

BLACK HISTORY • GRADES 3-6

# Black History Biographies Printable Pack

12 Inspiring Americans to Learn About, Read, and  
Remember



Harriet Tubman • Frederick Douglass • Sojourner Truth • George  
Washington Carver • Rosa Parks • Martin Luther King Jr. • Ruby Bridges •  
Jackie Robinson • Thurgood Marshall • Shirley Chisholm • Katherine  
Johnson • Mae Jemison

Grades 3-6

PDF + JPG Printable Set

12 Biographies • Worksheets • Answer Key



# Harriet Tubman

C. 1822 - 1913

## KNOWN FOR

Escaped slavery and led many other enslaved people to freedom on the Underground Railroad.

Harriet Tubman was born into slavery in Maryland around 1822. As a young woman, she made a brave choice: she escaped to the free state of Pennsylvania. But Harriet did not stop there. She returned to the South again and again to guide her family and other enslaved people north to freedom. She used a secret network of safe houses and helpers known as the Underground Railroad. Traveling at night and using clever tricks to avoid capture, she never lost a single person she led. During the Civil War, Harriet worked as a nurse, a cook, a scout, and a spy for the Union Army. She even helped guide a raid that freed hundreds of people. Later in life, she worked for women's right to vote and opened a home to care for the elderly. Harriet Tubman is remembered as one of the bravest fighters for freedom in American history.

## ◆ Timeline

- c. 1822** ● Born into slavery in Dorchester County, Maryland.
- 1849** ● Escapes slavery and reaches Pennsylvania.
- 1850s** ● Returns south many times to lead others to freedom.
- 1863** ● Helps guide the Combahee River raid during the Civil War.
- 1913** ● Dies in Auburn, New York.

## ◆ What I Learned

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## ◆ Fast Facts

- ★ She was nicknamed "Moses" for leading people to freedom.
- ★ She made about 13 trips back to the South to rescue others.
- ★ She worked as a scout and spy for the Union Army.
- ★ She was active in the movement for women's right to vote.
- ★ The U.S. Treasury has announced plans to place her on the \$20 bill.

## ◆ Vocabulary

**slavery** — A cruel system where people were owned and forced to work without pay.

**Underground Railroad** — A secret network of people and safe houses that helped enslaved people escape.

**scout** — A person who explores ahead to gather information.

### Think About It

Harriet risked her own freedom to help others. Why do you think she kept going back?



# Frederick Douglass

C. 1818 - 1895

## KNOWN FOR

Escaped slavery and became a famous writer, speaker, and leader against slavery.

Frederick Douglass was born into slavery in Maryland around 1818. As a boy, he secretly learned to read and write, even though it was against the rules for enslaved children. Reading opened his mind, and he never stopped learning. In 1838, he escaped to the North and became free. Frederick became one of the most powerful speakers and writers of his time. He told audiences the truth about slavery in his own words. He wrote books about his life, including a famous autobiography, and started his own newspaper called the North Star. He met with leaders, including President Abraham Lincoln, to push for freedom and fair treatment for Black Americans. He also supported women's right to vote. Frederick Douglass believed that education and speaking up could change the world. He is remembered as a brilliant voice for freedom, equality, and justice.

## ◆ Timeline

- c. ● Born into slavery in Talbot County, Maryland.
- 1838 ● Escapes slavery and gains his freedom in the North.
- 1845 ● Publishes his famous autobiography about his life.
- 1847 ● Starts his anti-slavery newspaper, the North Star.
- 1895 ● Dies in Washington, D.C.

## ◆ What I Learned

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## ◆ Fast Facts

- ★ He taught himself to read and write as a child.
- ★ He published his own newspaper called the North Star.
- ★ He advised President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War.
- ★ He wrote three autobiographies about his life.
- ★ He spoke out for women's right to vote.

## ◆ Vocabulary

**autobiography** — A book a person writes about their own life.

**abolitionist** — A person who worked to end slavery.

**equality** — When all people are treated the same and fairly.

### Think About It

Frederick said knowledge was the path to freedom. How can learning give a person power?



