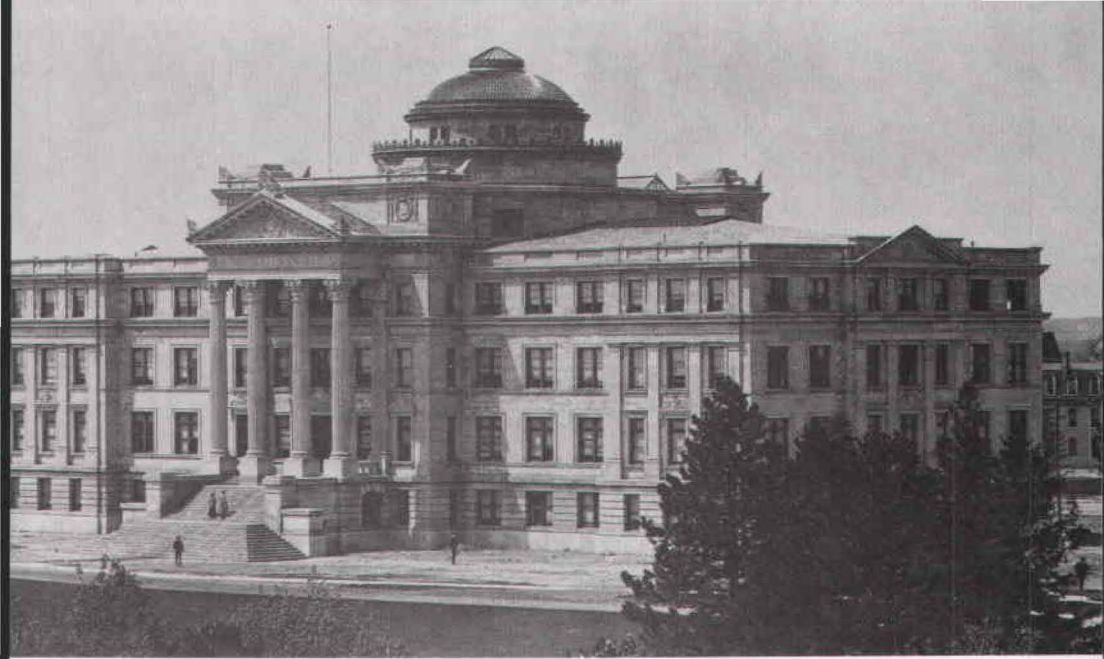
James Continues His Education

World War I was the first time that airplanes were used in combat. The Germans had many airplanes. The United States knew that they would need to build many planes to win the war. The U.S. Army assembled a crew of expert pilots called “flying aces” to help defeat the Germans.

James read about what was happening in Europe. He read the headlines and stories about the flying aces. Maybe his dreams of flying started with these stories. But in those days, he was thinking about his education.

🕒 Eddie Rickenbacker was an American flying ace. In 1930 he was awarded the Medal of Honor.





📍 Iowa State College—now Iowa State University—admitted a few African American students in the early 1900s.

James felt assured that he would do well in college if he had the chance. Most colleges in the United States were for whites only. However, there were some colleges for African Americans and a few colleges that admitted all qualified students.

James worked hard and graduated from high school in 1919. Later that year he was accepted to Iowa State College in Ames, Iowa. James knew that his parents needed him to help on the farm. But he hoped that there would be a way for him to go to college.



An Interest in Airplanes

The Bannings rented their farm to another family and moved with James to Ames, Iowa. James studied hard in college. To make money he repaired cars in his parents' garage. Despite this busy schedule, James set out to learn all he could about airplanes.

Iowa is a state with flat land and wide, open spaces. It is a perfect place for flying. Iowa county fairs featured **barnstormers**, pilots and performers who did tricks in the air. Sometimes many pilots performed together as an "air circus." People applauded as the planes spun, looped, and made daring climbs straight up into the sky.

In 1920 James went to an air circus. Stanley M. Doyle, a World War I pilot, was one of the flyers that day. James paid five dollars to take a 45-minute ride with Doyle. When the ride was over, James knew that he wanted to become a pilot.

