A Teacher's Guide to

Soar, Elinor!

Written by Tami Lewis Brown
Illustrated By François Roca

Praise for Soar, Elinor!

Junior Library Guild Selection 2010

Story Summary

In 1917, six-year-old Elinor Smith took her first ride in an airplane. Her dedication and passion for flight led her to earn a pilot's license at the age of 17, making her America's youngest pilot ever, male or female. This is the true story of how Elinor broke records and soared into a nation's heart.

About the Author

TAMI LEWIS BROWN holds an MFA in Writing for Children from Vermont College. She has been a lawyer, and more recently, writer-in-residence and librarian at The Sheridan School in Washington, D.C. Elinor Smith's story, which later became Soar, Elinor! inspired Tami to become a pilot and a lawyer. "Everyone in my family flew. Each time someone told me, 'It's a man's world,' I thought of Elinor's unquenchable drive to be herself and live her dreams. Where others built barriers, Elinor saw nothing but wide open horizons."

As part of her research to write Soar, Elinor!, Tami and her ten-year-old son flew loops and spins in an antique Waco ZPF-7, similar to the plane Elinor flew.

Tami Lewis Brown grew up in Kentucky and attended Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. Now she lives in one of the oldest houses in Washington, D.C. Visit www.tamilewisbrown.com to learn more about Tami and her work.

About the Illustrator

FRANÇOIS ROCA has illustrated over 30 books for children, including *The Yellow Train*, by Fred Bernard; Katherine Patterson's *The Light of the World: The Life of Jesus for Children*; *Twenty-One Elephants and Still Standing*, by April Jones Prince; and *Muhammad Ali: Champion of the World*, by Jonah Winter. He lives in Paris, France.

PRE-READING

Have You Ever?

Ask students if they have ever done something they were not supposed to do. What were their reasons for doing it? What was the outcome? If given the chance, would they do this thing again?

Encourage students to come up with situations that could potentially yield both positive and negative outcomes. Possible scenarios might include defending someone who is being teased, helping a friend cheat on a test, or trying out for a new sport. Explain what it means to "weigh the risks," and let students discuss how they would make a decision in each situation.

- *Understand the relationship between choices and consequences.*

Get a Clue!

Share the photo (on the following page) with your students. Without giving away any information, ask students to study the photo and make predictions about what they may hear in the story. Using a chart like the one below, record the details from the photo and students' own background knowledge that they used to infer the story's topic.

Prediction:	**Picture Clues:**	**Background Knowledge:**	**Was the prediction accurate?**
I think the book will be about Amelia Earhart.	A lady is standing next to a plane.	I read that Amelia Earhart was a famous pilot.	No—this is Elinor Smith!
I think this story takes place a long time ago.	The woman in the photo is wearing old-fashioned clothes.	When I went on an airplane, the pilots were not wearing this kind of uniform.	Yes! Elinor's famous flight was on October 21, 1928.

- *Use prior knowledge to interpret pictures.*
- *Use pictures to make predictions about content in stories and informational text.*
- *Make, confirm, or revise predictions.*

Permission for educational use of photo granted by Elinor Smith.

VOCABULARY

Your students may be unfamiliar with the following terms:

soar	flimsy	rickety	vaudeville showman	gunned	deter
solo	knickers	hesitated	claimed	flapper	swaggering
grumbling	pillars	illegal	route	calculated	tide tables
nimble	bridge footings	skimming	slalom course	scanning for hazards	huddled
sturdy	tapestry	newsreel	dangled	lapped	nudge