# Sojourner Truth

C. 1797 - 1883

## KNOWN FOR

A powerful speaker who spoke out against slavery and for women's rights.

Sojourner Truth was born into slavery in New York around 1797. Her first name was Isabella. She was sold several times as a child and worked hard for many years. When New York began to end slavery, she walked away to freedom with her baby daughter. She even went to court to win back her young son who had been sold away, and she won. Later, she chose a new name, Sojourner Truth, because she felt called to travel and speak the truth. She could not read or write, but she gave speeches that moved huge crowds. She spoke against slavery and for the rights of women. One of her most famous speeches asked people to see women as strong and equal. During the Civil War, she helped formerly enslaved people find homes and jobs. Sojourner Truth is remembered as a fearless voice for freedom and fairness.

## Timeline

- c. ● Born into slavery in Ulster County, New York.
- 1797 ● Walks to freedom with her infant daughter.
- 1828 ● Goes to court and wins her son's freedom.
- 1843 ● Takes the name Sojourner Truth and begins traveling to speak.
- 1883 ● Dies in Battle Creek, Michigan.

## What I Learned

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## Fast Facts

- ★ She was one of the first Black women to win a court case in the U.S.
- ★ She chose the name "Sojourner Truth" herself.
- ★ She gave speeches even though she could not read or write.
- ★ She spoke for both the end of slavery and women's rights.
- ★ She helped freed people during and after the Civil War.

## Vocabulary

**sojourner** — A person who travels from place to place.

**rights** — Things every person should be allowed to have or do.

**freedom** — Being able to live and make choices without being controlled by others.

### Think About It

Sojourner spoke up even when it was hard. When is a time you needed courage to speak up?



# George Washington Carver

C. 1864 - 1943

## KNOWN FOR

A scientist and inventor who found many new uses for plants like peanuts.

George Washington Carver was born into slavery in Missouri near the end of the Civil War, around 1864. As a child, he loved plants so much that neighbors called him the "plant doctor." He worked hard to get an education during a time when that was very difficult for Black students. He earned college degrees in agriculture, the science of farming. Carver became a teacher and scientist at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. He noticed that growing only cotton wore out the soil, so he taught farmers to plant crops like peanuts and sweet potatoes to keep the land healthy. To help farmers sell these crops, he discovered hundreds of new uses for them, from foods to dyes to everyday products. He shared his ideas for free because he wanted to help people. George Washington Carver is remembered as a creative scientist who used his knowledge to help farmers and the land.

## ◆ Timeline

- c. ● Born into slavery in Diamond, Missouri.
- 1864 ● Earns a college degree in agricultural science.
- 1896 ● Begins teaching and research at Tuskegee Institute.
- 1900s ● Develops hundreds of new uses for peanuts and other crops.
- 1943 ● Dies in Tuskegee, Alabama.

## ◆ What I Learned

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## ◆ Fast Facts

- ★ As a boy he was nicknamed the "plant doctor."
- ★ He taught at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama.
- ★ He helped farmers improve their soil by changing crops.
- ★ He found hundreds of uses for peanuts and sweet potatoes.
- ★ He often shared his discoveries for free to help others.

## ◆ Vocabulary

**agriculture** — The science and work of farming and growing crops.

**soil** — The top layer of earth where plants grow.

**crop rotation** — Changing which plants grow in a field to keep the soil healthy.

## Think About It

Carver used science to help farmers and the soil. How can science help solve real problems?



# Rosa Parks

1913 - 2005

## KNOWN FOR

Refused to give up her bus seat, helping spark the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Rosa Parks was born in Alabama in 1913. She grew up at a time when unfair laws kept Black and white people apart. These rules forced Black riders to give up their bus seats to white riders. Rosa worked for civil rights with a group called the NAACP. On December 1, 1955, she was riding the bus home from work in Montgomery, Alabama. When the driver told her to give up her seat to a white passenger, Rosa quietly said no. She was arrested for her choice. Her brave stand led Black residents to stop riding the city buses for over a year in a protest called the Montgomery Bus Boycott. This peaceful protest helped change unfair laws. Rosa Parks spent the rest of her life working for equal rights. She is often called "the mother of the civil rights movement" and is remembered for showing how one calm, brave act can make a big difference.

