



Lighter Than Air: Sophie Blanchard, the First Woman Pilot

Matthew Clark Smith , Matt Tavares (Illustrations)

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Take to the skies with the beautifully told tale of Sophie Blanchard a woman meant for the air as she discovers the incomparable sensation of flight.

Behold the story of Sophie Blanchard, an extraordinary woman who is largely forgotten despite her claim to being the very first female pilot in history. In eighteenth-century France, "balloonomania" has fiercely gripped the nation . . . but all of the pioneering aeronauts are men. The job of shattering that myth falls to a most unlikely figure: a shy girl from a seaside village, entirely devoted to her dream of flight. Sophie is not the first woman to ascend in a balloon, nor the first woman to accompany an aeronaut on a trip, but she will become the first woman to climb to the clouds and steer her own course. The words of Matthew Clark Smith bring Sophie s story to light after so many years, while Matt Tavares s atmospheric art and unique perspectives take her to new heights."

Lighter Than Air: Sophie Blanchard, the First Woman Pilot Details

Date : Published March 14th 2017 by Candlewick Press

ISBN : 9780763677329

Author : Matthew Clark Smith , Matt Tavares (Illustrations)

Format : Hardcover 32 pages

Genre : Childrens, Picture Books, Biography, Nonfiction, History

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From Reader Review *Lighter Than Air: Sophie Blanchard, the First Woman Pilot* for online ebook

Stephanie Tournas says

Little is known about the early life of Sophie Blanchard. In this picture book biography we learn that shortly after attending a balloon show featuring the daredevil balloonist Jean-Pierre Blanchard, they were married. After flying only twice with her husband, she took to the air on her own and never looked back, even after his death, accomplishing over 60 solo flights. Blanchard is the first female pilot in history and the first woman to die in an air accident, although this book doesn't dwell on that part. By recounting Blanchard's triumphs in a historical context, Smith gives a great introduction to this pioneering woman. Tavares's gorgeous ink and watercolor illustrations complement the text, with lovely views from the air and design embellishments typical of the time. Back matter includes notes and a selected bibliography.

Jenny says

Tells of Sophie Armand who dreams of flying. When she meets Jean-Pierre Blanchard, the hot air balloonist, she tells him she belongs in a balloon. At first, he laughs but he quickly realizes she is serious. They marry and he takes her up in balloons. After Jean-Pierre died from injuries sustained when he fell from a balloon, Sophie was heartbroken. But she soon took to the skies again and became a talented, famous balloonist. Napoleon named her Aeronaut of the Official Festivals and Chief Air Minister of Ballooning.

I appreciate the author and illustrator notes and the bibliography and I LOVED the illustrations.

Tori says

Nonfiction story, very wordy. Sort of inspirational. Would recommend for older children. So very not for storytime, but worth a read.

This one was featured on ReadBrightly's 17 Picture Books of 2017.

RLL22017 Flora Zayas says

Smith or Tavares did not win any awards for this beautifully written and illustrated story about the first women pilot in the 1800s.

Sophie Blanchard was only a teenager when man first took to the sky in "floating bags in the sky"- also known as hot air balloons. The illustrations compliment the text with aerial views to show the audience exactly what Sophie would have seen. Sophie's husband, Jean-Pierre was instrumental in her ability to ride in the balloons; Sophie and her husband would fly up together. After Jean-Pierre's death, Sophie's love for the sky subsided for a time. When it was reignited, she officially became the "world's first woman pilot." The remainder of the story follows her journey through good weather, bad weather, selling tickets to commoners,

and setting off fireworks for Emperor Napoleon's family.

This book is recommended for ages 6 to 9 years old. Some activities would include discussion questions, visualization activities, and close readings.

Courtney says

I love celebrating important women in history, but this book was boring and a little long.

Matthew says

A new figure in the history of aeronautics introduced there. In total, it's a great addition to all that already exists on pioneering aviators. Comparatively, this is on par with anything else on the market. The illustrations are impressive. The text is clear and very readable. I liked it, beginning to end. I look forward to whatever comes next from this author.

Lauren Dooley says

This book is a true story about a woman named Sophie Blanchard. She was actually the first female pilot in history! She had a dream of being able to fly and a lot of people did not believe in that dream. However, she proved many wrong and was the first woman to fly her own plane in to the clouds. I enjoyed reading this book and learning about someone who is typically forgotten. I had never heard of Blanchard before and it was really inspiring to hear her story. I believe a lot of young girls would really like this book and I would use it in my classroom.

