

# HISTORY MAKERS THE WRIGHT BROTHERS

They turned the dream of human flight into reality.



## AS YOU READ, THINK ABOUT:

What might life be like without planes?

A cold wind whipped across a beach in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

It was December 17, 1903. Orville Wright took off in a small airplane called the *Wright Flyer*. He had built it with his older brother Wilbur.

Orville's flight lasted only 12 seconds, but it was historic. For the first time, a pilot had flown an engine-powered plane.

"No one had ever done anything like that," says Beth Hudick of the Wright Brothers National Memorial. "It was absolutely a moment that changed history."

## WORDS TO KNOW

**aviation** *noun*. the business or practice of flying aircraft

**pioneers** *noun, plural*. people who begin or take part in the creation of something new

The Wright brothers had set a course for **aviation** that few could have imagined.

## Curious Minds

Wilbur was born in 1867, four years before Orville. Growing up in Dayton, Ohio, they enjoyed playing with a small helicopter-like toy.

Fascinated, they tried to make their own.

That curiosity grew as they became adults. At the time, people had flown mainly in hot-air balloons and gliders. In 1899, Orville and Wilbur set out

to build a piloted aircraft powered by an engine.

The brothers spent countless hours experimenting with different aircraft designs. They

had several problems to solve. The pair had to figure out how to power the aircraft and lift it off the ground. They also had to determine how to control the plane once it was in the air.

## First to Fly

In 1903, the brothers finished the *Wright Flyer*. It had wooden propellers and two long wings

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Illustrations by Beart Pelemaci/Shutterstock.com (background, SSP), via Getty Images (Gilder); Underwood & Underwood/Corbis via Getty Images (Wright brothers)

covered in fabric. It also had a small gasoline-powered engine.

After their first successful flights over Kitty Hawk, the Wrights worked to improve their design. In 1905, Wilbur flew 24 miles in 39 minutes in a new plane.

Despite the brothers' successes, many people refused to believe that

humans could fly. But over time, the Wrights showed the world their skills. People then began to give the brothers the credit they deserved.

"They proved everybody wrong," Hudick explains. "This is a story about people who didn't accept that something was impossible."

## Up, Up, and Away

Wilbur died in 1912. Orville lived another 36 years. It was long enough for him to see how his inventions had inspired others to build bigger and better aircraft.

Today, it's hard to imagine a world without planes. Thanks to these **pioneers**, we don't have to.

"They achieved the dream of flight," Hudick says. "They inspired a lot of other people to dream."

—by Alicia Green

The brothers often practiced in a glider without an engine.

Orville (left) and Wilbur Wright



# TAKING FLIGHT

Here's a look at the day the Wright brothers made history.

December 17, 1903: Kitty Hawk, North Carolina