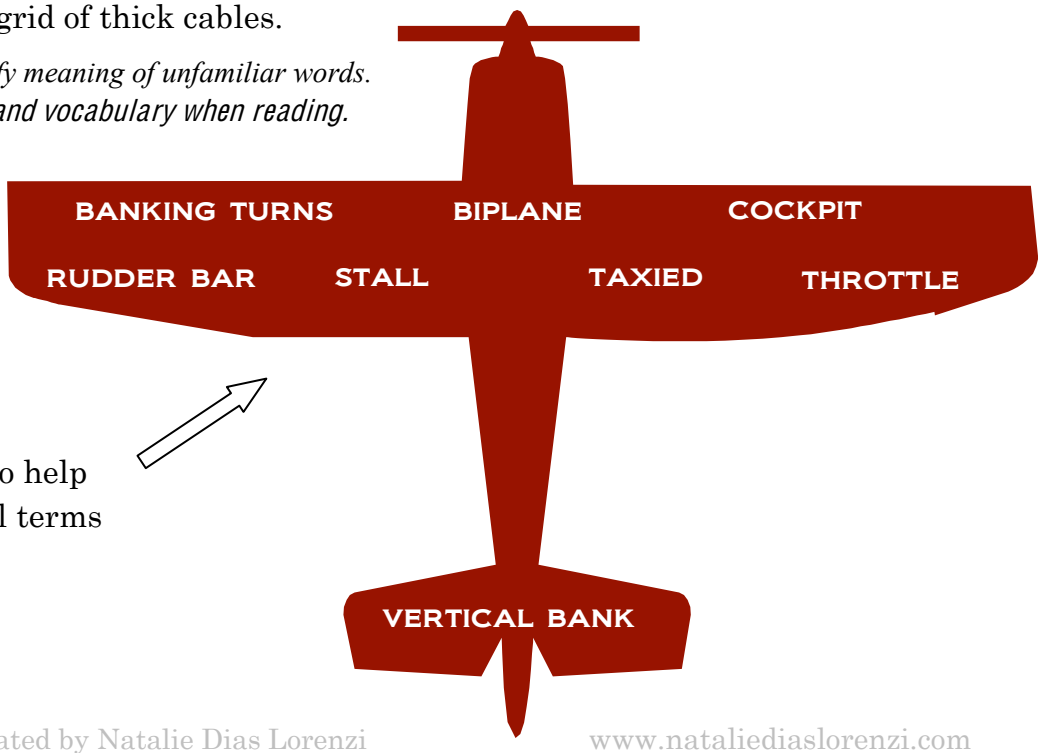
Encourage students to use picture and context clues to infer meaning. Choose excerpts from the story (such as the ones below) and let students highlight new terms and underline clues that help decode meaning (see examples below):

1. She practiced takeoffs and landings. Pilots call them touch and goes. She landed her plane, tapped the ground for a moment, then slammed the throttle to the wall and climbed back into the sky.

2. Flying under bridges was also illegal. The government could take her license away, and flying was her life.

3. Just ahead, the Manhattan Bridge hovered before her. It seemed to float above the water from a grid of thick cables.

- *Use context to clarify meaning of unfamiliar words.*
- *Use pictures to expand vocabulary when reading.*



