

LEVELED BOOK • Q

# Amelia Earhart: A Legend in Flight



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Written by Julie Mettenburg

# Amelia Earhart: A Legend in Flight



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## Focus Question

Who is Amelia Earhart, and why is she a legend?

## Words to Know

accomplishments  
bloomers  
disappeared  
fatigue  
instruments

legend  
navigator  
pilots  
tailspin

Front cover: Amelia after a nineteen-hour flight across the United States

Title page: A studio portrait of Amelia Earhart

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Amelia in 1937

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## Introduction

The airplane bounced among the clouds.  
Giant black storm clouds lay ahead.

The year was 1932. The airplane carried Amelia Earhart. She had been the first woman to ride in an airplane over the Atlantic Ocean. Now, if she made it, she would be the first woman to fly an airplane over the Atlantic. And she would be the first person to have crossed the Atlantic in an airplane twice.

But first she had to succeed, and the trip was dangerous. Airplanes in the 1930s were small, and they didn't have the **instruments** that today's **pilots** do. A pilot had to go by her sense of sight, keeping tight control of the airplane.

The black clouds ahead were too large to fly around, so Amelia pointed the little plane right into them. Ice froze the plane's controls, sending it into a **tailspin**. Amelia struggled to get control. Finally, the ice melted and Amelia was able to pull the plane out of its spin.

Many hours later, Amelia set the plane down in Northern Ireland. She had crossed the Atlantic Ocean in an airplane she flew herself. She had already been famous. Now, she would be a **legend**. But Amelia Earhart would be most remembered for something else. While trying to fly around the world, she **disappeared**.



Reporters surround Amelia after her Atlantic flight.



The Wright brothers make their first flight.

## Winged Machines

The world's first airplane flight happened in 1903. Two brothers, Wilbur and Orville Wright, successfully flew their winged machine in North Carolina.

Many people thought the idea of flying was exciting. It was also dangerous. Planes were fragile and slow. They did not fly well in bad weather, and many pilots died in crashes.

By 1937, airplanes had improved a lot. Engineers designed better airplanes, but accidents still happened.

## Kansas Youth

Anyone who knew Amelia as a child could hardly have been surprised by her later accomplishments. She was born in Kansas in 1897. She spent most of her time with her family and friends.

They climbed around the banks of the Missouri River. Amelia made up games for the children to play. She and her sister were such active children that their mother made “**bloomers**” for them to wear. Unlike dresses, bloomers allowed the girls to be as active as the boys.

When Amelia was twenty-one, her family moved to California. One day she attended an air show. The airplanes dazzled her, flying in loops and doing stunts. She knew then that she wanted to fly.

With her parents’ help, Amelia took piloting lessons and saved enough money to buy an airplane. Before long, she was flying in air shows herself.



Amelia and her sister, Muriel



Amelia's work often involved helping children.

## Time to Fly

Amelia later moved to Boston and found a job at Denison House. It was a place where people who were poor, especially children, could receive help. She loved her work there, but then the chance of a lifetime presented itself.

George Putnam, a publicist, searched for a woman to be the first to ride in an airplane over the Atlantic. It was a dangerous idea. Three women had died trying to cross the Atlantic the year before.

Only men had ever crossed the Atlantic in an airplane. Anyone who would try it had to withstand danger and **fatigue**. George thought Amelia Earhart was perfect, and she was eager to go.

## Amelia Earhart: Flier and . . . ?

In her lifetime, Amelia worked at many jobs. At that time, it was unusual for women to have jobs at all!

- Nurse
- Magazine editor
- Social worker
- Writer
- Pilot
- Airline executive
- Clothing designer
- Professor

She also helped start the “Ninety-Nines,” a group of women pilots that still exists today.



Amelia in her nurse's uniform in 1918

Amelia was just a passenger on that 1928 flight, but her life would never be the same. The first woman to cross the Atlantic made headlines around the world. After the flight, she was famous and busy writing books and giving speeches about flying. She also designed clothing and luggage for active women like herself and even helped launch two airlines. Later, she married George Putnam. She also continued to fly.



