You might think of them as child’s play, but there's a surprising amount of history behind paper airplanes.

Thought to have been invented by the Chinese several thousand years ago, these useful toys have helped guide some of history's most famous aviators. Leonardo da Vinci built them to test his ornithopter. The Wright Brothers used them to prototype their historic Flyer. During the early part of the 20th century, designers at Lockheed and Heinkel put them to work in the development of new warplanes.

But today, even with the benefit of modern aerodynamics, physics, and materials, the creation of a good paper airplane is still as much art as it is science. Grab a stack of 8.5” x 11” paper, find a clean, flat surface, and get ready to fold. Here are five of our favorite flying wonders.

**The Record Holder**

Where better to start than with a world record holder? Florida resident Ken Blackburn used this design to set the world record for paper-airplane flight time back in 1998, clocking an astonishing 27.6 seconds. Although Blackburn’s record has been surpassed, the design is still superb, and it's surprisingly easy to make. Perhaps you can outfly him.

**The Sabertooth**

The cool split nose of the Sabertooth makes it a mean-looking contender. A little harder to build, it'll really help if you use paper that's marked on one side, just like in the video. The build requires you to flip the sheet over a number of times -- miss one and you'll probably get hopelessly lost. Or end up winging it.
**The Cobra**

Satisfyingly ingenious to build, the cunning design of the Cobra is made easy to follow by this clear video. Two concertinaed folds shorten the length considerably, adding plenty of weight up front, and the result is a clean-looking, classic snub-nosed plane that flies straight and true.

**The Arrow**

Can a paper airplane be classified as a weapon? Before you answer, try hurling The Arrow. Good for 30-40 feet of dead-straight flight, this slender projectile is razor sharp and worryingly effective. Don’t shoot your eye out, kid.
The Spirit
Ready for something a little more intricate? Starting with a square-shaped piece of paper, the Spirit requires finesse in the last few steps, otherwise you'll end up with something that looks like a pig and flies like a cow. Get it right, though, and you'll be the envy of all your friends...as long as you have friends that are impressed with cool paper airplanes.