Air Circuses of the 1920s



The air circus, also called the flying circus, was popular after World War I. People were looking for excitement and fun, and an air circus offered both. Pilots performed dives, barrel rolls, and loop-the-loops. Some flew upside down to get the audience to applaud. Other barnstormers danced on the wings of flying planes while wearing fancy costumes. Some jumped from one plane to another while in midair. Performing in an air circus was a way for some pilots to make a living. Even Charles Lindbergh, one of America's most famous pilots, got his start as a barnstormer.



📍 The Locklear Flying Circus was just one of many air circuses that performed in the United States.

Chapter 2

The Pilot Years



His auto-repair business was so successful that James didn't have enough time to study. He needed the money so he dropped out of college. In 1921 he officially opened "J. H. Banning's Auto Repair."

James didn't give up his dream of becoming a pilot. He knew that there were several African American pilots. One was Eugene Bullard, an African American who flew for the French during World War I. The other was Bessie Coleman, who had earned her license in Europe.



➤ Eugene Bullard became a pilot in the French army.

James Learns to Fly

James decided it was time to take flying lessons. However, no flight school would accept African American students. James did not let that stop him. In 1924 he met World War I flying ace Raymond C. Fisher. Fisher agreed to give James private lessons. James was thrilled to get the chance to fly.

All Shook Up

In 1932 the *Pittsburgh Courier* interviewed James Banning about his pilot training. James recalled: "...I would shiver and shake through a half-hour dual instruction.... I need not mention the added shiverability provided by the shaking, trembling ...old plane in which we trained."



After learning all about flying from Raymond C. Fisher, James (shown above) was ready to take off.



- 📍 James Banning and his plane, *Miss Ames*, performed in many events around the country. No matter the city, the audiences were sure to applaud.

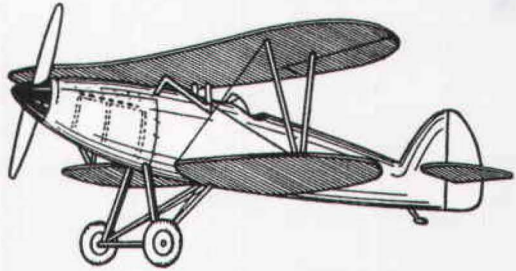
In 1926 James Banning became the first African American pilot licensed in the United States. He had saved enough money to buy a plane. The plane he purchased was a Hummingbird. James decided to call his plane *Miss Ames* in honor of Ames, Iowa. James became a barnstormer. He performed all over the country.

Stormy Weather

Marie Coker once flew with James on a stormy day. She said, "Banning was flying the plane...we didn't know if we were going to hit a mountain or not. But...we came right down in the Riverside area and landed in an orange grove."

A Closer Look at a Biplane

One of the most famous biplanes was the Stearman. It had two sets of wings, with a wingspan of over 32 ft (9.8 m). The upper set of wings overlapped the lower set. Struts, or poles, connected the two sets. The plane also had an open cockpit. This means there was no roof over the pilot's head. Some people still restore and fly Stearmans.



In 1929 James became the chief pilot of the Bessie Coleman Aero Club. This was a flying school for African Americans named in honor of the first African American female pilot in the United States. The club was made up of talented African American pilots. James Banning was the most experienced pilot of them all.

In the early years, pilots did not have special equipment to guide them through bad weather. They had to fly by **dead reckoning**. This means they figured out where they were based on **landmarks** on the ground, how long they'd been in the air, and how fast they were flying.

The Flying Hobos

In 1929 the **Great Depression** hit the nation. It was during this difficult time that James Banning decided to do something he'd wanted to do for a long time. He decided to become the first African American pilot to fly across the country.

James needed another plane for this trip. He found one that had been used in World War I. He bought it for \$450. James realized he could not make the trip on his own, however. He needed a top-notch **mechanic** to go with him. Mechanic Thomas C. Allen agreed to fly with James.

Getting money for such a record-breaking trip was hard during the Depression. None of their friends or family members had enough money to help James and Thomas. And companies did not want to **sponsor** them.

But James and Thomas had a plan. They would make the trip without money from sponsors. On September 18, 1932, they flew from Los Angeles. They had just \$100 with them. They called themselves the "Flying Hobos."