Amelia in Southampton, England, after the 1928 Atlantic flight

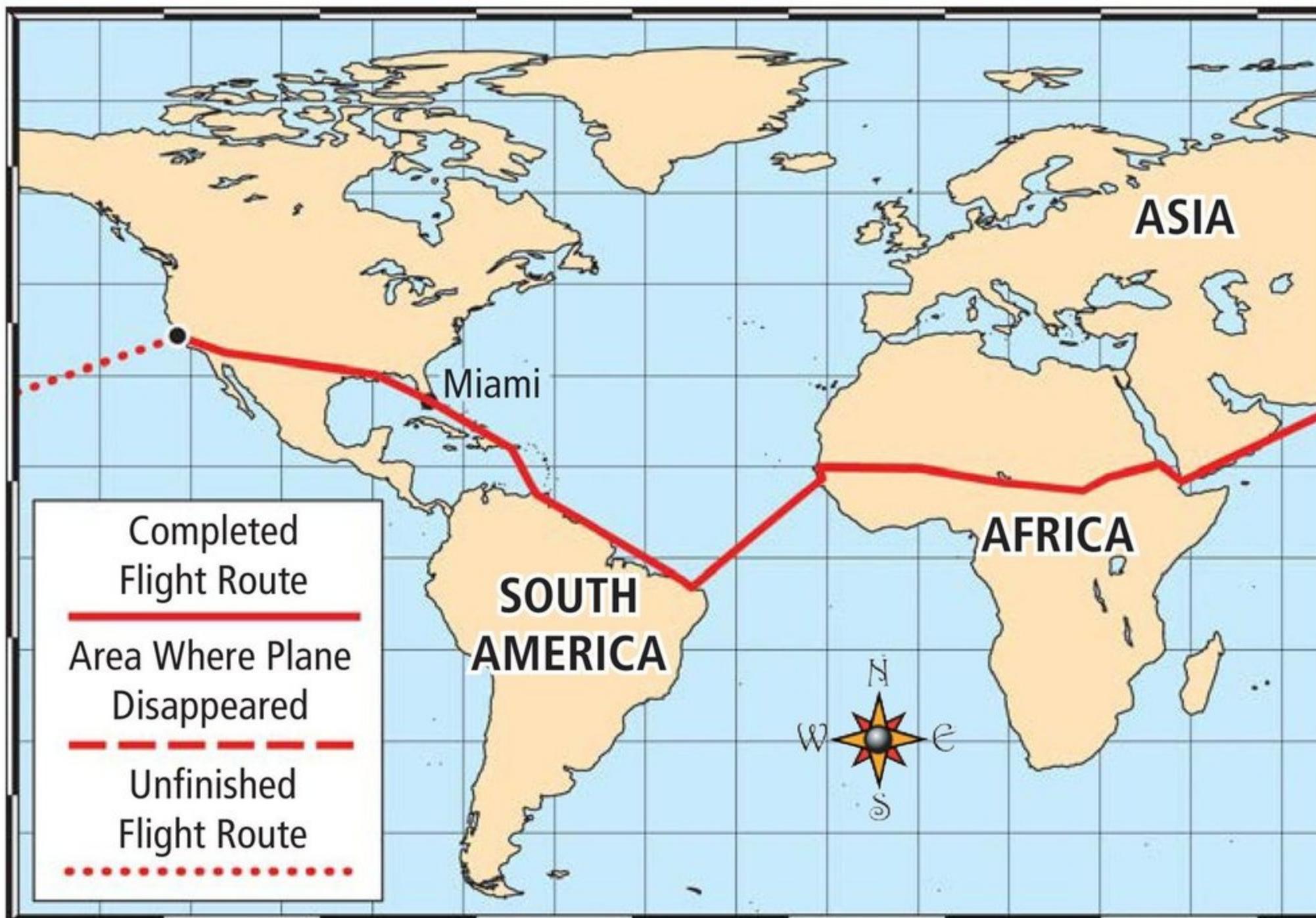
By the time she was thirty-nine years old, Amelia had made every major flight there was, except for one. The greatest challenge left was to fly around the world.

Only one pilot had ever flown around the world. But he didn't follow the equator, the longest and most difficult route. This was the route Amelia would fly. Would she make it?

By this time, no one doubted Amelia Earhart's flying skill. On May 21, 1937, she took off with her **navigator**, Fred Noonan. They went from California to Florida in a Lockheed Electra.



Amelia poses on her Lockheed before taking off on her around-the-world flight.