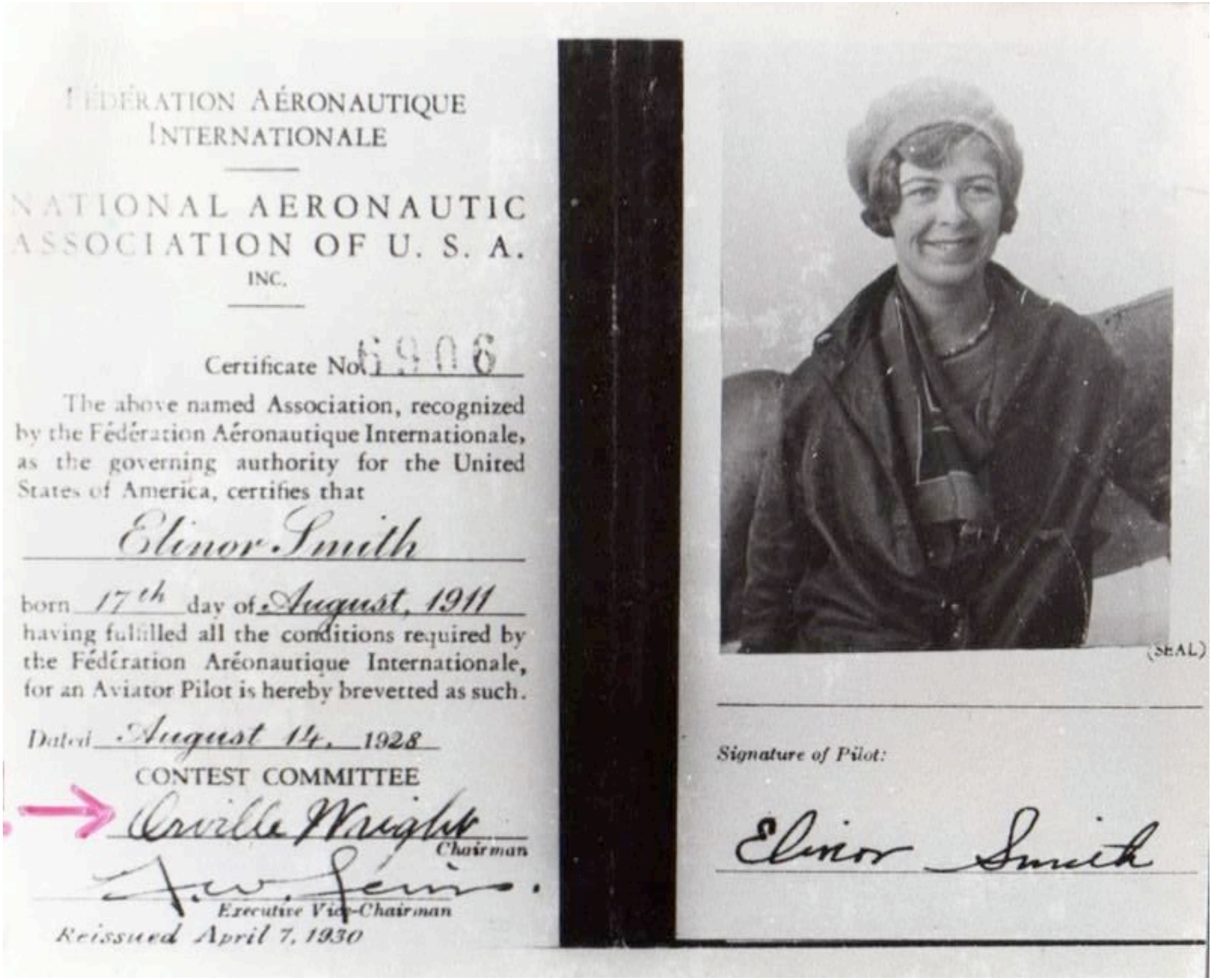
Context clues can also help decipher aeronautical terms found in the story.

Discussion Questions

1. What first sparked Elinor's love of flying? (*knowledge*)
2. What stood in the way of Elinor's dream? What helped her to achieve her dream? (*comprehension*)
3. Look at the photo of Elinor's pilot's license (next page). Look for the red arrow next to Orville Wright's signature. Research to find out about Orville Wright. Why would he have issued Elinor Smith's license? (*application*)
4. What did Elinor wear on her flight under the bridges of New York City? Why did she choose these items? What does this say about her confidence that day? (*analysis*)
5. Make a list of the pros and cons of Elinor's famous flight. Are there more pros or more cons? Do you think Elinor made a similar list (either on paper or in her mind)? Did Elinor make the right decision to go through with the flight? Why or why not? (*synthesis*)
6. According to www.dictionary.com, there are two meanings of the word *flapper* that could be applied to Elinor:

> 1. a young woman, esp. one who, during the 1920s, behaved and dressed in a boldly unconventional manner.
>
> 2. a young bird just learning to fly.