📌 James Banning and Thomas C. Allen were determined to become the first African American men to fly across the United States.

James and Thomas did not make one long flight to New York. The plane would not have been able to do that. Instead they flew a short distance and then landed. They stayed with African American families along the way. With this plan, they would not have to be concerned about planning for hotels or restaurants.

Word spread about the Flying Hobos. People rushed to meet them when they landed in their towns. Seeing the two men attempting such a feat during the Great Depression gave people much-needed joy and hope.

Chapter 3

Aviation Hero

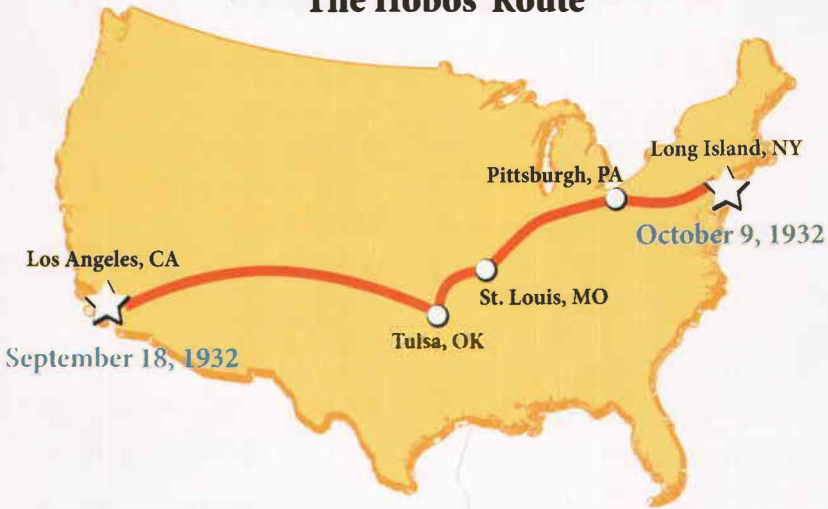
The Flying Hobos continued to hop across the country. Newspapers reported the Hobos' adventures as they traveled from the West to the East.

As James and Thomas reached St. Louis, Missouri, the plane's engine began to feel unstable. The Flying Hobos landed their plane. Students from a nearby school helped James and Thomas take apart the engine and locate the trouble. The **engine valves** needed replacing. An instructor from the school brought new valves. Soon the Hobos were back in the air.



🔗 Banning and Allen replaced the engine valves in their plane with engine valves from a 1928 Nash automobile. Both car and plane used the same kind of valves!

The Hobos' Route



Success!

In Pittsburgh, James and Thomas met Robert Vann. Vann was campaigning for presidential candidate Franklin D. Roosevelt. Vann came up with an idea to help the campaign as well as the two **aviators**. He gave James thousands of **campaign flyers**. James dropped the flyers from his plane between Pittsburgh and New York. In return, Vann paid for the Hobos' trip home.

On Sunday, October 9, 1932, James and Thomas landed on Long Island. Many people were waiting to congratulate them. It had taken the Flying Hobos three weeks to cross the country. The actual time in the air was less than 42 hours. James and Thomas were greeted as heroes in New York City.

Famous African American Aviators

In the early 1900s other African Americans became pilots. These men and women paved the way for those who came after them.



Bessie Coleman was the first African American woman pilot in the United States. Bessie earned her pilot's license in France in 1921. Later she learned how to perform flying tricks and became a popular barnstormer. People loved to watch Bessie hoisting herself into her plane and then taking off into the sky. She performed many exciting stunts in the air. Bessie was an inspiration to other pilots.





William J. Powell became a pilot in the 1920s. He served in a segregated unit during World War I. William admired Bessie Coleman. He helped found the Bessie Coleman Aero Club in Los Angeles, California, in 1929.



The Tuskegee Airmen flew for the United States during World War II. These were the first African American pilots to fly for the United States military. Before the first men entered the program, African Americans had been kept out of aviation training programs in the military.

