

# SET THE STAGE: CLASSROOM DISCUSSION POINTS

## WINGS OF COURAGE (15 min. total)

### Show & Theater Company: (less than 1 min.)

- *Wings of Courage* by Mad River Theater Works

### Art Form: (1-2 min.)

- Musical theater
  - ? Musical theater is a special kind of play. What is musical theater? (a play with songs)

### Context: (3-5 min.)

- Eugene Bullard was born in October 1895, the seventh child in his family, in Columbus, Georgia
  - ? How long ago was that?
    - [Point out Georgia on a map]
- He was African American and part Native American but encountered racism even as a child
  - ? What is racism? [a belief that one race is superior to another often backed by discrimination or even violence]
- Eugene was orphaned at 8 or 9 (exact timing isn't clear) and worked as a stable boy and jockey in order to live
- Eugene's father used to tell him stories about France and how the people there didn't judge others by the color of their skin, so he was fascinated with Europe, and at the age of 10 stowed away on a ship bound for Scotland
  - Eugene worked in any job he could in an effort to get to France: on the docks, at an amusement park, and even as a boxer. He eventually made it to France while performing in a vaudeville act.
- ? When was World War I? [1914 to 1918]
  - In 1914 with the start of WWI, Eugene enlisted in the French Foreign Legion, rising in the ranks and receiving important honors
  - During the war, he flew many combat missions for France, though flying was very dangerous as a still relatively new technology
  - Eugene was a bit of a daredevil and was known to fly behind enemy lines, earning the nickname "The Black Swallow of Death." He even flew against The Red Baron (an infamous German fighter pilot)!
  - When the U.S. joined the war in 1917, Eugene applied to be an American fighter pilot since the Army stated they were accepting African Americans. But Eugene was never called upon for duty, nor were any other African Americans.
    - ? Was this fair?
  - After WWI, Eugene remained in Paris and earned a living as a musician and nightclub owner; he married in 1923, eventually raising two daughters
- ? When was World War II? [1939 to 1945]
  - In the late 1930s, during the start of WWII, Eugene became a spy in Paris against the Germans, and in 1940 joined the French army as a machine gunner
  - After the war, he moved back to the U.S. after 30 years to recover from an injury
    - ? Was there still racism in the U.S. in 1945 when Eugene returned to the U.S.?
- In 1959, the French honored Eugene with a knighthood in the French Legion of Honor
- Eugene died in New York in 1961
- On August 23, 1994, 33 years after his death, Eugene Bullard was posthumously commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force

### Main concepts: (3 min.)

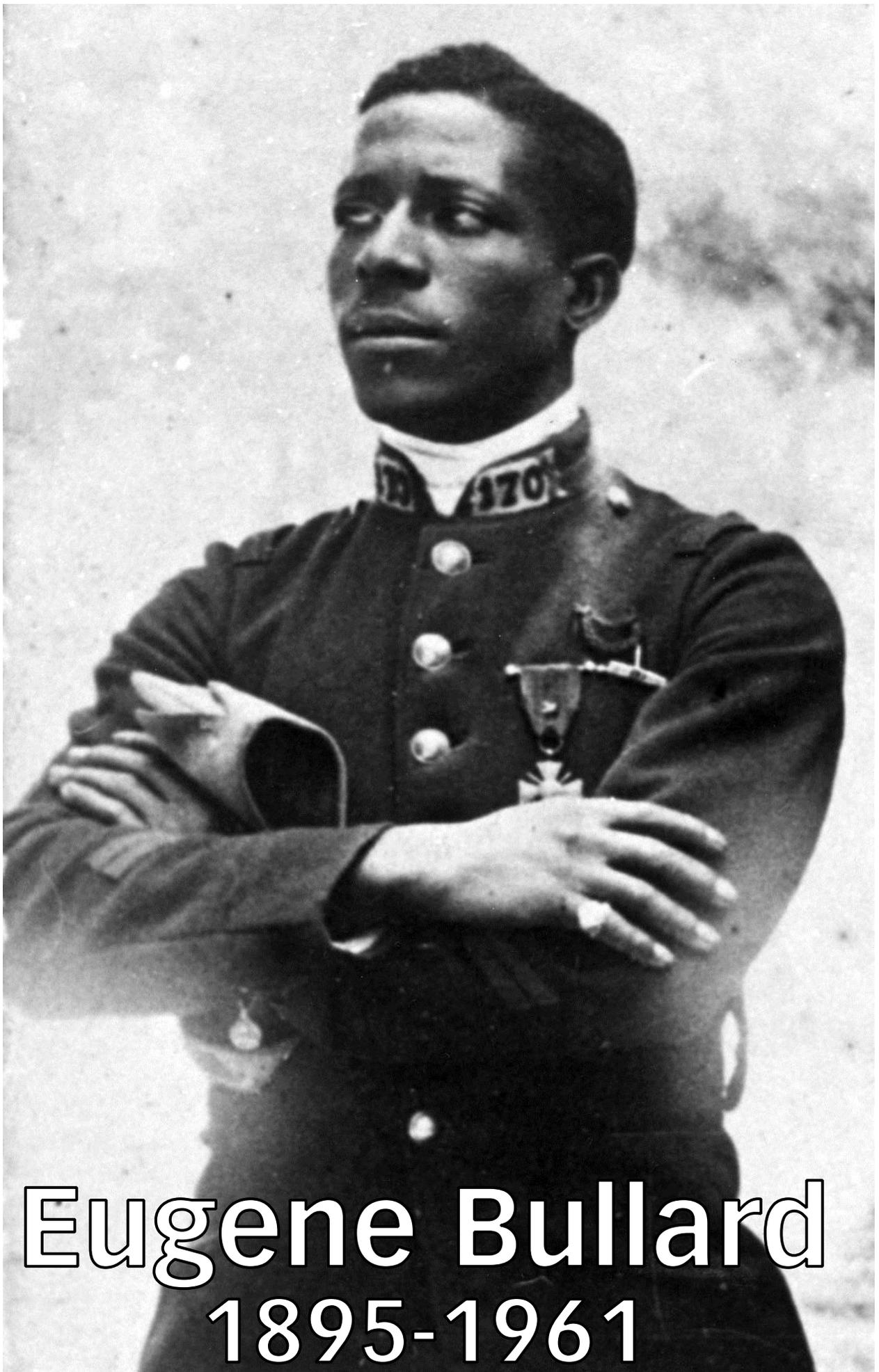
- Perseverance
- Struggle of racism; importance of not judging people before you know them
- History and technology
- Finding one's special talent – One of Eugene's was flying!
  - ? Does anyone in this class have a special talent?

### Special things to look for: (3 min.)

- How will the production show flying? [Hint: We'll be depending on your imaginations!]
- There are only two actors, but lots of characters!
  - ? How can an actor play more than one character? What "tools" would they use, besides their costumes? (They will use their bodies, their voices, costumes, and they will depend on your imaginations!!)
  - ? There is a special name for the clothing actors wear on stage; who knows what that is? [Costumes provide clues about the characters on stage, such as that character's age, time in history, job, social status, and/or attitude.]

### Theater Etiquette: (2-3 min.)

- Respect the theater, one person to a seat, limit bathroom breaks, do not kick the seats, no food or drink in the theater (bottled water okay), and turn off cell phones.
  - ? How is watching live theater different than watching a movie or TV?
    - Can't pause, rewind, or fast forward with live theater
    - Live theater is exciting, because each performance is unique
    - Students are in the same room as the performers. Every sound they make and moving around can affect the performers and other members of the audience



**Eugene Bullard**  
**1895-1961**