## ◆ Timeline

- 1913 ● Born in Tuskegee, Alabama.
- 1943 ● Becomes active in the civil rights movement with the NAACP.
- 1955 ● Refuses to give up her bus seat in Montgomery.
- 1955- ● The Montgomery Bus Boycott takes place.
- 2005<sup>56</sup> ● Dies in Detroit, Michigan.

## ◆ What I Learned

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## ◆ Fast Facts

- ★ She refused to give up her bus seat on December 1, 1955.
- ★ Her arrest helped start the Montgomery Bus Boycott.
- ★ The boycott lasted more than a year.
- ★ She is often called "the mother of the civil rights movement."
- ★ She received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1996.

## ◆ Vocabulary

**boycott** — When people refuse to use or buy something to protest unfair treatment.

**civil rights** — The rights of all people to be treated fairly and equally.

**protest** — An action that shows people disagree with something.

### Think About It

Rosa made a brave choice by staying seated. What does it mean to stand up for what is right?



# Martin Luther King Jr.

1929 - 1968

## KNOWN FOR

A leader of the civil rights movement who used peaceful protest to seek equality.

Martin Luther King Jr. was born in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1929. He grew up to become a minister and a leader in the fight for civil rights. At that time, unfair laws separated people by the color of their skin. Dr. King believed in changing these laws through peaceful protest, not violence. He led marches, gave powerful speeches, and helped organize boycotts. In 1963, he gave his famous "I Have a Dream" speech in Washington, D.C., where he shared his hope that one day people would be judged by their character, not their skin color. His work helped lead to new laws that protected the rights of all Americans. In 1964, he received the Nobel Peace Prize for his peaceful work. Dr. King's life was cut short in 1968, but his message of equality and peace lives on. Today, the United States honors him with a national holiday each January.

## ◆ Timeline

- 1929 ● Born in Atlanta, Georgia.
- 1955 ● Helps lead the Montgomery Bus Boycott.
- 1963 ● Gives his "I Have a Dream" speech in Washington, D.C.
- 1964 ● Receives the Nobel Peace Prize.
- 1968 ● Dies in Memphis, Tennessee.

## ◆ What I Learned

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## ◆ Fast Facts

- ★ He was a minister and a civil rights leader.
- ★ He believed in peaceful, nonviolent protest.
- ★ He gave his "I Have a Dream" speech in 1963.
- ★ He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964.
- ★ A U.S. national holiday is held in his honor each January.

## ◆ Vocabulary

**equality** — When all people are treated the same and fairly.

**nonviolence** — Working for change peacefully, without harming others.

**minister** — A leader in a church who guides and helps people.

### Think About It

Dr. King believed in solving problems peacefully. Why can peaceful actions be powerful?



# Ruby Bridges

BORN 1954

## KNOWN FOR

As a young child, she helped integrate an all-white elementary school.

Ruby Bridges was born in Mississippi in 1954 and grew up in New Orleans, Louisiana. When Ruby was just six years old, she became part of an important moment in history. Courts had ordered that Black and white students should be able to attend the same schools. In 1960, Ruby was chosen to be the first Black child to attend an all-white elementary school in her city. On her first day, federal marshals walked beside her to keep her safe as angry crowds shouted. Ruby stayed brave and calm. For a while, she was the only student in her class, taught by a kind teacher named Mrs. Henry. Ruby kept going to school every day, and over time more families joined her. Her courage helped open school doors for children of all backgrounds. As an adult, Ruby Bridges started a foundation to promote respect and kindness. She is remembered for showing great bravery at a very young age.

## Timeline

- 1954** ● Born in Tylertown, Mississippi.
- 1960** ● Becomes the first Black child at her New Orleans elementary school.
- 1960** ● Walks to school with federal marshals for protection.
- 1999** ● Starts the Ruby Bridges Foundation.
- Today** ● Continues to speak about kindness and respect.

## What I Learned

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## Fast Facts

- ★ She was only six years old when she integrated her school.
- ★ Federal marshals walked with her to keep her safe.
- ★ For a time she was the only child in her classroom.
- ★ Artist Norman Rockwell made a famous painting about her walk.
- ★ She started a foundation to promote respect and kindness.

