



# Wind Tunnel Testing



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## Lesson Focus

Lesson focuses on wind tunnel tests that engineers in many industries use to when developing products such as airplanes, cars, and even buildings. Teams of students build their own model car out of everyday products and test their design in a wind tunnel made of a fan blowing through a long cardboard box. As an extension activity, students may design an airplane wing for an online wind tunnel.

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## Lesson Synopsis

The Wind Tunnel Testing lesson explores how wind tunnels provide feedback to engineers about the performance and durability of products such as planes, cars, and buildings. Students work in teams to build their own model of a car, using simple materials, and test their designs in a classroom wind tunnel set up.

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## Age Levels

11-18.

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## Objectives

- ✦ Learn about engineering design.
- ✦ Learn about wind tunnels and engineering testing.
- ✦ Learn about teamwork and working in groups.

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## Anticipated Learner Outcomes

As a result of this activity, students should develop an understanding of:

- ✦ mechanical engineering and design
- ✦ aeronautical engineering testing
- ✦ problem solving
- ✦ teamwork



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## Lesson Activities

Students learn how products such as airplanes, cars and trucks are tested in wind tunnels to determine performance and efficiency. Student teams design their own model car and test it in a simple classroom wind tunnel using a fan and long cardboard box. Next, student teams draw their design, build it using low cost materials, evaluate their own work and that of other students, and then present their observations to the class.

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## Resources/Materials

- ✦ Teacher Resource Documents (attached)
- ✦ Student Worksheets (attached)
- ✦ Student Resource Sheets (attached)

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## Alignment to Curriculum Frameworks

See attached curriculum alignment sheet.

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## Internet Connections

- ✦ TryEngineering ([www.tryengineering.org](http://www.tryengineering.org))
- ✦ NASA Wind Tunnels (<http://aocentral.arc.nasa.gov/>)
- ✦ NASA Future Flight Design (<http://futureflight.arc.nasa.gov/map.html>)
- ✦ Flying on the Ground, Wind Tunnels of Glenn Research Center ([www.nasa.gov/centers/glenn/about/fs05grc.html](http://www.nasa.gov/centers/glenn/about/fs05grc.html))
- ✦ Interactive Wright 1901 Wind Tunnel (<http://wright.nasa.gov/airplane/tunnl2int.html>)
- ✦ ITEA Standards for Technological Literacy: Content for the Study of Technology ([www.iteaconnect.org/TAA](http://www.iteaconnect.org/TAA))
- ✦ National Science Education Standards ([www.nsta.org/publications/nses.aspx](http://www.nsta.org/publications/nses.aspx))



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## Recommended Reading

- ✦ Transonic Wind Tunnel Testing (ISBN: 0486458814)
- ✦ The Wright Brothers: A Biography of Aviation's Greatest Pioneers (ISBN: 0316861448)

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## Optional Writing Activity

- ✦ Write an essay or a paragraph about what other manufactured products would benefit from wind tunnel testing.

# Wind Tunnel Testing



## For Teachers: Teacher Resource

### ◆ Lesson Goal

The Wind Tunnel Testing lesson focuses on wind tunnel tests that engineers in many industries use to when developing products such as airplanes, cars, and buildings. Teams of students build their own model car out of everyday products and test their design in a wind tunnel made of a fan blowing through a long cardboard box.

### ◆ Lesson Objectives

- ✦ Learn about engineering design.
- ✦ Learn about wind tunnels and engineering testing.
- ✦ Learn about teamwork and working in groups.

### ◆ Materials

- ✦ Student Resource Sheet
- ✦ Student Worksheets
- ✦ Materials to build classroom wind tunnel: Small portable fan, rectangular cardboard box with ends removed, tape to affix box to floor in fixed position. Include a measurement (ruler, markings) to indicate the distance prototype cars move under the force of the wind.
- ✦ Materials (wood, plastic) to set up a ramp for testing each car on a 15 degree slope.
- ✦ One set of materials for each group of students: tape, string, plastic wrap, foil, popsicle sticks, toothpicks, paperclips, paper, pencils, cardboard, one cardboard tube (from paper towel or toilet paper roll). All materials must be used so that each car weighs the same.

### ◆ Procedure

1. Show students the various Student Reference Sheets. These may be read in class, or provided as reading material for the prior night's homework. Divide students into groups of 2-3 students, providing a set of materials per group.
2. If internet access is possible, have students work in teams to try out the online wind tunnel at <http://wright.nasa.gov/airplane/tunn12int.html>. This will provide a better understanding of how the shape of their car will impact results.
3. Explain that students are now an "engineering" team that must develop a new automobile prototype that offers the best fuel efficiency by creating the least drag or resistance to the wind.
4. Students meet and develop a plan for their car. They agree on materials they will need (out of those you have provided), write or draw their plan, and then present their plan to the class.
5. Student groups next build their prototype cars. All materials must be used.