Why did some newspapers call Elinor the "flying flapper"? Do you think she would have liked that nickname? Was it appropriate? Why or why not? (*evaluation*)



FÉDÉRATION AÉRONAUTIQUE
INTERNATIONALE

NATIONAL AERONAUTIC
ASSOCIATION OF U. S. A.
INC.

Certificate No. 6906

The above named Association, recognized by the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale, as the governing authority for the United States of America, certifies that

Elinor Smith

born 17th day of August, 1911
having fulfilled all the conditions required by the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale, for an Aviator Pilot is hereby brevetted as such.

Dated August 14, 1928

CONTEST COMMITTEE

Orville Wright
Chairman

Executive Vice-Chairman

Reissued April 7, 1930

(SEAL)

Signature of Pilot:

Elinor Smith

Permission for educational use of photo granted by Elinor Smith.

Teacher's Guide created by Natalie Dias Lorenzi www.nataliediaslorenzi.com

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Born to Soar

The first page of *Soar, Elinor!* reads:

In 1917, some girls dressed their dolls.
They played house and hopscotch,
jump rope and jacks.
But one little girl wanted more.
Elinor Smith was born to soar.

Using the above as an example, let students express their dreams for the future by writing similar poems about themselves.

In _____, some _____ _____.

They played _____ and _____,

_____ and _____.

But one little _____ wanted more.

_____ _____ was born to _____.

- *Read poems with fluency and expression.*
- *Write effective poems.*

Read All about it!

Have students imagine that they were in New York City on October 21, 1928 as Elinor flew under the Manhattan Bridge. Students can either use paper and pencil or a word processing newsletter template to write an eyewitness newspaper story about the event.

Permission for educational use of photo granted by Elinor Smith.

Steps:

1. Come up with a newspaper name and a catchy headline.
2. Make up a volume number for your newspaper and date it October 21, 1928.
3. Jot down the facts that you will include in the article (place names, famous people, Elinor's route, etc.).
4. Write the article. Remember to include who, what, when, where, why and how.
5. For paper and pencil versions of the project, copy the photo above to use in the articles. For word processing newsletter templates, use Snagit or another screen capture program to insert the photo. Create a caption to go with the photo.

Let students share their articles. Although they wrote about the same event, the articles will not be the same. Help students analyze the differences in their articles. How did students decide what information to include and what to leave out?

- *Ask and answer who, what, when, where, why, and how questions about what is read.*
- *Use prewriting and planning strategies to organize information before writing.*
- *Organize, evaluate, and condense information for use in writing.*

Flight Log

Most pilots keep a flight log. After each flight, they record things like weather conditions, distance traveled, sights, and how they felt during the flight. Have students write their own flight log entries for each of Elinor's flights in the story, beginning with her first flight at age six. Guide them in using the book's illustrations to infer weather conditions and the sights seen by Elinor from the air.

- *Name characters and tell about the setting of a story.*
- *Identify characters, setting, and important events.*
- *Draw conclusions about character and plot.*

Mapping the Big Apple

Elinor Smith flew under all four bridges in New York City: the Queensboro, the Williamsburg, the Manhattan, and the Brooklyn Bridge. Find these bridges using Google Earth (go to http://earth.google.com/ to download Google Earth 5 for free).

Search for the four bridges and zoom out until you have a view of all of them. Use the ruler icon at the top to measure* the distance between two of the bridges. Now estimate the distances between the other distances. Which two bridges are closest together? What is the total distance from the Queensboro to the Brooklyn Bridge?

*Note: The ruler option only allows measurement in a straight line. Students can measure in smaller increments to follow the path that Elinor would have taken. Students can record each measurement and add them to calculate total distances.

- *Use content-specific tools, software, and simulations.*
- *Use technology to locate, evaluate, and collect information from a variety of sources.*
- *Describe the path of shortest distance between two points on a flat surface.*
- *Analyze and interpret maps that include major physical features.*

Prepare for Take-Off!