## Vocabulary

**integrate** — To bring people of different backgrounds together, such as in a school.

**marshal** — An officer whose job is to protect people and keep order.

**courage** — Being brave even when something is scary or hard.

### Think About It

Ruby was very young but very brave. How can young people make a difference, too?



# Jackie Robinson

1919 - 1972

## KNOWN FOR

Broke the color barrier in modern Major League Baseball in 1947.

Jackie Robinson was born in Georgia in 1919 and grew up in California. He was a gifted athlete who starred in several sports in college, including baseball, football, and track. At that time, Black players were not allowed to play in Major League Baseball with white players. In 1947, Jackie changed that. He joined the Brooklyn Dodgers and became the first Black player in modern Major League Baseball. Many people treated him unfairly and shouted cruel things, but Jackie answered with great skill and self-control. He was an outstanding player who could hit, field, and steal bases. He was named Rookie of the Year and later won the league's Most Valuable Player award. His bravery helped open the door for many other Black athletes. To honor him, every team in Major League Baseball has retired his uniform number, 42. Jackie Robinson is remembered as a sports hero and a champion for equal rights.

## Timeline

- 1919 ● Born in Cairo, Georgia.
- 1947 ● Joins the Brooklyn Dodgers, breaking baseball's color barrier.
- 1947 ● Named Major League Baseball's Rookie of the Year.
- 1949 ● Wins the National League Most Valuable Player award.
- 1972 ● Dies in Stamford, Connecticut.

## What I Learned

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## Fast Facts

- ★ He broke baseball's color barrier in 1947.
- ★ He played for the Brooklyn Dodgers.
- ★ He was named Rookie of the Year in his first season.
- ★ His number 42 is retired by every MLB team.
- ★ He was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1962.

## Vocabulary

**color barrier** — An unfair rule that kept Black players out of a sport or job.

**athlete** — A person who is skilled at sports.

**retire a number** — To honor a player by never letting anyone wear their number again.

### Think About It

Jackie stayed calm when others were unfair. Why does self-control take strength?



# Thurgood Marshall

1908 - 1993

## KNOWN FOR

A lawyer and the first Black justice on the U.S. Supreme Court.

Thurgood Marshall was born in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1908. He became a lawyer who used the law to fight for fairness and equal rights. As a lawyer for the NAACP, he argued many important cases in court. His most famous case was Brown v. Board of Education in 1954. In that case, the Supreme Court agreed with Marshall that separating students by race in public schools was wrong. This decision helped end segregation in schools across the country. Marshall won most of the cases he argued before the Supreme Court. In 1967, he made history when he became the first Black justice on the United States Supreme Court. As a justice, he worked to protect the rights of all people, especially those who were treated unfairly. Thurgood Marshall is remembered as a powerful champion of justice who showed that the law can be a tool for positive change.

## Timeline

- 1908 ● Born in Baltimore, Maryland.
- 1940 ● Becomes a leading lawyer for the NAACP.
- 1954 ● Wins the Brown v. Board of Education case.
- 1967 ● Becomes the first Black U.S. Supreme Court justice.
- 1993 ● Dies in Bethesda, Maryland.

## What I Learned

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## Fast Facts

- ★ He was a lawyer for the NAACP.
- ★ He won the Brown v. Board of Education case in 1954.
- ★ That case helped end segregation in public schools.
- ★ He became the first Black Supreme Court justice in 1967.
- ★ He served on the Supreme Court for 24 years.

## Vocabulary

**justice** — A judge who serves on the Supreme Court; also means fairness.

**segregation** — The unfair separation of people by race.

**Supreme Court** — The highest court in the United States.

### Think About It

Marshall used the law to make things fairer. How can rules and laws help people?



# Shirley Chisholm

1924 - 2005

## KNOWN FOR

The first Black woman elected to the United States Congress.

