

INTRODUCING MAE JEMISON, THE STAR

All of science, all of space exploration— everything we do in the world is about imagination and using your creativity to expand beyond your normal boundaries.

–Mae Jemison



DIRECTIONS: Read the text on pages 1–2. Then, answer the questions on page 3.

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever used your imagination to make something happen? Like, fly down the stairs to the dinner table, or wave a magic wand to clean your room? Well, you're not alone in using your imagination. Doctor Mae Jemison imagined herself in space as a child, and she is now famous for making that dream come true.

As an astronaut for NASA, Mae became the first African American woman to fly into space. She was a mission specialist on the space shuttle *Endeavour* in 1992. Mae studied how living things act in space. She is also a doctor, researcher, teacher, and businessperson.

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

The youngest of three children, Mae was born in Decatur, Alabama, on October 17, 1956. Soon after she was born, her family moved to Chicago, Illinois, which is where Mae grew up. Her mother was an elementary school teacher, and her father was a maintenance worker.

When Mae was younger, she liked to dance and study science. She especially liked astronomy. Mae wanted to go to space. She had faith that she would get there someday.

Mae won a scholarship to Stanford University in California. She was only 16 years old, but she learned a lot in her studies. She double majored in chemical engineering and African American studies. While on campus, she planned and performed in dance performances.

After graduating from Stanford in 1977, she went to Cornell University Medical College in New York. During summer breaks from school, Mae went to Cuba and Kenya to learn about medical care in other countries. Mae wanted to use her medical degree to help others. In 1981, Mae became a doctor. After her experiences abroad in college, she decided to join the Peace Corps in 1983. She served in the Peace Corps for two and a half years. During her time in the Peace Corps, Jemison served as a medical officer in West Africa.



NASA is an acronym for National Aeronautics and Space Administration

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LAUNCHING HER WAY INTO THE HISTORY BOOKS

Over the years, Mae continued to think about her dream of going to space. She applied to be an astronaut for NASA. Mae's first application was denied because NASA had stopped taking on new astronauts at the time. But she didn't give up! She applied a second time. In 1987, Mae was one of 15 people chosen to become an astronaut out of 2,000 applicants.

Five years later, Mae worked on the STS-47 mission to study life in space. Mae studied in space for almost eight days. Her experience in space was so important to her that she wanted to encourage more human space travel.

CONTINUING HER SCIENTIFIC WORK

After leaving NASA, Mae started her own organizations. One was a camp called *The Earth We Share*. It started through the Dorothy Jemison Foundation for Excellence, named after Mae's mother in honor of her work as an educator. The camp helps kids learn more about science. Kids go to the camp from around the world. At the camp, young scientists get to use their imagination and share their ideas about future missions.

In 2012, the Dorothy Jemison Foundation for Excellence was awarded money for research through the 100 Year Starship project. The goal of this project was to encourage scientists to research and develop technology that would allow humans to travel to another star in the next 100 years.

COMBINING ARTS AND SCIENCE

Mae has always had an artistic side. She is trained as a dancer, choreographer, and actor. Using her training, she has appeared on television over the years. When she was younger, she looked up to Uhura, a Black female officer in the television show *Star Trek*. Her real life blurred with her childhood imagination as she guest starred in the television show *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Mae jumped at the chance to play Lieutenant Palmer in one episode. This was another example of a childhood dream coming true. It was also another experience that showed Mae the importance of the arts in expanding her imagination.

In her TED talk in 2002, Mae said, "We need to revitalize the arts and sciences." She said that understanding the arts can help young learners understand science better. Mae ended her TED talk by saying, "I like to think of ideas as potential energy. They're really wonderful, but nothing will happen until we risk putting them into action." She believes it is time to teach the arts and science together.

There is no doubt that Mae Jemison has used her imagination and worked hard to go beyond her normal boundaries. She has always imagined a world beyond the one she could see. Mae Jemison dared to imagine until those dreams came true.

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DIRECTIONS: Answer the questions using evidence from the text.

1. According to the text, what are some things Mae Jemison liked to do?

2. Why is Mae Jemison famous?

3. What is one challenge Mae Jemison faced in her life? How did she respond to that challenge?

4. Reread the quote from Mae Jemison:

“I like to think of ideas as potential energy. They’re really wonderful, but nothing will happen until we risk putting them into action.”

What did she mean by this? Use information from the text to support your answer.

5. Reread the last section of the biography. Do you think teachers should teach arts and science together? Why or why not? Do outside research to support your answer.

6. In all of the journeys in her life, whether they were on Earth or outer space, Mae Jemison has used her scientific knowledge to help others. Write about a career you would like to try that can help people, too.