Once you've found the four bridges on Google Earth, go to the toolbar and click "Tools," then select "Enter Flight Simulator." From there, you will have two choices of airplanes—a jet or a propeller plane. Click the "Help" button to learn how the flight simulator works. Begin at the Queensboro Bridge and "fly" over the other bridges until you get to the Brooklyn Bridge.

After the flight, students can write about their experience in their "flight journals."

- *Talk about experiences using expanded vocabulary, descriptive words, and paraphrasing.*
- *Write to communicate ideas using descriptive details.*

Spicing Up Writing

Author Tami Brown uses sensory writing to bring Elinor's story to life. Share the following examples and ask students to identify which of the five senses each passage elicits:

"Flimsy as a box kite, the Farman pusher biplane coughed and rumbled across the field."

"Clouds broke and shafts of sunlight bathed the fields in yellow and green."

"To Elinor, the engine's exhaust was a spicy perfume."

"The water glimmered silver and white. Over her shoulder she saw the trees and green fields of Central Park. Sunlight and shadows played among Manhattan's tall buildings."

Let students sit outside and record what they see, hear, smell, feel and taste. Have them write a descriptive paragraph of their experience and share it with others. How did their descriptive details compare with those written by their classmates?

On another day, share examples of simile used in the story, such as the following:

"Starting here, from the south, would be like threading the eye of a needle, even in the little Waco."

"Flimsy as a box kite…"

"She practiced … weaving between ship masts like a skier attacking a slalom course."

Have students revisit their descriptions from the previous activity, and brainstorm a list of similes they could use. Let them choose their favorites to add to their paragraphs. Discuss the affect that sensory description and simile have on their writing.

- *Identify simile.*
- *Identify sensory words.*
- *Write effective narratives, poems, and explanations utilizing elements of style, including word choice.*

A Caption is Worth a Thousand Words

Flying under bridges wasn't Elinor's only aviation feat. She also broke endurance records! Brainstorm a list of non-fiction text features with students (including title, photographs, captions, headings, etc.). Show students the following photo and ask them to guess who is in the picture and what is happening. Have them write a caption that they think might go with the photo.

Permission for educational use of photo granted by Elinor Smith.

Now reveal the title above the photo below and have students revise their captions accordingly.

NEW YORK SUN JANUARY 31, 1929.

17-Year-Old Girl Flyer Sets Endurance Record for Women

Permission for educational use of photo granted by Elinor Smith.

Finally, reveal the actual caption as shown below the photo. Discuss how non-fiction text features help readers with comprehension.

Permission for educational use of photo granted by Elinor Smith.

NEW YORK SUN JANUARY 31, 1929.

17-Year-Old Girl Flyer Sets Endurance Record for Women

Associated Press Photo.

Elinor Smith, seventeen-year-old Freeport aviatrix, falls into her mother's arms at the end of her plucky feat.

- *Use text organizers to predict.*
- *Formulate questions that might be answered in the selection.*
- *Identify new information gained from reading.*

What's the Purpose?

Discuss the three different types of author's purpose (inform, entertain, and persuade). Ask students what they think the author's purpose was for writing *Soar, Elinor!* (to inform and entertain). How do they know? (It contains verified facts as well as descriptive, sensory writing).

Show students the advertisement on the following page for Kendall Penzbest Motor Oil. What is the author's purpose here? (To persuade.) Have them highlight words or phrases that show the writer is trying to persuade the reader.

Brainstorm products and companies that use celebrity endorsements. Help students to analyze their effectiveness. What image are the companies trying to portray? Are they effective? Why or why not?

Let students invent an advertisement for their favorite product. Have them choose a celebrity who would be effective in selling this product. They can invent a written advertisement or record a video of their own commercial.

- *Identify the characteristics of biographies.*
- *Explain the author's purpose.*
- *Describe how the choice of language and information contributes to the author's purpose.*

Permission for educational use of photo granted by Elinor Smith.

