QUICK PROJECT
KITES
A Brief History of Kites

For centuries before the Wright Brothers took off at Kitty Hawk, people were enchanted by the concept of flight and enjoyed it through a simple, yet compelling proto-aircraft: the kite. Designed to mimic a bird’s flight and considered by many today as a simple child’s toy to be enjoyed on a windy day, kites have had a profound impact on many aspects of world culture throughout history, including religion, mythology, science, and play.

There is no way to know exactly when the first kites were flown; however, many historians credit Chinese philosophers, Mo Di and Gongshu Ban, with inventing the kite in the 5th century CE.

Today, Weifang, China is considered the birthplace of kites where the annual Weifang International Kite Festival is held each April.

Kites gradually spread from China throughout Asia, where they were utilized in many different ways. In Japan, they were used in religious ceremonies in order to carry prayers or wishes to the gods. They were thought to ward off bad luck and usher in a successful harvest.

During the Edo era in Japan, only people in the highest classes – which included feudal lords and samurai – were allowed the luxury of a leisurely pursuit like kite flying, which was considered a privilege.

Kites didn’t gain in popularity in India until around 1500 CE. Popular romantic stories written during this time period described sweethearts sending love letters to each other via kite delivery when they couldn’t see each other in person.

Kites eventually made their way to the Western world via explorer Marco Polo as well as Portuguese sailors, whom brought them back from their travels as gifts for their children.

In 1749, a British scientist named Alexander Wilson utilized kites to measure air temperature in various layers of the atmosphere.

In 1752, Benjamin Franklin famously used a kite to prove that lightning was, in fact, electricity.

Even the Wright Brothers experimented with kites before they took their historic first flight in an airplane!

ACTIVITY

1. Cut out the side and bottom of a standard-sized brown paper grocery bag.

2. Unfold the bag and mark out the dimensions given in the illustration.

3. Reinforce the string-attachment points with tape and attach string (approximately 6 feet in length, depending on the kite). Tie a simple loop knot, at the midpoint of the bridle.

4. Decorate as desired using colored markers.

STANDARDS

Did you know that the Four Forces of Flight effect more than just airplanes? Lift, gravity, thrust, and drag all have an impact on kites as well!

Lift: The upward force that pulls the kite vertically into the air.

Gravity: The downward force that pulls the kite back toward the Earth.

Thrust: The horizontal force that pulls the kite string: you!

Drag: The force acting against you.

SUPPLIES

- 1 standard paper grocery bag per student
- Pencils
- Rulers
- Scissors
- Markers, colored pencils, or crayons
- Kite template
- Masking tape
- Kite string
- Roll of Plastic Streamer Tape

Forces on a Sled Kite

Kite String Force
25 in (approx)

Attach tails, 6-9 ft long
HISTORY OF THE ACADEMY OF MODEL AERONAUTICS
AND THE NATIONAL MODEL AVIATION MUSEUM

The idea for the AMA began in 1935 (perhaps even before that) at the National Championships in Detroit, Michigan. Leaders and contestants were interested in a self-governing body of aeromodeling experts, the thought being that there should be expert guidance of, for, and by model builders. Modelers wanted a single voice to develop national rules for aeromodeling contests, as well as one voice to speak to the government.

First known as the American Academy for Model Aeronautics (AAMA), the organization dropped ‘American’ from its official title and changed “for” with “of” within a few years.