Holly Mueller says

Pioneers of flight amaze me. I just can't imagine being one of the firsts to go up in a hot air balloon, glider, or plane (I still would never fly in a hot air balloon or anything other than a plane). Seeing the illustration of Sophie Blanchard in "little more than a hanging chair" gives me heart palpitations! I enjoyed learning more about Blanchard, and I always enjoy Matt Tavares's illustrations.

Christina says

Beautiful ink and watercolor illustrations, with emphasis on the sky (bright and blue or dark and stormy depending on the mood of the subject), tell the story of Sophie Blanchard, who lived in 18th century France, married a balloonist and after his death went on to be a successful solo woman balloonist, giving exhibitions until dying in a balloon crash. She loved to fly and was willing to circumvent the conventions of her time. Includes tiny bibliography but has a couple of unsourced dialogue quotes as well as her thoughts; not a full biography.

Becky says

First sentence: It was November 1783. For months France had buzzed about the brothers Montgolfier and their mad dreams of floating bags in the sky. Now the moment had arrived.

Premise/plot: *Lighter Than Air* is a picture book biography of Sophie Blanchard. She came of age at a time when hot air balloons were brand new, awe-inspiring, and a true wonder. She wasn't alone in marveling at this new wonder that allowed mankind to take to the air. Everyone was mad for it. But Sophie wasn't content to watch from the ground. NO! She wanted to fly herself. She married a balloonist and was soon joining him on flights. But even that wasn't quite enough. She soon began taking solo flights. Each flight an adventure with some amount of risk and thrill. Some were fascinated by her exploits; others not so much! But whether they were saying nice things or mean things--she was being talked about.

My thoughts: I enjoyed this biography. I'd never heard of Sophie Blanchard before. Though to be honest I'd never heard of ANY hot air balloonists before. I couldn't have told you the first thing about their invention or early pioneers. The book packs a good amount of information in the narrative and even more in their author's note. (Although the author's note adds sadness as well. Looking at it glass half full one could say she died doing what she loved best.)

Text: 4 out of 5

Illustrations: 4 out of 5

Total: 8 out of 10

Heydi Smith says

Sophie Blanchard was a very daring women. She made a career out of flying hot air balloons. This telling of her story was not my favorite as it put many kids to sleep but it's an important story that should be told.

Gary Anderson says

Nothing on Earth captures the imagination quite like taking to the sky in a hot air balloon. *Lighter than Air* is a picture book biography about Sophie Blanchard, the first woman pilot. Blanchard guided hot air balloons all over 18th Century France. Author Matthew Clark Smith provides a narrative that contextualizes the French attitudes of the period, especially regarding the role of women in that society, and how Sophie Blanchard first challenges those expectations, then becomes an exception to all those rules as she gains popularity and respect for her airborne exploits.

Some of the Matt Tavares illustrations are drawings that evoke the art prints of that time, but several of the pictures are more involved with backgrounds and sophisticated shadings. These pictures are more satisfying and made me wish the others were more like them.

The design of *Lighter than Air* is simple. The endpapers are plain, and the back matter is an author's note, illustrator's note, and a brief bibliography. The author's note reveals the circumstances of Sophie

Blanchard's death. No spoilers here, but I hope young readers find their way to that detail and then ponder and discuss its ironies.

Edward Sullivan says

A rich, elegant portrait of 19th century balloonist Sophie Blanchard.

Debra says

I knew nothing about Sophie Blanchard and her hot air ballooning back in the early times of that sport. I had only heard of the men. I love how many biographies are coming out for us to offer to our students proving that there are those who broke barriers in so many fields and there are aspirations any one of us can have to reach a level of expertise in our desired vocation. This story is fun as the traditions and norms of the times will be interesting and likely great discussion points for today's youth and even how the balloons themselves began with every aviator taking great personal risks to advance this mode of transportation. The story is well written and the illustrations engaging and certainly both will lead to great conversations. I often tell my older elementary students to not forget about picture books as there is much to be learned in stories for students of all ages and I am grateful to have found another one that I will share with my students. I see this book as a first purchase, especially if your Biography section needs some new titles. (The only thing lacking for my biography report projects is a timeline. It seems picture book format biographies often miss this text feature too often.)

Lynn Davidson says

This is the true story of Sophie Blanchard who wanted to fly from the time she was a little girl. When hot air ballooning began, it greatly interested her. One day she met an interesting man who was a balloonist, and they fell in love and married. He introduced her to ballooning, and the rest of her life was devoted to doing amazing and daring things - flying as she'd always wanted to do.

This story is very well told with much interesting information included in the back matter also. Beautiful illustrations.