# Wind Tunnel Testing



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## For Teachers: Teacher Resource (continued)

### ◆ Procedure (continued)

6. Students must ramp test their cars to make sure they can roll prior to testing.
7. The teacher should set up the classroom "wind tunnel" and manage the testing of each car so the wind test is consistent between student teams. Students will measure the distance the prototype car is pushed by the wind; the one that moves the least has the least resistance to the wind.
8. Each student group evaluates the results, completes an evaluation/reflection worksheet, and presents their findings to the class.

### ◆ Tips

1. Use caution with young children and fan blades.
2. If time allows, give students an opportunity redesign their car if they determine that alterations might improve performance.

### ◆ Time Needed

Two to four 45 minute sessions

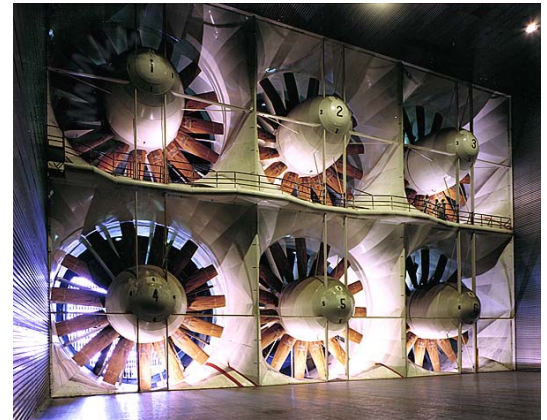
# Wind Tunnel Testing



## Student Resource: All About Wind Tunnels

### ◆ What are wind tunnels?

Just as its name suggests, a wind tunnel is a tube or tunnel that has man-made wind blown through it at a certain speed. Scientists and engineers put a model of an airplane in the tunnel and then study the way air moves around the model. By looking at the way this smaller model acts in the wind tunnel, they get a pretty good idea of how a real life-sized airplane of the same design will probably fly. It is a lot easier, cheaper, and safer to build and test a model than to build and fly a real airplane.



### ◆ How do wind tunnels work?

Wind tunnels work on the idea that a stationary model with air moving around it behaves the same way a real, full-scale airplane moving through stationary air does. Sometimes only a part of an airplane, like a wing or an engine, is tested in a wind tunnel. The models, usually made out of steel or aluminum, that are tested are loaded with many instruments and sensors that report back to the computers in the control room. It's there that scientists, engineers, and technicians can begin to understand how the airplane is performing.

### ◆ How are wind tunnels used in aerospace research?

Scientists and engineers use wind tunnels to study the pressures, forces, and air flow direction affecting an airplane. Pressure is measured by small devices called pressure taps that are placed at various locations on the surface of the model. Forces are recorded by sensors in the structures that support the model in the test section. The direction that air flows around the model can be seen by the way tufts, small yarn-like strands attached to the model, flap around. Sometimes smoke is blown into the test section to make it easier to see how the air is flowing. From these different kinds of measurements, a great deal can be learned about the model being tested.



Wind tunnels vary in size according to their function. Some of the smallest wind tunnels have test sections that are only a few inches large and therefore can only be used with tiny models. Other wind tunnels have test sections that are several feet big. The largest wind tunnel in the world is at the National Full-Scale Aerodynamics Complex at NASA Ames Research Center, in the United States. Its 80 foot by 120 foot test section can fit a life-sized Boeing 737 inside! Wind tunnels aren't just used to test airplanes. Anything that has air blowing around or past it can be tested in a wind tunnel. Some engineers have put models of spacecraft, cars, trucks, trains, even road signs, buildings, or entire cities in wind tunnels to see how to improve their designs.

(Some resources on this page are provided courtesy of NASA.)

# Wind Tunnel Testing



## Student Worksheet: Wind Tunnel Simulator

You are a team of engineers who have been given the challenge of building a new automobile prototype that offers the best fuel efficiency by creating the least drag or resistance to the wind.

### ◆ Research/Preparation Phase

1. Review the various Student Reference Sheets, and if internet access is available try out a virtual wind tunnel at <http://wright.nasa.gov/airplane/tunnl2int.html>.

### ◆ Planning as a Team

1. Your team has been provided with some "construction materials" by your teacher. You have tape, string, plastic wrap, foil, popsicle sticks, toothpicks, paperclips, paper, pencils, cardboard, one cardboard tube (from paper towel or toilet paper roll) and must use all materials so all cars weigh the same.



2. Start by meeting with your team and devising a plan for your car. Feel how strong the wind will blow in your classroom wind tunnel so you can anticipate how strong your car must be. Your car must hold its form through all wind levels and move the least to indicate it has the least resistance to the wind.

3. Write or draw your plan in the box below, including your projection for the materials you'll require to complete the construction. Present your design to the class, and explain your choice of materials. You may choose to revise your teams' plan after you receive feedback from class.

Materials Needed:

# Wind Tunnel Testing



## Student Worksheet: Wind Tunnel Simulator

### ◆ Construction Phase

1. Build your car!

### ◆ Ramp Test

Your car must pass a ramp test before fan testing. It must roll down a ramp set at an angle of 15 degrees and must roll at least 4 feet before it's "certified" for wind testing.