April 30, 1929.

Mr. I. H. Shearer
Kendall Refining Company,
Bradford, Pa.

Dear Mr. Shearer:

Needless to say, in my last endurance attempt during which I established a record of 26 hours, 23 minutes, Kendall Penzbest Oil was used. Of course, my opinion of your product has been quite generally known but after a gruelling test such as the above, allow me to state that it has been raised even higher.

The results speak for themselves and the consumption of one-half gallon is exceptionally low, particularly when you consider the heavy load that was carried.

As you know, I have used your oil since I started flying and have every confidence in it and I should like to congratulate you on its merits.

Sincerely,

Elinor Smith

26 hours-23 min.-2 qts. of Oil

Elinor Smith's record-breaking endurance flight over Roosevelt Field in her Bellanca—Whirlwind Cabin Monoplane, on April 23rd and 24th, will be long remembered for the following notable features:

First of all, a plucky 17-year-old girl broke the World's endurance record by 4 hours and 18 minutes.

Secondly, only three other persons—Charles Lindbergh, Martin Jensen and Royal Thomas—have flown solo for more than twenty-four hours.

Thirdly, of the 8½ gallons of Kendall Penzbest Oil with which the flight started, 8 gallons were remaining at the finish—a total oil consumption of only two quarts .... A truly remarkable indication of the value of good lubrication.

World's records in the air are not achieved easily. Exceptional pilots, exceptional planes, exceptional engines and wise planning are all necessary. Pilots plan wisely when they select Kendall Oil for difficult lubricating tasks. Kendall Oil insures effortless engine performance plus conservation of gasoline, for a smoothly running, perfectly lubricated motor is able to deliver the last ounce of power of which it is capable.

Only an oil as good as Kendall can be recommended for faultless performance for thirty hours or more without change. And the oil that stands up longest, lubricates best. Throughout Elinor Smith's flight, Kendall Penzbest Oil performed as it can always be relied upon to do, according to specification. *For a list of Airports where Kendall Penzbest Oil is now obtainable, address Aviation Division, Kendall Refining Co., Bradford, Pa.*

KENDALL PENZBEST MOTOR OILS

KENDALL PENZBEST MOTOR OIL

See our Exhibit at the National Aeronautical Exposition, Cleveland, Ohio, August 24th to September 2nd.

Use the Air Mail!

REFINED FROM 100% BRADFORD GRADE OF PENNSYLVANIA CRUDE

Paper Airplanes in Flight

Have students choose a paper airplane to make from a source such as http://www.funpaperairplanes.com. Working in pairs or small groups, let them make and test their planes. Give them a chart like the one below to record the planes' name and physical features (pointed nose, blunt nose, upturned wingtips, etc.) After they've tested their planes, have them take turns launching them and record the distances.

Afterwards, display all plane models and have students predict which ones flew the longest and shortest distances. Record all data on a class chart such as the one shown below. Analyzing which features seemed to yield the most aerodynamic results. What other factors could have influenced the flight distances? Which model flew the longest distance? Which one had the longest average distance?

Name of Airplane:	**Physical Features:**	**Longest Distance Flown:**	**Average Distance Flown:**

- *Plan and conduct investigations in which*

a) distinctions are made among observations, conclusions, inferences, and predictions;
b) hypotheses are formulated based on cause-and-effect relationships;
d) appropriate instruments are selected to measure linear distance;
e) appropriate metric measures are used to collect, record, and report data.

- *Investigate and understand characteristics of moving objects. Key concepts include:*

a) motion is described by an object's direction and speed;
b) forces cause changes in motion.

AN INTERVIEW WITH TAMI LEWIS BROWN

Author Tami Brown Lewis with Elinor Smith (Palo Alto, California; 2007)

How did you get the idea for SOAR, ELINOR?