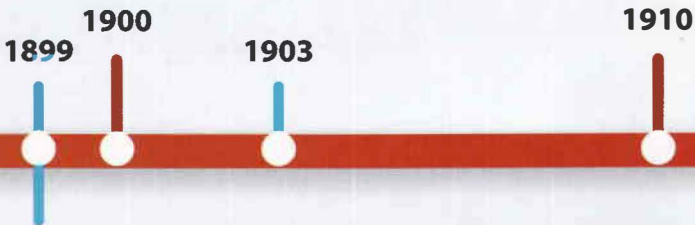
Conclusion



On February 5, 1933, James Banning attended an air show in San Diego, California. The head of the show would not give James an airplane to fly. He did not think James was a capable pilot, in spite of his cross-country flight.

James climbed into the back of another pilot's plane to ride along as a passenger. The pilot knew what James had accomplished. He decided to try to impress his passenger. The pilot pulled the plane into a steep climb, but the plane stalled in the air. Then it crashed to the ground. Hundreds of people witnessed the crash. James Banning was rushed to the hospital, but died soon after.

The Wright Brothers
become the first
people to fly



James Banning
is born

James Banning was only 33 years old when he died. Yet we remember him as a kind of pioneer. James showed that **prejudice** could not hold him back. He proved that with determination, education, and courage, people can achieve their dreams.



📌 This illustration was published in a newspaper in 1933. It showed that James Banning's spirit had inspired African American pilots.

Barnstormers fly in the skies

James learns to fly

The Flying Hobos take off from Los Angeles

1917

1920

1924

1926

1930

1932

1933

United States enters World War I

James becomes the first African American pilot licensed in the United States

James dies in a plane accident

Glossary

- aviator** (*AY-vee-ay-tuhr*) a person who flies an airplane (*page 17*)
- barnstormer** (*BAHRN-stawr-mer*) a pilot or performer who does tricks while flying in a plane (*page 8*)
- campaign flyer** (*kam-PAYN FLIGH-uhr*) a small piece of paper that advertises a candidate who is running for office (*page 17*)
- dead reckoning** (*DED REK-uh-ning*) finding the position of an aircraft based on landmarks, time in the air, and speed (*page 13*)
- engine valve** (*EN-juhn VALV*) a part in an engine that controls the flow of liquid or gas (*page 16*)
- flying ace** (*FLIGH-ing AYS*) a skilled pilot, especially during World War I (*page 6*)
- Great Depression** (*GRAYT di-PRE-shuhn*) a period in American history when business went into a huge slump. The Great Depression lasted from 1929 to about 1939. (*page 14*)
- landmark** (*LAND-mahrk*) an object that marks a place (*page 13*)
- mechanic** (*mi-KA-nik*) a person who is skilled in repairing and operating machines (*page 14*)
- prejudice** (*PRE-juh-duhs*) hatred or unfair treatment of a particular group based on race or religion (*page 21*)
- segregation** (*seg-ri-GAY-shun*) the practice of setting one racial group apart from another (*page 3*)
- sponsor** (*SPON-suhr*) to pay or put up money for another person's project (*page 14*)
- territory** (*TER-uh-tawr-ee*) an area of the United States that is not part of a state (*page 4*)

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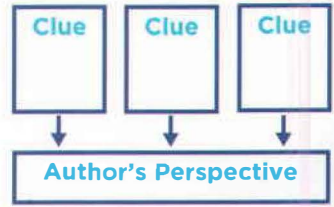
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Comprehension Check

Summarize

Use an Author's Perspective chart to record clues from the book.

Then use those clues to tell the author's perspective.



Think and Compare

1. Look back through the book. How do you think the book's author feels about James Banning's achievements? What makes you think so? **(Evaluate Author's Perspective)**
2. Which do you think you would have enjoyed more—piloting a plane across country or working as a barnstormer? Explain. **(Analyze)**
3. Why is it important for people to read about the difficulties that early African American pilots faced? **(Evaluate)**

Literacy Activities



Interview James Banning

If you had the chance to interview James Banning after his cross-country flight, what would you ask him? Write four questions you would ask.



On Eagles' Wings

Research another famous pilot or aviation hero, such as Charles Lindbergh, Amelia Earhart, or Bessie Coleman. Make a poster about this person's life. You can include photos, a time line, and any other details you would like.

Against the Wind: James H. Banning

What's a barnstormer? What's a flying ace? And who were the Flying Hobos?



4.6 Week 4

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