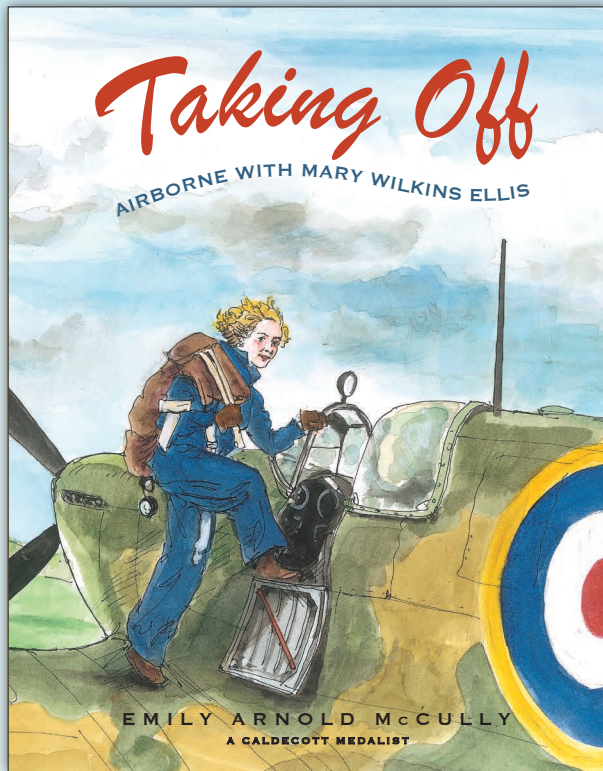


HOLIDAY HOUSE

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



HC: 9780823449668 · e-book: 9780823452781
MARGARET FERGUSON BOOKS

Taking Off: *Airborne with* *Mary Wilkins Ellis*

by Emily Arnold McCully

ABOUT THE BOOK

Witness the true story of how Mary Wilkins Ellis's childhood passion for flying led to an exciting career in the air, written and illustrated by a Caldecott Medalist.

As a child, Mary Wilkins Ellis always longed to fly. In 1940, when Germany launched its attacks on her home country of Britain, her dreams were dashed as all civilian flight was banned. However, one day Mary heard a radio appeal for Britons with a pilot's license, which she had obtained at age sixteen before the ban, to join the Royal Air Force. Despite being one of very few female pilots, Mary joined the war effort. Through many accomplishments in the field and lifelong bonds with her colleagues, Mary left a stamp on aviation that continues to inspire today.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Setting is when and where a book takes place. Take a hint from the cover illustration and discuss when this book is set. Look at the end pages. How many types of airplanes do you see? Explain how the end pages further establish the setting. Study each illustration in the book. Point out items that define when the book is set. The text reveals that the book is set in England. Which illustration reveals this?
- Discuss how Mary Wilkins Ellis developed her passion for flying. How was her father supportive of her dreams? Discuss Mary's reaction when she attended the Cobham's Flying Circus. Describe what she saw on her first flight with Mr. Cobham. How was this first flight more than an adventure for Mary?



- Mary began flying lessons at age sixteen. Discuss the skills required before she could pilot a plane. Explain why “calm focus and resourcefulness” were some of the most important skills. Mary never felt fear as she began her plight to fly. Explain how she developed such courage.
- Women pilots weren’t accepted in the Royal Air Force (RAF) during World War II, but Mary wanted desperately to serve her country. What was the purpose of the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA)? How did the ATA give Mary the opportunity to help her country? Why was flying for the ATA so challenging? How was Mary’s courage tested each time she delivered a plan to an RFA field?
- All of the women pilots of the ATA wanted to fly a Spitfire. How was this plane different from other planes they flew? Mary finally got the opportunity to fly a Spitfire. Explain the following: “It was pure freedom, and hers alone” (p. 20).
- How did Mary get the nickname “the fog flyer”? Describe the danger she encountered while flying in bad weather. What were the dangers she faced in good weather? Some of the ATA pilots died in crashes. How did this affect Mary and the other pilots?
- Who was Winston Churchill? How did his words give Mary hope and courage? Explain Mary’s feeling when Churchill announced the war had ended. How did Mary’s work as an ATA pilot lead to a career after the war? In retirement, Mary loved racing cars. How was this hobby similar to flying planes?
- The illustrations were created using pen and ink and watercolor. Note the many shades of color used to create the clouds and the landscapes that Mary saw from the cockpit of the plane she was flying. How does pen and ink give definition to the illustrations?
- Read the Author’s Note at the end of the book. Discuss the words of the editor of *Aeroplane* (p. 36). How was his comment degrading to women? Explain how Mary and the other women pilots proved him wrong. Mary knew that she was “born to change history.” Plot her course in the history books.

Guide created by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Emily Arnold McCully has illustrated many books for children including *1,2,3, Pull: An I Like to Read® Book*, *3,2,1, Go: An I Like to Read® Book*, *Little Ducks Go: An I Like to Read® Book* available in Spanish as *Los patitos pasean*, *Ballerina Swan*, *Caroline’s Comet*, *Kate’s Light* by Elizabeth Spires, and *Taking off: Airborne with Mary Wilkins Ellis*. She lives in Austerlitz, New York. Visit her at EmilyArnoldMcCully.com.