### ◆ The Wind Tunnel Test!

1. Observe as your team and other teams test their prototypes in your classroom wind tunnel. You should conduct three tests and average the values you find. Record your team's results in the box below, including points and observations.

Test #1 Results and Observations

Test #2 Results and Observations

Test #3 Results and Observations

Average Results

### ◆ Re-engineering

If time allows, you may redesign your car if you determine that alterations might improve performance.



# Wind Tunnel Testing



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## Student Worksheet: Evaluation (continued)

5. What designs or methods did you see other teams try that you thought worked well?

6. Did you find that there were many designs in your classroom that met the project goal? What does this tell you about engineering plans?

7. Do you think you would have been able to complete this project easier if you were working alone? Explain how teamwork impacted this project.

8. List several products that you think would benefit from wind tunnel testing.

# Wind Tunnel Testing



## For Teachers: Alignment to Curriculum Frameworks

Note: All lesson plans in this series are aligned to the National Science Education Standards which were produced by the National Research Council and endorsed by the National Science Teachers Association, and if applicable, also to the International Technology Education Association's Standards for Technological Literacy or the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics' Principles and Standards for School Mathematics.

### ◆ National Science Education Standards Grades K-4 (ages 4 - 9)

#### **CONTENT STANDARD A: Science as Inquiry**

As a result of activities, all students should develop

- ✦ Abilities necessary to do scientific inquiry
- ✦ Understanding about scientific inquiry

#### **CONTENT STANDARD B: Physical Science**

As a result of the activities, all students should develop an understanding of

- ✦ Position and motion of objects

#### **CONTENT STANDARD E: Science and Technology**

As a result of activities, all students should develop

- ✦ Abilities of technological design
- ✦ Understanding about science and technology

#### **CONTENT STANDARD F: Science in Personal and Social Perspectives**

As a result of activities, all students should develop understanding of

- ✦ Science and technology in local challenges

#### **CONTENT STANDARD G: History and Nature of Science**

As a result of activities, all students should develop understanding of

- ✦ Science as a human endeavor

### ◆ National Science Education Standards Grades 5-8 (ages 10 - 14)

#### **CONTENT STANDARD A: Science as Inquiry**

As a result of activities, all students should develop

- ✦ Abilities necessary to do scientific inquiry
- ✦ Understandings about scientific inquiry

#### **CONTENT STANDARD B: Physical Science**

As a result of their activities, all students should develop an understanding of

- ✦ Motions and forces

#### **CONTENT STANDARD E: Science and Technology**

As a result of activities in grades 5-8, all students should develop

- ✦ Abilities of technological design
- ✦ Understandings about science and technology

#### **CONTENT STANDARD F: Science in Personal and Social Perspectives**

As a result of activities, all students should develop understanding of

- ✦ Science and technology in society

#### **CONTENT STANDARD G: History and Nature of Science**

As a result of activities, all students should develop understanding of

- ✦ History of science

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## For Teachers:

### Alignment to Curriculum Frameworks (continued)

#### ◆ National Science Education Standards Grades 9-12 (ages 14-18)

##### **CONTENT STANDARD A: Science as Inquiry**

As a result of activities, all students should develop

- ✦ Abilities necessary to do scientific inquiry
- ✦ Understandings about scientific inquiry

##### **CONTENT STANDARD B: Physical Science**

As a result of their activities, all students should develop understanding of

- ✦ Motions and forces
- ✦ Interactions of energy and matter

##### **CONTENT STANDARD E: Science and Technology**

As a result of activities, all students should develop

- ✦ Abilities of technological design
- ✦ Understandings about science and technology

##### **CONTENT STANDARD F: Science in Personal and Social Perspectives**

As a result of activities, all students should develop understanding of

- ✦ Natural and human-induced hazards
- ✦ Science and technology in local, national, and global challenges

##### **CONTENT STANDARD G: History and Nature of Science**

As a result of activities, all students should develop understanding of

- ✦ Historical perspectives

#### ◆ Standards for Technological Literacy - All Ages

##### **The Nature of Technology**

- ✦ Standard 1: Students will develop an understanding of the characteristics and scope of technology.
- ✦ Standard 2: Students will develop an understanding of the core concepts of technology.
- ✦ Standard 3: Students will develop an understanding of the relationships among technologies and the connections between technology and other fields of study.

##### **Technology and Society**

- ✦ Standard 4: Students will develop an understanding of the cultural, social, economic, and political effects of technology.
- ✦ Standard 7: Students will develop an understanding of the influence of technology on history.

##### **Design**

- ✦ Standard 9: Students will develop an understanding of engineering design.
- ✦ Standard 10: Students will develop an understanding of the role of troubleshooting, research and development, invention and innovation, and experimentation in problem solving.

##### **Abilities for a Technological World**

- ✦ Standard 12: Students will develop abilities to use and maintain technological products and systems.
- ✦ Standard 13: Students will develop abilities to assess the impact of products and systems.

##### **The Designed World**

- ✦ Standard 20: Students will develop an understanding of and be able to select and use construction technologies.