

# Gladys West

## MATHEMATICIAN & DEVELOPER OF GPS

Gladys West was born in 1930 in Virginia, USA. She grew up on a farm, where most children were expected to work on the land. However, Gladys loved learning and worked hard at school. She got the best results in her whole high school and won a free place at university. She decided to study maths, which was very rare for women, and especially for Black women at that time.

After finishing her studies, Gladys got a job as a mathematician and computer programmer for the US Navy. At that time, computers didn't work like we know today, so she had to do a lot of maths by hand.

Gladys worked on using satellites to take accurate measurements of the Earth. She created complex computer programs that helped to work out the planet's exact shape and size. This was an important part of developing GPS (Global Positioning System), which is the technology we use every day in our phones and cars to tell us where we are.

Gladys showed how perseverance and working hard in maths can have a huge impact on people's lives.



1. What did Gladys West do as a child instead of working on the farm?
2. Why was being good at maths important in West's first job?
3. Explain what taking "accurate measurements of the Earth" means.
4. How has Gladys West impacted our lives today? Explain with evidence from the text.
5. In a short paragraph, explain why Gladys West deserves to be considered a STEM Hero.