I grew up in a family of pilots—my dad, my mom, even my little sister—so it feels like I've always "known" pioneer aviatrix Elinor Smith. After my father passed away, I wanted to write something to honor his memory. Early one morning when I was barely half-awake, I began to think about some of the things he had loved—reading poetry, growing fruit trees, raising Morgan horses...and most of all, flying small planes. Flying led me straight back to Elinor Smith, a record-breaking aviatrix who did some of her most amazing flying as a teenager.

My eyes were still closed when the words SOAR ELINOR hit me, almost like a command. I knew right away that this would be both the title and the theme for Elinor's picture book biography.

Once the idea came to you, what happened next?

I bolted up in bed, grabbed a pen and a skinny piece of paper I use for making to-do lists, and scrawled *Soar Elinor* at the top with *world's youngest pilot underneath*. Later that day, I began to research, first reading a variety of books about women pilots I have in my own collection, then surfing the internet.

By the first afternoon, I'd contacted the archives at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum to see if they had materials about Elinor and her career. And they did! Scrap books, paintings, old magazine articles! It was a treasure trove, and the archivists were wonderful, helping me search for even more. I'm lucky to live in Washington, D.C. so I could visit the Smithsonian and the Library of Congress often. Whenever I had a question—what does the engine of a Farman pusher biplane sound like? How does the throttle on a Waco 9 work?—there was always someone at the Smithsonian or another aviation museum, airport, or flying club ready with an answer.

While the idea for this book hit me like a bolt of lightning, it took two years of research and revision to learn all the details of Elinor's story, write it up, and revise and revise and revise.

What was the most challenging part of writing this book? The most rewarding?

Elinor accomplished so much at such a young age! It was hard to decide which record to focus on. Should I tell the story of her altitude record (she was probably the smallest pilot in the U.S., so she could push her planes higher into thin air than anyone else)? Should I write about her endurance record, when she stayed in the air for hour after hour in the freezing cold, until even the hot chocolate in her thermos was frozen solid? Should I tell about the time she became the first woman to refuel a plane in mid-air? Sadly, a picture book isn't long enough to include everything. I wrote each of these separate stories out and shared them with my writing friends, teachers, and even my editor. We all quickly agreed that Elinor's flight under the East River bridges was the one story that absolutely had to be told.

The most rewarding part of this book's journey was meeting Elinor Smith. I traveled to California, where Elinor let me look through her photo albums, posters, letters, and other mementos. I even put her flight helmet on my head! I talked to Elinor and her son Pat Sullivan for hours, learning more about her life, her family, and the early days of flight.

How is writing non-fiction different from writing fiction?

I love writing fiction, too! The biggest difference between writing fiction and non-fiction is with non-fiction you can't make *anything* up! Every detail has to be researched and confirmed. I even found antique paint charts with exact color samples for each of Elinor's planes. I was so lucky to get to talk to Elinor. She remembered small things, like the smell of the airplanes' engines, and the words Charles Lindberg said as she flew off for the bridges. I was able to include all that in the book. Not one detail was made up.

How did the illustrations come about?

Most writers have no say in who illustrates their picture books, which surprises a lot of readers. They think I drew my own pictures, or approached the publisher with the pictures already painted. Not so. When my editor told me she wanted to publish *Soar, Elinor!* she asked how I imagined the illustrations and who I'd like to do

them, but she had ideas of her own, too. We agreed that Francois Roca was the perfect illustrator for the job. He loves planes and bridges! His paintings are gorgeous! What more could we ask for?

Since I'm a pilot myself I did lots of research for the illustrations. I shared photographs from Elinor's personal photo albums with Francois and although the pictures in *Soar, Elinor!* were completely Francois' inspiration. I was very lucky to participate in this small way. One great example is the painting Francois did of Elinor climbing the bridge supports on the Brooklyn Bridge in preparation for her flight. Elinor herself joked that she'd "hung by her heels" to get a better view. We knew she hadn't literally hung off the bridge, but we wanted to show she went to extraordinary lengths to inspect the bridge and make her flight as safe as possible. But what would that look like? Finally, I found a photo of Gene Kelly dancing on those same supports on the Brooklyn Bridge in a classic Hollywood movie. I sent the photo to Francois and he used it as inspiration for his painting in the book. I love to share that movie image alongside the book illustration when I speak to school groups.

