



Katherine Johnson

Katherine Johnson was born on the 26th of August 1918. As a child, she loved numbers. Her favourite subject was maths. She would count everything, even the number of steps she took along the road. She loved learning and finding out about different things.

Katherine was extremely clever.

Katherine went to high school when she was only 10 years old. When she was 15, she began learning at West Virginia State College.

Katherine studied very hard. She liked learning how to solve big problems using calculations. Katherine left college at 18 and became a teacher, just like her mother.

In the 1950s her life began to change. She worked in the computing department at NASA. She worked with a small team who were all African American women. They studied data and performed lots of important calculations.

In 1962, computers were new. They were unreliable. This means they broke a lot and didn't always work. This was a huge problem. If the computer broke, it could cause disaster for the astronauts in space.

In 1962, an astronaut called John Glenn was preparing to go to space. He didn't trust the computers. He asked for Katherine Johnson to help him. She checked that the computers were correct. She did all of the maths on her own. After Katherine helped him, John felt safe and completed his mission.

RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. What was Katherine's first job?
2. What was the name of the astronaut Katherine helped in 1962?
3. How many years did Katherine work for NASA?
4. What did President Barack Obama give Katherine?

Katherine Johnson then worked on the moon mission. She did the maths to make sure it was safe. Without her work, the mission would have been a lot more dangerous. She was vital to the success of the mission. Her amazing mind helped to make history and change the world.

Katherine worked at NASA for 33 years. She retired in 1986. She loved her job and was proud of what she did. In 2015 she was given a medal by President Barack Obama. A film about Katherine was made in 2016. It was called Hidden Figures. Katherine died in 2020. She was 101 years old. She is remembered as a brilliant woman.



VIPERS QUESTIONS

V

What word means 'can break and doesn't always work'?

I

What country did Katherine Johnson live in?

S

Put these events the order they happened in.

Katherine dies at 101 years old

Katherine goes to West Virginia State College

Katherine starts work for NASA

Katherine becomes a teacher

Katherine meets President Barack Obama

Answers:

1. A Teacher
2. John Glenn
3. 33 years
4. A medal

V: Unreliable

I: America / The USA

S: Katherine goes to West Virginia State College

Katherine becomes a teacher

Katherine starts work for NASA

Katherine meets President Barack Obama

Katherine dies at 101 years old