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SPACE TECH SERIES

Katherine Johnson

The Human Computer

The Woman Who Did the Math for Space

Katherine Johnson was a mathematician who worked for NASA. A mathematician is a person who is an expert at math. Katherine was so good that people called her a "human computer."

In 1961, her math helped send Alan Shepard into space. He was the first American in space. In 1962, an astronaut named John Glenn flew all the way around Earth. Before his flight, Glenn asked NASA to "get the girl" to check the numbers by hand. He meant Katherine!

Katherine helped NASA for many years. She even worked on the Apollo mission that landed people on the Moon. She lived to be 101 years old and won the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

SPACE WORDS TO KNOW

- **mathematician:** a person who is an expert at math and solving number problems
- **orbit:** to travel all the way around a planet like Earth
- **astronaut:** a person who is trained to travel and work in space

Part 1 • Reading Comprehension

1. What was Katherine Johnson's job at NASA?

2. Why did people call her a "human computer"?

3. What did John Glenn ask Katherine to do before his 1962 flight?

4. What big award did Katherine win?

Checking the Flight Numbers

Like Katherine, you will check the math for a rocket. John Glenn's capsule circled Earth 3 times. Each trip around Earth takes about 90 minutes.

- 1 How many minutes does it take to go around Earth 3 times? (3×90)

- 2 Check your answer by adding: $90 + 90 + 90 = ?$

- 3 The flight was planned for 300 minutes but ended at 270 minutes. How many minutes early was it? ($300 - 270$)

Part 3 • Think About It

John Glenn trusted Katherine's math more than the new computer. Why might a person double-check numbers by hand before a dangerous trip?

