

American History Activators

World War I through 1950

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Introduction

Purpose

These simple-to-use Activators supplement your U.S. history classes and immerse your students in “living history” situations. Students get up from their desks, move around in different classroom configurations, and find themselves drawn into history that becomes compellingly real. For a variety of reasons, students seem to function better and learn more when actively engaged. American History Activators provide brief, clever, and exciting experiences for your students.

What Are Activators?

Activators possess three common elements, which embody a philosophical foundation.

1. Activators are simple and brief and require little background reading or preparation. Most Activators take one to two class periods.
2. Duplication requirements are minimal. Brief essays read and visual schematics projected can provide all the background information students need.
3. Activators involve most, if not all, of your students, be they of advanced, average, or low ability or of limited English fluency.

Special Lessons

American History Activators provide experiences that shape students' historical perceptions and positively enhance their understanding of past, current, and future events. As you introduce the units to your students, help them to understand that we re-create history because doing so has an inherent value.

- **Be Prepared.** Be sure to read the **Setup, Directions,** and **Lesson Plan** options thoroughly before introducing the Activator to your students. Enlist students' help in setting the scene within the classroom.
- **Reinforce Student Response.** During the action of an Activator, your students are involved in issues and events. When students make personal comments, either in class or during the **Debriefing**, praise them for their astute remarks. Your reinforcement of their experiences emphasizes for all students that history is real because it touches them. Above all, express your pleasure that students are so involved.



Teaching tip

Every student in your class will be standing, walking, marching, crawling, lying down, negotiating, plotting, and perhaps even “flying” as participants at crucial turning points in the development of our country.



Teaching tip

An Activator provides memorable experiences that your students will retain long after other school events fade.

Lesson Plan

Overview

This Activator puts your students in the cockpit of the *Spirit of St. Louis* as it soars over the Atlantic Ocean en route to Paris in late May 1927. Piloted by the “Lone Eagle,” Charles Augustus Lindbergh, the small plane and its soon-to-be-famous pilot will make history, generate an incredible outpouring of hero worship, and at the same time, launch the modern air age. No event stirred 20th-century Americans like Lindy’s flight, and your students will be a part of it.

Setup

1. **Duplication:** Consider duplicating the **Background Essay** and the **Postscript**, although you may choose to use them to convey the information to students in a brief oral presentation. Also duplicate **Acting Out Lindy’s Flight** to be used just before takeoff and **Narration** if you opt to use student narrators.
2. **Schematic, props, costumes:** Study the **Schematic** carefully. Find and bring to your classroom any props and costumes that will help create the settings of Lindy’s flight. Your students can help find costume pieces—goggles and swim caps—and bring them in.
3. **Roles:** In this activator you fill no special roles because everyone is Lindbergh. All students vicariously experience the flight together. To encourage students to really immerse themselves in the Lindbergh persona, have a Lindbergh look-alike contest. Award classroom dollars or points for winners. Show some pictures of Lindbergh a day or two before the Activator to inspire the search for an authentic aviator’s cap and goggles.
4. **Narrator(s):** Decide whether you or one or more students will act as the narrator(s).
5. **Flourishes:** Display pictures of Lindbergh’s flight on the screen during the activator. Recommended: *The Pathfinders* (Epic of Flight Series) Time-Life Books, 1980, pages 51–107.

Teaching tip

This flourish, requiring some extra time, could become a sight-and-sound experience, especially if you play an audio recording of an airplane engine.



Directions

1. Hand out the **Background Essay** either the day before the Activator as class homework or pass it out at the beginning of the Activator period. If you have given it as homework, conduct an informal discussion of the main points brought out in the essay. If you are passing it out now,

you may wish to read the essay aloud to the students as they read along with you, pausing to explain the main points. (Whether or not to use this latter choice is, of course, determined by your students' age/abilities.)

2. Now have students move desks, tables, and chairs to resemble what is on the **Schematic**. Students should have their caps and goggles ready to put on as they prepare to slide into their chairs. Narrators should be in an inconspicuous place, preferably behind the students.
3. Before the narrators begin to read, go over **Acting Out Lindy's Flight** with students and review how each of these actions will be acted out. Demonstrate or have students demonstrate all of the actions preparatory to the flight.
4. Unlike most Activators in this series, this Activator has just one option—the narrators read, and the pilots react.
5. Before the narration begins, make sure you show the students how to turn their desks over to resemble the cockpit of the Spirit of St. Louis on its flight to Paris. Whatever kind of desk you have—single unit or separate small tables and chairs—both can serve as Lindy's cockpit. Ideally, the small tables can be turned over, and the two farthest legs can be used as the throttles and the tables' undersides can function as foot rests—if the tables are at a 45° angle. The single-unit desk used in most schools has less flexibility, but it will work, even though students are sitting on the floor guiding the "plane," instead of sitting in a chair. But they don't turn the desks over yet—wait!
6. Once all is ready, have the narrators read the **Narration** at a slow pace so that your aviators can act out the required movements and emotions. You can direct or encourage students as needed. Allow your students to improvise.
7. At the end, select one student to be Lindbergh. Have the other pilots converge on him yelling, "Lindbergh! Lindbergh! Lindbergh!" As they do, they should pick him up out of the cockpit and carry him on their shoulders to the front of the room where the image of the real hero is on the screen. At this point, the crowd should return to their planes, except the hero, and you or a designate should read the **Postscript** as students focus on the screen's image. (See Setup #5 for recommended sources from which to find pictures.)



Teaching tip

This rehearsal of reactions will enhance the success of the "flight." Have one or two students model what to do in each requested reaction.



Teaching tip

This is a terrific, emotional closure to the simulated flight.

Images of Gibson Girls and the Flapper

Charles Dana Gibson (Gibson Girl) was a very popular artist and his drawings and illustrations became the signature women of his era. Note the differences in dress, poses, and facial expressions between the Gibson Girls and the flapper.

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1.



2.



3.

Image Source: 1. Cover illustration for *Collier's magazine*, October 30, 1909, by Charles Dana Gibson.

2. *Their First Quarrel*, a 1914 print by Charles Dana Gibson.

3. "Where there's smoke there's fire" Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsca-01589.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Points to Ponder Response Sheet

Focus Question: In this age of crossing boundaries, did the flappers spearhead positive change for the New Women of the 1920s?

1.

Gibson Girl	Flapper

2. **Images of Gibson Girls and the Flapper:** As you compare images of the Gibson Girls and the flapper, reflect on this question: Is there usually a wide gap between adjacent generations of females, especially in appearance and behavior? Why or why not?

3. **Document A:** How would you sum up Ellen Page's appeal to parents about the flapper?

4. **Document B:** After reading the lyrics to the 1920s songs and reading the lines of poems, what kind of "new" woman emerges? Is she merely mischaracterized or is her "wild child" stereotype a perceived reality in the lyrics of both genres?

What words would you lift from the songs and poems to defend your P.O.V. (Point of View)?

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