Shirley Chisholm was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1924. Her parents had come to the United States from the Caribbean. As a child, she spent several years living in Barbados with her grandmother, where she received a strong education. Shirley grew up to become a teacher and an expert in early childhood education. She cared deeply about her community and decided to enter politics to help people. In 1968, she made history by becoming the first Black woman elected to the United States Congress. Her campaign slogan was "Unbought and Unbossed," which meant she could not be controlled by others. In Congress, she worked to help children, families, and people in need. In 1972, she made history again by becoming the first Black candidate to run for a major party's nomination for president. Shirley Chisholm is remembered as a brave leader who opened doors and spoke up for people who were often left out.

## ◆ Timeline

- 1924 ● Born in Brooklyn, New York.
- 1964 ● Elected to the New York State Assembly.
- 1968 ● Becomes the first Black woman elected to Congress.
- 1972 ● Runs for a major party's presidential nomination.
- 2005 ● Dies in Ormond Beach, Florida.

## ◆ What I Learned

## ◆ Fast Facts

- ★ She was the first Black woman elected to the U.S. Congress.
- ★ Her campaign slogan was "Unbought and Unbossed."
- ★ She worked as a teacher before entering politics.
- ★ In 1972 she ran for president.
- ★ She was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2015.

## ◆ Vocabulary

**Congress** — The part of the U.S. government that makes laws.

**politics** — The work of running the government and making decisions for a community.

**campaign** — The work a person does to try to be elected to a job in government.

### Think About It

Shirley said she was "unbought and unbossed." What do you think that means?



# Katherine Johnson

1918 - 2020

## KNOWN FOR

A NASA mathematician whose calculations helped send astronauts safely into space.

Katherine Johnson was born in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, in 1918. Even as a young child, she loved numbers and counted everything she could. She was so good at school that she started high school at age 10 and finished college at 18. Katherine became a mathematician and went to work for NASA, the U.S. space program. There, she and other Black women worked as "human computers," solving the hard math needed for space travel by hand. Katherine calculated the flight paths that helped send the first American astronauts into space. When NASA began using electronic computers, astronaut John Glenn trusted Katherine so much that he asked her to check the computer's math before his historic orbit around Earth. Her work also helped astronauts travel to the Moon and return home safely. In 2015, she received the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Katherine Johnson is remembered as a brilliant mathematician who helped reach the stars.

## ◆ Timeline

- 1918** ● Born in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia.
- 1953** ● Begins work as a "human computer" at NASA's forerunner.
- 1961** ● Calculates the path for America's first human spaceflight.
- 1962** ● Checks the math for John Glenn's orbit around Earth.
- 2015** ● Receives the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

## ◆ What I Learned

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# Mae Jemison

BORN 1956

## KNOWN FOR

The first Black woman to travel into space.

Mae Jemison was born in Alabama in 1956 and grew up in Chicago, Illinois. From a young age, she loved science and dreamed about space. She was a hard worker who entered college at just 16 years old. Mae studied chemical engineering and later became a medical doctor. Before joining the space program, she worked as a doctor with the Peace Corps, helping people in West Africa. In 1987, NASA chose Mae to become an astronaut. On September 12, 1992, she flew aboard the space shuttle Endeavour and became the first Black woman to travel into space. During her mission, she helped run science experiments. Mae spent about eight days in space before returning safely to Earth. After leaving NASA, she became a teacher and started programs to get young people excited about science. Mae Jemison is remembered for following her dreams and for showing children that they can reach for the stars.

## ◆ Timeline

- 1956 ● Born in Decatur, Alabama.
- 1981 ● Earns her medical degree and becomes a doctor.
- 1987 ● Is chosen by NASA to become an astronaut.
- 1992 ● Becomes the first Black woman to travel into space.
- 1993 ● Leaves NASA to teach and promote science education.

## ◆ What I Learned

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## ◆ Fast Facts

- ★ She entered college at age 16.
- ★ She is both an engineer and a medical doctor.
- ★ She served as a doctor in the Peace Corps in West Africa.
- ★ She flew on the space shuttle Endeavour in 1992.
- ★ She was inspired by the TV show "Star Trek."

