



## Monica Smith

Student, Master of Fine Arts  
in Creative Nonfiction Writing

### Challenge

- Graduate student unable to find niche-specific reference materials needed to complete series of detailed class projects.
- Traditional search engines and library reference desks struggle to provide access to rare material necessary for high quality research.

### Solution

- Gale's *Evolution of Flight* digital archive

### Results

- Student now able to instantly access more than one million pages of rare flight history material that was once only available by special request.
- Targeted search function produces highly relevant results and improves quality of student research and performance.



## Student Success Story

### Graduate Student Lacks Access to Rare Niche-Specific Reference Materials

Monica Smith, a student working toward a Master of Fine Arts degree in creative nonfiction writing, was looking for a needle in a haystack. Specifically, Smith wanted to write a series of children's books about African American aviators. The problem she faced was a lack of access to high-quality reference materials necessary to create books that are visually compelling, informative, and engaging.

"Some of the people I wanted to write about are less known," Smith said. "Besides information on pilots involved in an African American civilian pilot training program, I needed pictures to make these stories come alive for middle grade history students."

The rare resources Smith needed are not always found via traditional search engines or within library reference desks. In fact, many of the resources required for Smith's project are available only by special request from places like the National Air and Space Museum Library—an institution with limited staff, and she knew that a request to NASML could result in delays that would jeopardize the deadline for her project.

### *Evolution of Flight* Archive Provides Access to Once Hidden Reference Materials

Smith avoided the potential delays and costs often associated with special requests by using a variety of new resources, including Gale's *Evolution of Flight 1784-1991* digital archive. This cloud-based collection of images, diaries, correspondence, scrapbooks, government documents and other primary source materials empowers researchers to provide the "story behind the story" of humankind's desire to fly. The archive also provides on-demand access to rare resources and dramatically improves the visual quality of materials that can be hundreds of years old.

"It felt like I was actually looking at a photo taken in 1912," Smith said. "The archive is of such high quality and the items are so clear it's like I'm holding the actual document in my hand."

The archive also brings together more than one million pages of material in several languages from the National Air and Space Museum Archives, Smithsonian Institution Archives, and the National Air and Space Museum Library. Not only did Smith find a vast collection of resources on African American aviators, but she learned the materials she found in *Evolution of Flight* were easily integrated into classroom assignments, research projects, and quizzes.



“It’s like having a mini-research assistant to search through the files for you and pull out the most relevant information.”

### Monica Smith

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## Evolution of Flight’s Targeted Search Feature Saved Time and Yielded Rare and Relevant Results

“It was a big find,” Smith said of the search results that provided insight into why the aviation industry was reluctant to hire African Americans in the 1920s. “I don’t think I would have found that information if it hadn’t been for the *Evolution of Flight* archive.”

Many of today’s search engines, Smith says, simply aren’t good enough to find the niche-specific information for which researchers like her are looking. “You can miss things that are vital to your project if you type in the wrong search term,” she said. “The archive really opens up access to a lot of information that otherwise may never be found.”

*Evolution of Flight* chronicles the lives and contributions of aviation’s pioneers, scientists, and wartime fighter pilot aces, and also assures researchers they are citing trusted sources. Materials can be saved for easy retrieval later, and users can change or modify search criteria to further narrow results.

## Improved Research and Project Quality

The variety of materials housed in the archive, a key in creating an engaging series of children’s books, has dramatically increased the quality of Smith’s work. “I really like the mixture of types of information,” Smith said. “I get photos, news articles, and things that would have been more difficult to find that Gale pieces together in a file that seems like it was created just for me.”

The vast collections housed in the archive are supplemented by the perspective also being offered by the tool. Specifically, the archive orders search results in a way that quickly provides historical context to search results. Instead of searching through databases and reading each article to see if it’s relevant, *Evolution of Flight* allows researchers a unique way to quickly cut through irrelevant resources and find the needle in the haystack for which they’ve been looking.

“It was almost like the archive was reading my mind at times,” Smith said. “It’s like having a mini-research assistant to search through the files for you and pull out the most relevant information.”



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