

Katherine Johnson

MOON LANDINGS MATHEMATICIAN

Katherine Johnson was born in West Virginia, USA, in 1918.

She always found maths very easy and managed to finish high school and start college by age 15. She took every maths course she could and they even made some courses up especially for her!

Johnson worked as a teacher until she married and had children. When she was 34, she took a job at NASA working as a "human computer". Along with other female mathematicians, she had to figure out the calculations for spaceflights.

She helped calculate the path of America's first human spaceflight in 1961 and the historic first moon landing in 1969.

Johnson had to overcome many barriers because of her race, both as a child and while she worked at NASA. In fact, no one knew about her amazing work until a long time later.

In 2016 a movie came out called Hidden Figures and the world finally recognised all she had achieved.



1. What two space missions did Johnson help with?
2. Explain what is meant by "barriers" in the text.
3. Why do you think people with her job were called "human computers"?
4. How do we know Johnson's work was important? Use evidence from the text to explain your answer.
5. In a short paragraph, explain why Katherine Johnson deserves to be considered a STEM Hero.