## ◆ Vocabulary

**astronaut** — A person trained to travel and work in space.

**engineer** — A person who designs and builds machines or structures.

**space shuttle** — A spacecraft that could carry astronauts into space and return.

### Think About It

Mae followed her dream of going to space. What is a big dream you would like to reach?

# Biography Research Worksheet

Choose a person from Black history. Use books or trusted websites to fill in each part.

**Name**

**Date**

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**Person I am researching**

**Why this person matters**

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**Born (year & place)**

**Died (if known)**

**Early life**

**A quote or meaningful idea (only if you can verify it)**

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**Challenges this person faced**

**My favorite fact**

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**Important accomplishments**

**Sources I used**

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**My drawing or symbol for this person**



**Reflection: What can I learn from this person's life?**

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# Compare Two Leaders

Pick two people from Black history. Compare their lives, challenges, and achievements.

**Person 1**

**Person 2**

|                      |                   |                      |
|----------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Person 1 only</b> | <b>Both alike</b> | <b>Person 2 only</b> |
|----------------------|-------------------|----------------------|

**Challenges they faced**

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**Achievements**

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**What inspires me most**

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**A question I still have**

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# Reading Comprehension

Use with any biography page in this pack. Read the page first, then answer the questions.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Biography I read \_\_\_\_\_

1 What was this person known for?

\_\_\_\_\_

2 When and where was this person born?

\_\_\_\_\_

3 What is one challenge this person faced?

\_\_\_\_\_

4 What achievement made an important difference?

\_\_\_\_\_

5 Which event from the timeline do you think was most important, and why?

\_\_\_\_\_

6 Name two fast facts you learned about this person.

\_\_\_\_\_

7 What lesson can students learn from this person's life?

\_\_\_\_\_

8 Choose one vocabulary word from the page and use it in a sentence.

\_\_\_\_\_

9 How did this person help other people?

\_\_\_\_\_

10 If you could ask this person one question, what would it be?

\_\_\_\_\_

# Teacher Answer Key

Suggested answers. Many questions are open-ended — accept reasonable responses supported by the page.

## ◆ Biography Pages

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**Harriet Tubman:** Known for escaping slavery and leading others to freedom on the Underground Railroad; key event: her 1849 escape opened the way for her rescues.

**Frederick Douglass:** Known for escaping slavery and becoming a great writer and speaker against slavery; learning to read gave him the power to fight for freedom.

**Sojourner Truth:** Known for speaking against slavery and for women's rights; brave because she spoke out even though she could not read or write.

**George Washington Carver:** Known for finding new uses for crops like peanuts and helping farmers care for the soil; shows how science can solve real problems.

**Rosa Parks:** Known for refusing to give up her bus seat, which helped start the Montgomery Bus Boycott; shows the power of a calm, brave stand.

**Martin Luther King Jr.:** Known for leading the civil rights movement with peaceful protest; the 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech shared his hope for equality.

**Ruby Bridges:** Known for being the first Black child at her New Orleans school; shows that even young people can be brave and make a difference.

**Jackie Robinson:** Known for breaking baseball's color barrier in 1947; answered unfair treatment with skill and self-control.

**Thurgood Marshall:** Known for winning Brown v. Board of Education and becoming the first Black Supreme Court justice; used the law to make things fairer.

**Shirley Chisholm:** Known for being the first Black woman elected to Congress; "Unbought and Unbossed" meant she could not be controlled by others.

**Katherine Johnson:** Known for NASA calculations that helped send astronauts into space; curiosity and a love of math drove her success.

**Mae Jemison:** Known for being the first Black woman in space (1992); followed her childhood dream through years of study and hard work.

## ◆ Reading Comprehension Worksheet

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Q1 the person's main accomplishment (see "Known For"). Q2 the birth year/place from the page. Q3-Q4 any challenge and achievement listed. Q5 accept any timeline event with a sensible reason. Q6 any two fast facts. Q7 a thoughtful lesson (courage, fairness, hard work, curiosity). Q8 correct use of a vocabulary word. Q9 a way the person helped others. Q10 any respectful, reasonable question.

**Tip:** The research and compare worksheets are open-ended. Look for accurate facts, a verified source, and a thoughtful reflection rather than one "correct" answer.