

PBS Lesson Series

ELA, Grade 3, Lesson 8

Teacher Packet

Rise to the Challenge

Memoir of an Astronaut



by Dr. Rhea Seddon with Jesse-Anna Bornemann



*My early training in sewing came in handy
in my careers as a doctor and astronaut!*



*Here are the first six
female astronauts.
I am second from
the left—the short,
blond one!*

space
suit →



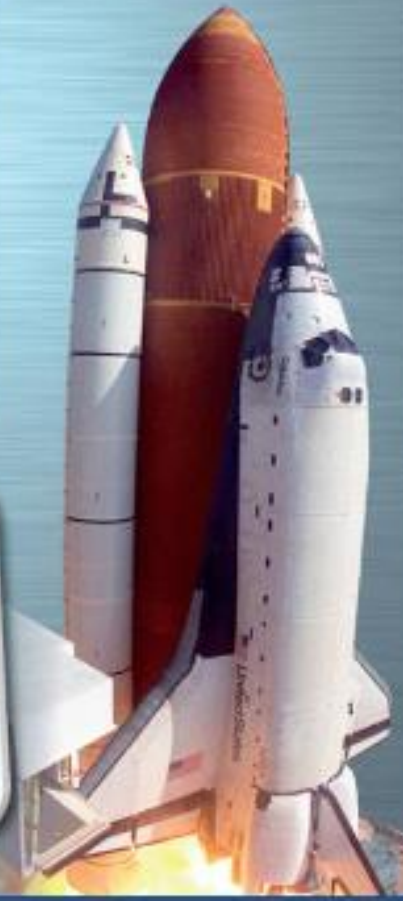
Rise to the Challenge:

Memoir of an Astronaut

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Part One: Preparation



1. Figure out what is wrong with the patient.
2. Decide which medical tools to use.
3. Take action!

As a young doctor working in emergency rooms across the South, I learned to perform these three steps within seconds. To save my patients' lives, I had to stay calm and think fast. But on April 13, 1985, I found myself in a new situation. I was aboard the space **shuttle** *Discovery*, 25,000 miles from home. My "patient" was a huge, broken machine. My tools were whatever items I could patch together with tape. I had finally reached my goal of becoming a doctor and an astronaut. But was I ready to deal with an emergency in space?



The odds of me going into space were quite slim. I was one of 6,000 people who applied to join NASA in 1977. For the first time, both men and women were being considered for jobs as astronauts. However, only thirty-five of us would make the cut. During my childhood in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, I had imagined becoming a doctor on a space station. At age thirty, I had earned my medical degree. I was halfway there! Now there was a chance, however small, to make the rest of my dream come true.



I got the phone call early in the morning on January 16, 1978. NASA's head of flight operations offered me the job. "Do you still want to join us?" Of course I did! I found out that twenty-nine men and six women had been chosen. I would be Tennessee's first female astronaut. What an honor ... and what a challenge!



Here are the first six female astronauts. I am second from the left—the short, blond one!

space suit →



Before I would be allowed to **soar** above Earth, I had to graduate from a two-year training program. We trained at Johnson Space Center (JSC) in Houston, Texas. Each day, my brain was packed with as much information as it could hold. In one class, I had a lesson from Neil Armstrong, the first person to walk on the moon.



astronaut in training getting the feel of weightlessness

on break during training in 1978



My muscles were tested, too. I was taught how to fly a small jet and use a parachute. I did scuba training in a giant pool, as practice for a possible space walk. At five feet two, I was the shortest of my NASA classmates. Most of NASA's materials weren't designed for someone my size. In earlier years, all astronauts had to be at least five feet six. The orange suits that astronauts wear during launch and landing weigh nearly eighty pounds. Walking in my suit was almost like carrying around another person! Yet no matter how sore or tired I became, I never once thought of complaining. I wanted to prove that women and smaller people could become great astronauts. Each day of training brought me closer to a space **voyage**.

the crew of my first spaceflight



The hard work paid off quickly. NASA decided to end our training after only one year. I wanted to climb aboard a space shuttle right away, but it would be nearly six more years before my first trip. In the meantime, I was given projects that would help other astronauts. Some of those projects drew on my background as a doctor. For example, I helped design medical kits that would be flown on shuttles. Other work involved things that were completely new to me. I spent months testing the computers that fly space shuttles, and learning how science experiments are prepared for flight. I also worked with a team trying to improve astronauts' meals.



lunchtime

Many foods taken into space are powdery and dry, like the food you might take on a camping trip. At mealtime, astronauts add water to their food. My task was to help find which foods would be healthy, tasty, and easy to prepare in space. We learned that strawberries worked well as a space food. Asparagus wasn't bad either, but you had to put the right amount of water in it. Who wants to eat crunchy, dry asparagus?



Before my first space trip, I married my NASA classmate Robert "Hoot" Gibson. Hoot and I had our first son, Paul, in 1982. The next year, my classmate Sally Ride became the first American woman in space. I was very proud of Sally, who had become a good friend. I was excited, too, because I knew my turn would come soon.



Hoot Gibson

Sally Ride



Key Details Chart

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Rhea Seddon got her medical degree when she was thirty years old.
She was preparing for her dream to be a doctor on the space shuttle.

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Rhea Seddon got her medical degree when she was thirty years old. She was preparing for her dream to be a doctor on the space shuttle.

Then in 1978 she was offered a job as an astronaut for NASA. First she had to go to training school to prepare to be an astronaut and take a voyage into space.