

Name _____

Date _____



Katherine Johnson & the Human Computers

Unsung Heroes of the Space Race

Lost in history, we found the unsung heroes whose story wasn't told, but who shaped the globe. Like Katherine Johnson.

She was born without a silver spoon, West Virginia mountain town,

1918: that's the year that she touched the ground.

A black girl born at a time,

When girls weren't prized for their minds.

And black folk had to fight to survive,

Under segregation laws that white folk had devised.

And though there were many obstacles in her path,

Katherine Johnson didn't let them hold her back.

She was drawn to numbers and mastered math,

And took hard classes for the fastest track

To college, she enrolled at age 15,

When she graduated, what would she be?

Meanwhile, a program had been created

That would lead to the dream of space exploration.

This was before computers had silicon chips,

Computers back then had a pulse in their wrists.

These women at NASA crunched numbers nonstop,

Without them the engineers couldn't do their jobs.

Then, war broke out, men saw it firsthand,

And job discrimination was banned.

So, black women like Katherine joined NASA,

Though segregation split the group in half.

Different bathrooms, cafeterias, workspace,

Unequal treatment hurt in the worst way.

She wrote the book, she paved the way, she made the model.

She looked up at the moon, and then asked us to follow.

We fly so high, while on the ground,

Are unsung heroes, I can see them now.

Johnson was inquisitive, always asked why,

And in the face of barriers, her dream didn't die.

She never gave in, no, she wouldn't relent,

Though some meetings seemed only for men.

Johnson asked if there was a law against

Women attending them, and then she went.

By '58, America was face to face

With the Soviets in a Cold War race to space.

The Space Race, for Johnson especially,

Meant she was calculating rocket trajectories,

The paths they'd take, doing it right

Meant life or death for Alan Shepard's flight.

He didn't orbit the Earth, but, hey,

He was the first American up in space.

On John Glenn's first orbit of the Earth,

They used an electronic computer to make it work.

But John Glenn said no, don't launch me yet,

I want Katherine Johnson to double check.

And when Neil Armstrong took a giant step

For mankind, well, you can bet,

That Johnson did the calculations to get

The Apollo 11 mission to the moon.

This computer was doing what they thought she could never do,

To me that's incredible, and that's why I'm telling you...

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