

Mae Jemison Biography

Ways to use the biographies

Studying the lives and achievements of scientists is part of Sc1 (National Curriculum)-Ideas and evidence in Science - Scientific Enquiry - in the National Curriculum.

All children need to know that Minority Ethnic peoples have contributed to science in the past and present.

Read and discuss the biography of a person relevant to the area of science the children are studying. Many of the biographies have Race Equality issues in them, discuss these with the children and relate to their own experiences of Race Equality Issues.

Comprehension activities could be developed from these biographies.

Collaborative paired or group tasks and discussions could be

- What evidence did the scientists have to identify a problem?
- What did they do?
- How did it make a difference to people's lives?
- What do you think were the main difficulties that faced the scientist?

- To role play the life of the scientist.
- Produce a poster about the scientist and her/his discovery.
- Produce a story-board of their life.
- Write a list of questions they would like to ask the scientist if they could.
- How did this scientist achieve? Ask them to listen and discuss in groups the personal qualities of the person. E.g. persistence.
- Have they heard of this person before? If not, why not? Is there another scientist whom they associate with this discovery?
- Who are scientists? What do scientists do? What tools do they need?

Mae Jemison

Born 1956

Even as a young girl growing up on the South Side of Chicago, Mae Jemison dreamed of space travel. She was so determined that even in kindergarten she rejected any suggestion that she had set her sights too high.

“My teacher asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, and I told her a scientist”, said Jemison. The teacher replied, “Don’t you mean a nurse?”

“Now there is nothing wrong with being a nurse”, said Jemison, “but that’s not what I wanted to be”.

Her father, who was a maintenance supervisor, and her mother, a primary school teacher encouraged Jemison to pursue her dream.

In 1973, at 16, she received a scholarship to Stanford University where she went on to earn bachelor’s degrees in chemical engineering and African and Afro-American studies. She next earned her MD from Cornell University.

While in medical school, she spent a summer working in a refugee camp in Thailand. She served as the Peace Corps medical officer in Sierra Leone and Liberia from 1983-85.

While managing the health care of peace corps volunteers and the US embassy personnel, she developed and assisted in research projects on hepatitis, rabies and schistosomiasis (a disabling disease, carried by tropical worms, that affects more than 200 million people in areas of Africa, Asia and Latin America).



After returning to the US, Dr Jemison opened a private practice and began taking graduate courses in engineering at UCLA. She applied to NASA in 1987, and was accepted for astronaut training.

After serving 4 years on the shuttle ground crew, in 1992 her childhood dream of space travel finally came true. As a science-mission specialist aboard space-lab-J, Dr Jemison performed experiments to determine how living organisms reacted to zero-gravity and assisted with research on human bone cells.

“One of the first sights I saw when I first when into orbit was the city of Chicago..I went to the window, looked down, and, literally, we passed right over it.” After the mission, Chicago organised a city-wide tribute to its hometown heroine.

She left NASA in 1993, to pursue her interests in education and health care and to help give disadvantaged children more opportunities to prepare for careers in science and technology.

She believes in the motto...

“Don’t be limited by others limited imaginations.”