

# Fallen Comrade, David Greenwood

## KEY IDEAS

- Flight has inspired and awed humankind throughout history
- The Tuskegee Airmen are heroic and legendary for their contributions to World War II and to the Civil Rights Movement in the United States

## STORY

The Tuskegee Airmen were men who fought two enemies; the Nazis who would have plunged the entire world into the darkest evil, and their fellow Americans that resisted the thought that a black man could love America enough to fight for its ideals of freedom and equality. These college educated young African American men passed the same tests and underwent the same high level of training that all Army Air Corps pilots faced. Flying their P-40s, P-47's and P-51 fighters in the skies over Europe, they fought off the best of the Luftwaffe and saved the lives of hundreds of bomber crewmen as they escorted them to their targets and then home.

Back at their bases both in Europe and stateside, the Tuskegee Airmen were met not with respect or thanks for their service, but instead saw racism, systematic segregation and utter contempt by many of their fellow Army Air Corps officers and commanders who saw their skin color as the only quality that counted.

When the war in Europe ended, the Airmen continued to fight the longer war against unfair treatment and racial

bigotry. Thanks to their efforts and steadfast resistance to inequality, President Truman cited their outstanding war record and courage facing two enemies when he signed the executive order to integrate the armed forces in 1948.

## BACKGROUND

Man's desire to fly is found in the mythology of many cultures. Stories about flight and the people who fly abound in history. They include the myth of Icarus trying to reach the sun, the Wright brothers' first flight at Kitty Hawk, and the astronauts of today. Stories about flight have entered our popular culture by way of movies, television and comic strips.

David Greenwood was inspired by his childhood awe and fascination with flight, the Tuskegee airmen and the people in Detroit who worked in converted automobile plants making tanks, planes, and artillery during World War II.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Have students take turns sitting in the seat or to imagine doing so. Ask them sensory questions about their experience as a "pilot." What do they see? What are the noises and smells they imagine? What do they feel on their skin?
- What stories about flight can you think of?
- Why is this plane here in the woods? How do you think it got there?
- Is this work abstract or representational? Why?

