

# Black History Month

## A Florida Focus

### A CIVICS IN REAL LIFE SERIES: CIVICS CONNECTION SPOTLIGHT

#### Spotlight #22: Mae Jemison

[Dr. Mae Carol Jemison](#), born on October 17, 1956, in Decatur, Alabama, is widely recognized as the first African American woman to travel into space. Raised in Chicago, she developed an early passion for science, [dance](#), and exploration. Jemison attended Stanford University at just sixteen, earning degrees in chemical engineering, African studies, and African American studies. She then completed her medical degree at Cornell University in 1981, where her interests expanded to global health and humanitarian outreach. In the years following medical school, Jemison worked as a medical officer with the [Peace Corps](#) in Liberia and Sierra Leone. There, she managed public health initiatives, provided medical care, helped write manuals, and supervised the pharmacy. She also worked with the [Centers for Disease Control](#), conducting vaccine research. Inspired by the first American female to fly in space, [Sally Ride](#), Jemison applied to the astronaut program in 1985. She applied again in 1987, after [NASA](#) lifted the freeze it had placed on the program following the Space Shuttle *Challenger* [incident](#). Out of over 2,000 applicants, Jemison was one of 15 to be selected, making her the first African American woman admitted as a NASA astronaut candidate. Her training and pre-launch preparations took place at [Kennedy Space Center](#) in Florida. On September 12, 1992, she flew aboard the Space Shuttle *Endeavour* on [mission STS-47](#) as a Mission Specialist, conducting experiments in materials science, life sciences, and human physiology in microgravity. Jemison's significance in African American history lies not only in her "firsts" but in her ability to break down barriers within the aerospace and STEM communities. Her success serves as an inspiration to countless students across the country. After leaving NASA in 1993, Jemison founded The Jemison Group, which focuses on technology, education, and social responsibility. She also launched [The Earth We Share](#), an international science camp that encourages young people to creatively solve global problems through creativity and scientific reasoning. Beyond her scientific work, Jemison also actively promotes the arts and even runs a dance studio from her home. Dr. Jemison's life exemplifies perseverance, interdisciplinary thinking, and a commitment to public service. From her work as a physician and engineer to her achievements as an astronaut, educator, and entrepreneur, she has consistently demonstrated how scientific knowledge can be applied to solve real-world problems. In the end, she hopes to continue inspiring learners of all ages, reminding them that *"solutions, technologies, and systems are more sustainable and beneficial when they are built drawing upon the full range of human perspective, skills, experiences, and talents."*

### CONNECTION QUESTIONS

- In what ways do science and civics overlap?
- How can citizens use the scientific method when attempting to address state or local problems?
- What is the function of agencies such as the Peace Corps, the Centers for Disease Control, and NASA?