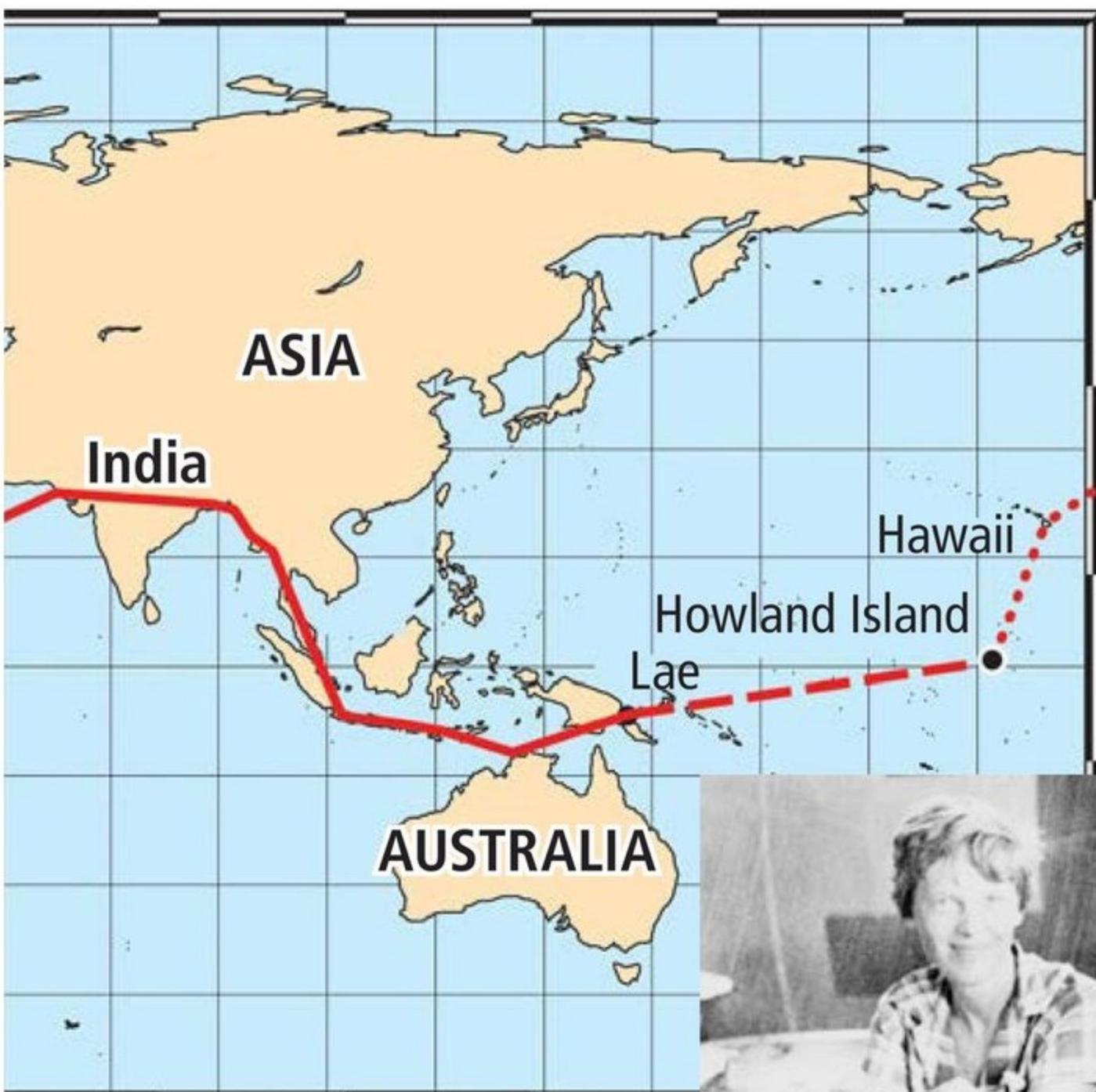
Map of Amelia's 1937 around-the-world flight route

## Last Flight

Amelia and Fred first stopped the Electra in Florida. The new plane had crossed the entire North American continent.

Next, they flew to South America, Africa, India, Asia, and Australia. It appeared that Amelia Earhart would once again pull off a historic flight without a hitch.

On June 29, 1937, they stopped in New Guinea, just north of Australia. There, they fueled the airplane and checked their maps. When they took off again, there was no hint of any trouble to come.



Fred Noonan and Amelia on one of their last stops in Indonesia

As they flew close to Howland Island, their radio messages became odd. The U.S. Coast Guard cutter *Itasca* waited offshore to receive their signals and help them find the island. Those radio signals were irregular and strange. Amelia spoke of a storm, yet the weather over the island was clear.

More than twenty hours into the flight, Amelia's voice said, "We're running north and south." She was never heard from again.



The USS *Lexington* was one of eight ships the U.S. Navy sent to search for Amelia.

## What Happened to Amelia?

This question is still a mystery today.

The *Itasca* and the U.S. Navy began searching for Amelia's plane. The search continued for weeks. No sign of the plane, Amelia, or Fred was found.

After a year of searching, Amelia's husband believed that she died at sea. But is that the full story?

Some people think Amelia and Fred survived an emergency landing and were picked up by a Japanese ship.

Others think that Amelia landed the plane, but at a different island. There, she and Fred were able to live on native foods but died of either sickness or old age.

Many people believe the easiest answer is that the plane landed in the water. Perhaps Amelia and Fred drowned before they inflated their life raft.

Whatever happened, there is no doubt that Amelia Earhart is one of the greatest Americans of the 20th century. She showed everyone that women didn't have to live with limits. She showed people that anyone could fly. She was a legend.



Amelia doing what she loved best: flying

## Glossary

<b>accomplishments</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	successfully completed goals or tasks (p. 7)
<b>bloomers</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	old-fashioned loose pants that were gathered at the knee or ankle and worn by active women (p. 7)
<b>disappeared</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	stopped existing or being in sight (p. 5)
<b>fatigue</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	tiredness or weariness from mental and/or physical activity (p. 9)
<b>instruments</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	tools, especially those used for making or recording measurements (p. 4)
<b>legend</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a famous person who is known for a special talent or achievement (p. 5)
<b>navigator</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a person who plots a course to arrive at an intended destination (p. 11)
<b>pilots</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	people who fly aircraft or spacecraft (p. 4)
<b>tailspin</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the rapid descent of a diving aircraft while turning round and round (p. 5)

# Amelia Earhart: A Legend in Flight

A Reading A-Z Level Q Leveled Book

Word Count: 1,020

## Connections

### Writing

Pretend you are Amelia Earhart.

Write a journal entry describing one of your first flights. Include details from the book.

### Social Studies

Use information from the book and other resources to create a timeline of Amelia Earhart's life including at least ten events. Share your timeline with your class.

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