



## Mae C. Jemison

Mae Carol Jemison spent the early years of her life in Alabama in the United States of America. Born in 1956, she was the youngest of three. When she was a few years old, the family moved to Chicago. It was there that she spent her formative years.

At the time, America was embroiled in a Space Race with the Soviet Union. It was a time when travelling to space was on everybody's minds. Films, books and music all took advantage. When the US landed the first men on the moon in 1969, Mae was watching it on television. She was already in love with the idea of travelling to space. She was often found in the school library reading books about science - especially astronomy.

When she graduated from high school, Jemison left home and went to Stanford University in California. There, she earned her degree in chemical engineering. She also experienced a lot of racial discrimination. She was one of only a handful of African American students on her course, and this encouraged her to go on to serve as the head of the Black Student Union. She also took part in several theatre productions that tackled issues of race. Alongside her degree in chemical engineering, she also received a degree in African and African-American studies.

After Stanford, Mae trained to be a doctor at Cornell Medical School. She used this experience to travel the world, helping people and to open her own practice. However, something happened in 1983 that changed Mae's ambitions.

Growing up, she has said that she was upset at the fact that there were no female astronauts. Sally Ride changed that in 1983 by becoming the first woman in space. Jemison decided that this was her chance and applied to NASA in 1985. Unfortunately, the space shuttle Challenger exploded in 1986, and NASA stopped accepting new candidates. It wasn't until 1987 that Jemison would get her chance to join the ranks. She and 14 other candidates were chosen out of 2,000.



In 1989, Mae was given her first mission - she would join the STS-47 crew as a Mission Specialist. The shuttle Endeavor took off on the 12th of September, 1992. Onboard was Mae C. Jemison, the first African-American woman in space.

Over the next 8 days, the crew orbited Earth 127 times before returning on the 20th of September. They landed at Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

Jemison retired from NASA in 1993, after six years as an astronaut. She went on to found several technology companies that aim to help the environment, appeared on Star Trek (the first real astronaut to do so) and became a professor. She wrote a children's book about her life in 2001.



## SUMMARY FOCUS

1. Where did Mae live before Chicago?
2. Why did she leave home?
3. What did Mae do once she had graduated from Stanford?
4. Why was Mae annoyed by the astronauts that she saw growing up?
5. Why didn't Mae apply to NASA in 1986?

## VIPERS QUESTIONS

**I**

What might have inspired Mae to become the head of the Black Student Union?

**I**

Why is Mae such an important figure in the history of space travel?

**R**

What was the name of the space shuttle that Mae travelled on?

**R**

What was the subject of Mae's children's book?

**V**

Find the word "tackled" in the text. What does it mean in this context?