Reading Comprehension Worksheet

Grade 5

Answer Key

Katherine Johnson: The Woman Who Counted to the Moon

Katherine Johnson was born on August 26, 1918, in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia. From the time she was very young, she counted everything: the steps to church, the dishes she washed, even the stars in the sky. Numbers simply made sense to her.

Katherine learned so quickly that she started high school at the age of ten. At that time, Black students in her county were not allowed to attend school past the eighth grade, so her family moved to another town where she could keep studying. She graduated from college at eighteen with degrees in mathematics and French.

In 1953, Katherine began working at a research laboratory in Virginia run by NACA, the agency that later became NASA. She was hired as a "computer," a person who solved difficult math problems by hand. At first, she worked in a separate office for Black women mathematicians. Katherine asked questions, offered ideas, and insisted on attending important meetings where women were rarely invited.

In 1961, Katherine calculated the flight path for Alan Shepard, the first American to travel into space. The next year, astronaut John Glenn prepared to become the first American to orbit Earth. NASA now used electronic computers, but Glenn wanted a person he trusted to check their numbers. He asked for Katherine. "If she says they're good," he reportedly said, "then I'm ready to go." She checked the math, and the mission was a success.

Katherine later helped with the calculations for Apollo 11, the 1969 mission that landed astronauts on the Moon. In 2015, she received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, one of the highest honors in the United States. Her story reached millions of people through the book and film *Hidden Figures*. She died in 2020 at the age of 101. Her advice to young people was simple: "Like what you do, and then you will do your best."

Part A: Multiple Choice

Circle the best answer.

1. What did Katherine like to do as a young child?

Answer: b) Count everything around her

2. Why did Katherine's family move to another town?

Answer: a) So she could keep going to school

3. What was Katherine's job when she started at NACA?

Answer: c) A "computer" who solved math problems by hand

4. Why did John Glenn ask for Katherine before his flight?

Answer: c) He wanted someone he trusted to check the computer's numbers.

Part B: True or False

Write T for true or F for false.

5. Katherine graduated from college at the age of eighteen.

Answer: True

6. Katherine calculated the flight path for Neil Armstrong, the first American in space.

Answer: False

7. Katherine received the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Answer: True

Part C: Elements of a Biography

A biography is a true story about a real person's life, written by someone else. It uses facts, dates, and quotes, and it is usually told in time order.

8. List three important events from Katherine's life in time order. Include the year for each.

Sample answer: 1953: She began working at NACA as a computer. 1962: She checked the math for John Glenn's orbit. 2015: She received the Presidential Medal of Freedom. (Accept any three correct events in order.)

9. Find a quote in the biography. Explain what it shows about Katherine or about how others saw her.

Sample answer: John Glenn said, "If she says they're good, then I'm ready to go." This shows that people trusted Katherine's math so much that an astronaut would risk his life on it.

Part D: Think and Explain

10. What personal qualities helped Katherine Johnson succeed? Support your answer with two details from the biography.

Sample answer: Katherine was curious and determined. She counted everything as a child and kept studying even when her family had to move so she could attend school. She was also confident, because she asked questions and insisted on attending meetings where women were rarely invited.