What's the best piece of writing advice you've ever received?

Everything you put on a page should be your best work. No sloppy writing ever. Every time I write- whether it's an email or a chapter for a novel- I'm training for the next thing I'll write. I always try to do my best.

What advice do you have for young writers?

Have fun with writing! Get a little silly. Go out on a limb. Forget grammar rules sometimes and just express yourself.

Do you have a writing routine?

I'm a full time writer, so generally I begin writing as soon as my son gets off to school in the morning. At any particular time, I'm usually working on two or three books—some nearly finished and others at the brainstorm stage.

When you aren't writing, what are some of your favorite things to do?

I confess I love to sneak onto the Internet, check my emails, read a few writing blogs. That can be really distracting so I usually disable my internet connection for a few hours every morning. Otherwise I'm liable to look up and notice it's lunch time without a word on the page.

I have a great dog, Murphy Brown, and she and I go on lots of walks. I also love getting together with my friends. Most of my friends are writers, so we have lots of stories to tell.

How do feel about flying in airplanes?

Are you kidding? I LOVE AIRPLANES. I've loved them all my life. When I was in second grade my school was next to a small airport. Every afternoon I daydreamed to the sound of airplanes taking off and landing, so for me, imagination and airplanes will always be bound together. When I grew up, I became an airplane pilot and even owned my own plane for a while. I was absolutely thrilled to get the chance to fly a plane similar to Elinor's when I was writing this book. Did I say I LOVE AIRPLANES!

AN INTERVIEW WITH ILLUSTRATOR FRANÇOIS ROCA

When did you begin to think of yourself as an artist?

I don't know if I think of myself as an artist. I have always liked to draw, ever since I could take a pen in my hand. I was lucky to never stop and do some studying to be able to continue to progress.

In the beginning, I did graphic design and advertising, but that was not for me, so I went to school to specialize in illustration, comics and animation. What I love is to tell stories with my pictures. More than an artist with a big "A," I consider myself more of a visual author. Illustrating for children's books is perfect for me.

What type of media do you like working with the most?

I have always loved to paint. For the past 12 years, I have done all my work with oil paintings. That suits me well and the possibilities of this medium are infinite.

Did you collaborate with the author as you did the illustrations?

I don't collaborate with authors, because I'm in France and they are usually far away. Personally, I believe that authors have their job, while mine is to create my own "visual" story from their words. I don't want to be influenced by an author's images for a book. Authors need their own visuals to write the story, but me, I need to create my personal images, too. I don't think they are ever exactly the same.

How long did it take to illustrate SOAR, ELINOR?

It took me a long time to recreate the ambiance, decor, airplanes, clothes...
I think that I worked more than 4 months on this book.

What is the most challenging part of your job?

To be as exact as possible on the details of the airplanes, to recreate the action when Elinor flies under the bridge, and to depict Elinor's feelings and attitudes as best I can through the pictures.

How is your artistic process different for non-fiction and fiction books?

It is not so different for me, because I'm a realistic illustrator so I always need to start with reality. It's the same for fiction, but I'm just more free to invent the characters. In non-fiction, I try to be as close as possible to the way Elinor's face looked.

Pablo Picasso once said, "All children are artists. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up." Do you agree?

In part, yes. I always try to have the same excitement and joy when I paint as I had when I was a child. We change, and painting is a job now, but always I try to keep a maximum level of pleasure when I make pictures. In this case it was real happiness because when I was young, I wanted to be a pilot. I always painted and drew airplanes.

How do you feel about flying?

It's an easy way to travel, and I always enjoy taking an airplane. Flying is, for me, one of the best sensations.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

Take care of my two daughters and my wife.