

# GREATEST STORIES NEVER TOLD PRESENTS

## ON GOLDEN WINGS PROJECT GUIDE— A VISIT TO 1932



### JAMES HERMAN BANNING

#### THE FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN TO FLY ACROSS THE UNITED STATES

*On Golden Wings* is a Living History play that shares the story of one of America's great African American aviation heroes--James Herman Banning. Despite the racial barriers of his time in early 20<sup>th</sup> century America, Banning would see his dream to fly realized through sheer will and determination.

His ingenuity in building his own plane made his dream of becoming the first black aviator to fly across the Continental United States a reality!

But this play is more than just fostering the importance elements of the STEM program – instead it is about overcoming prejudice and not allowing bigotry to determine Banning's trajectory. His dream also required skills in communications, fundraising, marketing, and getting a supportive minority public behind his vision. His story reflects how STEM plays out in the real world at its best.



**The Greatest Stories Never Told**  
***TELL YOUR OWN GREATEST STORY***  
**By Louisa Jaggard and Shari Becker**

In this activity, students will explore concepts and ideas around research, storytelling, and family history by uncovering a great, nonfiction story that needs to be told. They may choose to discover this story by interviewing family members or friends OR conducting research to discover a story that they feel deserves to be shared and celebrated. \*\*\* Each teacher may adapt this lesson to meet curriculum requirements. For example, subject area teachers may want to focus on accomplishments of scientists, technologists, human rights activists, musicians, military heroes, poets, ect. Who are not as well known as others in their field and wo deserve more attention.

**What is a “Greatest Story?”**

For GSNT, “Greatest Stories” have two special elements. 1) Few people have heard the story, and 2) the person the story is about had to overcome serious obstacles to reach their dream.

1. Begin by asking students to engage in a conversation exploring what a “greatest story” means to individuals, to families, and to communities at large. Next, teachers should engage students in a conversation around the idea of “never told.”

Important questions to discuss. (remember, there are no wrong answers to this because stories are very personal)

- Why do stories matter?  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jByHPdR0tjs>
- What are the different ways that different cultures tell stories?  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jByHPdR0tjs>

Other interesting questions to discuss:

- What makes a story a great one?
- What does “never told” mean?
- Is “never told” a secret story?
- If the story was “told”, why is it that most people today do not know about the story?
- Why have some “told” stories not received the national media attention they deserved shortly after they happened or at a later time period?
- What are some reasons historians didn’t record some important never told stories? Who are our historians who write our history books? Why might they not know about these stories?
- Why should untold stories be told? Why should we care about them?

2. Ask students to uncover their own greatest stories or a greatest story in their community. This involves students conducting research through interviews and/or research using valid, credible sources. Please see links below to primary sources and secondary sources.

Where can we find stories never told?

Question: Ask students to list all the ways one might uncover a greatest story. Ask the students to think outside the box on this one.

Here are some examples:

- Stories of historical women and minority heroes are often found in attics, minority newspapers, in old picture albums. The manuscript that Thomas Cox Allen wrote detailing the Banning and his trip was found in a museum attic in the bottom of a torn cardboard box.
- Where else can they find little known stories? Visiting a special place in their town and asking questions about how that place came to be.
- Maybe a family member has a story never told publicly before. Interviewing family members, friends, neighbors, community members often is a great source of little known stories.
- Old newspapers often hold many untold stories—particularly if these stories were written in minority newspapers.

3. Next, once students decide on their story, they can make a list of interview questions or research questions. Teachers can help students formulate a research plan to collect their information. What do they need to know to ultimately tell their “greatest stories”?
4. Now students can make a plan for how they can tell their story. There are many ways to tell a story. Finally, each student will present their “greatest story” to the classroom. They should address whether the story was told or never told and how and why they discovered the story. Greatest stories can be shared in many different ways as there are many ways to tell stories. Students may choose to write, complete a piece of artwork or comic, produce a short video, or they may share the story aloud as that is how so many greatest stories are shared.

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### **SHARING OUR GREATEST STORIES**

Giving students a wider audience will give them the motivation to excel in this project. We encourage teachers to share their students’ work Follow your school’s guidelines in sharing student work. (For example, students may want to use only their first names when posting projects.)

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## Preactivity

Greatest Stories decided to tell Banning's story through videos—the link is below—a book, *Sprouting Wings*; through art; and through the Living History Play *On Golden Wings*. We love that each telling brings something different to the story of Banning's life.

Watch *Lady Liberty*: a Living History video of Banning visiting the Second Baptist Church in Columbus Ohio. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-lq6m1aUcgo>

Share that the Second Baptist Church in Columbus, Ohio, gave Banning five dollars for his trip. That five dollars was greater than any other donation. In 1932, five dollars equaled around 88 dollars today. His flight took place during the Great Depression. How does that influence what you think of the five dollars given?

Questions:

- Why did Banning think it was important to fly across America?
- What did he believe his journey would prove?
- Why did the filmmakers have Banning talk to a young African American child in this video?
- Why tell this story this way?

After watching the play, *On Golden Wings*, students can compare how telling a story as a play versus as a video adds to an understanding of the characters and the context.

Read the book *Sprouting Wings* by Louisa Jaggar and Shari Becker  
Also watch the YouTube video of how this book came to be!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3t2BkgsduUs>

This YouTube video tells how this book's creation came to be and also how the illustrations were done. The beginning focuses on the discovery of the different pieces of Banning's story and how this became a book.

### SUPPLEMENTARY MEDIA LITERACY LESSONS

1. [What's the difference between a fictional and a nonfiction story?](#)
2. [What is the difference between Primary Sources and Secondary Sources?](#)
3. An important part of any research is examining whether a source is credible. Depending on the age of the students, teachers may want to conduct media literacy lessons using age appropriate resources. Some suggestions include:  
[Evaluating Primary Sources](#)  
[Evaluating Resources](#)  
[Evaluating What You Find: The CRAAP Test](#)

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